

Gerhard Stickel

## **Oscailt / Opening**

Minister,  
Excellencies,  
Mr. Fuhrmann,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

Tá an-áthas orm fáilte a chur romhaibh chuig an 7ú Comhdháil Bhliantúil de EFNIL (European Federation of National Institutions for Language). Ní mór a rá nach eagraíocht pholaitiúil í EFNIL ach bíonn na bailleagraíochtaí bainteach ar bhealaí éagsúla leis na polasaithe teanga ina dtíortha féin agus ar ndóigh tá EFNIL ina iomláine sainmhínithe ag an Aontas Eorpach. Dá bhrí sin, sílimid gur tráthúil agus gur dearfach an rud é an toradh a bhí ar an reifreann anseo ar Chonradh Liospóin faoin Aontas Eorpach agus gur deachomhartha í dár gComhdháil anseo i mBaile Átha Cliath.<sup>1</sup>

We are honoured by the presence of Minister Éamon Ó Cuív as member of the Irish government and of Mr. Konrad Fuhrmann as representative of the European Commission. I thank both of you for your kind and inspiring words. We are glad that a representative of a European language organisation with similar aims as ours has come. I welcome Ms. Neasa Ni Chineide, the president of EBLUL, the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages. I hope we can find an opportunity today or tomorrow to at least informally explore ways for a future cooperation and division of labour in the interest of multilingual Europe. I am glad to welcome the representatives of several diplomatic missions. Your presence underlines the importance your governments give to language politics and policies on both the national and European level. I also welcome our other guests, among them the three expert speakers who accepted our invitation to contribute with keynote lectures to the thematic part of the conference.

Before I come to the topic of this conference, I would like to extend the thanks of the Executive Committee and all members of EFNIL to our host, Foras na Gaeilge, represented by its Chief Executive Officer Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh. Actually, it is the second time some of us enjoy your hospitality. It was only four months ago that the members of our executive committee were your guests. Today, your kind words of welcome, Ferdie, made an excellent start for this session. I hope for your understanding when I save our special thanks to Seán O Carneigh for the concluding session tomorrow. He was and still is the main organizer of this conference. As yet, let me only assure you, Seán, that your cooperation with the EFNIL Secretariat in preparing the conference was obviously successful because we all are here.

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<sup>1</sup> With great pleasure I salute and welcome you all to the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL). Although EFNIL is not a political organization, its member institutions are in various ways related to language policies of their countries, and EFNIL as a whole defines itself in relation to Europe. We, therefore, consider the outcome of the latest Irish referendum concerning the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union as an auspicious omen for our meeting here at Dublin.

The general theme of this year's conference is *The relationship between the official national languages and regional and minority languages in Europe*. With this topic, we continue the series of themes and discussions concerning language use and language policies in Europe that we began six years ago at our founding conference in Stockholm. Let me just recall the general themes of our previous annual conferences: They were:

Stockholm 2003: *Linguistic Functional Domains and Language Legislation* (2 themes);

Paris 2004: *European Cooperation in Terminology: Domains and Networks*;

Brussels 2005: *Plurilingual Europeans – Foreign Language Learning and Language Politics*;

Madrid 2006: *Pluricentric Languages in Europe*;

Riga 2007: *National and European Language Policies*;

Lisbon 2008: *Language Use in Business and Commerce*.

And now it is: *The Relationship between the Official National Languages and Regional and Minority Languages*. Without trying to anticipate what our invited experts will say, let me, please, explain in brief our background for this topic. Nine years ago, delegates from central language institutions of several European countries met in Mannheim for the first preparatory conference that finally led to the foundation of EFNIL. Those who met there were not specialists for multilingualism or foreign language learning but experts for the official national languages of their countries. They came together with the aim to explore means and ways to preserve and further the development of their own languages within the context of multilingual Europe. From the very beginning **they**, that is, **we** focussed our discussion, our plans, and our activities on the national standard languages of our countries, although we had some difficulties to find an appropriate term and definition for the objects of our concern. The founding members of EFNIL will certainly remember the discussion we had in connection with the Mannheim-Florence Recommendations,<sup>2</sup> when we encountered the problem of translating between terms such as Spanish *lengua culta*, German *Hochsprache*, French *langue nationale*, Italian *lingua ufficiale*, Dutch *standardtaal*, and English *national* or *standard language*. In the meantime, we have made clear that EFNIL's primary concern is the standard varieties of the languages that are used in the various countries as official languages and are also recognized as official by the authorities of the European Union. Concerning the many other languages that are used in certain regions of our countries or by smaller groups of our populations, we realized that there were already groups and organisations that in various ways were concerned with these so called lesser used languages. We are glad to have representatives of two of these organisations with us today. For us, these languages, apparently, do not to cause specific problems for the linguistic togetherness of Europe as a whole. The problems they have are, as far as I can see, first of all to be recognized and respected within their national contexts in relation to the official standard languages. Concerning,

<sup>2</sup> See [www.efnil.org/documents/recommendations-of-mannheim-florence](http://www.efnil.org/documents/recommendations-of-mannheim-florence) or Stickel, Gerhard (Hg.) (2002): *Europäische Hochsprachen und mehrsprachiges Europa*. Mannheim: Institut für Deutsche Sprache, 225-256.

however, the aspect of international language contacts, it is highly improbable that, for example, Spanish Basques meet with French Bretons, German Sorbs, or British Welshmen and start a discussion about which of these languages should be used for their communication.

More frequent than encounters between speakers of different minority languages are those between speakers of languages such as Italian, English, French, German, Polish, and others as first languages: encounters in the realms of international business, politics, science, and tourism. There and then, the question of what language can or should be used becomes acute and urgent. As we all know, this question is nowadays being solved in most cases by using English as an auxiliary language (as I do right now, for instance). I consciously avoid here the term 'lingua franca' because the historical *lingua franca* was never used in politics, science, or art: it was only a primitive pidgin used by sailors and merchants on the Mediterranean coasts. The problem that the present European national languages have, are not caused by the use of an English pidgin for simple purposes such as finding a hotel or getting a taxi in another country but by the use of an elaborate English for the communication in the domains of science, politics, and higher education even within national contexts where traditionally the standard language of the country in question would have been used. This development is frequently being characterized as an increasing loss of linguistic domains that the European languages other than English are in danger of.

As we know, the governments of the individual continental countries make efforts in various ways and to a various extent to support and protect their official languages. Some of the member institutions of EFNIL are engaged in these efforts. In EFNIL, we are convinced that it is, however, in the very interest of our own languages that we do not only care for these languages but for other languages as well. We learned to consider each of our own languages as parts of the rich linguistic diversity that is constitutive for the cultural and social diversity and wealth of our continent. When I, for instance, support the use of my native tongue, German in science and higher education of my country, I have to accept and approve similar activities of my French, Swedish, Polish, Hungarian colleagues and friends from other countries to also support the use of their languages in these domains.

Although EFNIL and its members concentrate their interest and activities on the official national languages in Europe, we are, of course, aware of the fact that these languages are only part of the linguistic landscape of our countries and of Europe as a whole. I already mentioned regional and minority languages. These languages have already come into the focus of European institutions, especially the Council of Europe that agreed in 1992 on a European Charter for regional or minority languages. As we know, this charter has been accepted and ratified by most European states. It is fortunate and sensible that the regional and minority languages now enjoy official protection and support because they form an important part of the linguistic and cultural diversity and wealth of our continent. However, we are also aware that there is no corresponding European charter for the official standard languages of our countries. I doubt if there will ever be such a charter, although it is these languages that tend to get into conflicts because of their function for national identities.

The relations between the national languages and the regional or minority languages within our countries are complicated and vary from one country to the other. There is one aspect that must not be ignored and, therefore, should be mentioned here: the competition between national languages and regional and minority languages. Within the various national borders, the use of the official standard languages competes with the use of dialects and minority languages, especially in the domains of informal communication at the workbench, in the family, with friends, and at folkloristic occasions. In these domains, many people prefer their dialect or a regional or minority language in which they have grown up because of the specific emotional value of these linguistic varieties and languages. On the other hand, as mentioned before, the national languages compete with the use of global English in various domains of science, business, commerce, and international politics. Thus, the national standard languages might get into a fix between global English on one side and vital dialects, regional, and minority languages on the other side because the domains left for the use of the official languages tend to decrease. I hope that this aspect besides others will be covered in the reports on the present situations in different European countries that we will hear these two days. As a result of this conference, I hope that the members of EFNIL will learn that the respect and mutual support we agreed to give to each other's national languages should be extended to the regional and minority languages within our countries. I also hope for the understanding of our colleagues who are engaged for regional and minority languages that national languages have valuable functions for their countries, their history, and present culture that should be respected. However, let us cooperate not only in the interest of our individual countries and their languages but also for the maintenance and a flourishing development of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe.

Thank you,

Merci beaucoup,

Vielen Dank, ... and last but not least:

Buíochas!