

Peggy Heikkinen

## **Language use in public administration – theory and practice in the European states**

Thank you very much for the invitation to attend this Annual Conference being held by EFNIL in my bilingual home city of Helsinki/Helsingfors. It's a great pleasure to be here with you to discuss issues that are very close to my heart – languages and how their use can best be developed at a local, regional, national and European level.

It's also a great pleasure to be with you here today in my capacity as the Vice Chair of NPLD, which is the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity.

NPLD is a European-wide network. We work in the field of language policy and planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages (CRSS). The NPLD network includes governments, both at a national and regional level, universities, and a range of associations who are involved in language related issues. My employer The Swedish Assembly of Finland (or Folktinget in Swedish) is a full member of the network.

NPLD's main goal is to raise awareness at a European level of the vital importance of linguistic diversity. NPLD also aims to facilitate the exchange of best practice between governments, policy makers, practitioners, researchers and experts from all over Europe.

The theme of your conference here in Helsingfors is of great interest to many of our members. Many of us deal on a daily basis with the promotion of bilingualism or multilingualism in public administration. It's good to see today that you are looking at how countries deal with the issue of having more than one official language, and also how you deal with languages across a wide range of interfaces with the public.

However my main interest in being here is to highlight how important it is for NPLD to have a good and productive relationship with EFNIL. Both EFNIL and NPLD are networks working at a European level on issues related to languages. Networks in themselves are notoriously difficult to sustain. But as we look to the future, where it appears that the emphasis at the European level is moving away from issues such as languages, I believe that we need to work much more in partnership, and indeed we have already started along this path.

Both organisations have already realised the importance of technology for the future of their languages and for the sustainability of a multilingual Europe.

If the languages we enjoy using at the moment are to survive into even the near future, there must be an investment in language technologies in areas such as automatic translation and interpretation, multilingual information retrieval and other bi- and multilingual processes.

We know that language technology will be a key enabler in the next wave of the IT revolution. You won't type; you will speak with your hardware or machines. So we'll need to ensure that the basic building blocks for these developments are in place for all European languages. But in order to do this we have to collaborate. Very few individual countries will have the necessary expertise or funding to accomplish all that is needed on their own. This is a task for the European Union. However it must not only be for the national languages; it must be for all the languages of Europe.

What has increased our awareness of this issue is the publication of the EU's policy statement on the Digital Single Market, where no mention at all is made of the importance of languages. Not everyone speaks English!

This is where EFNIL and NPLD have joined forces in the past. We published a joint Position Paper on the Multilingual Digital Single Market in April 2015. This was jointly agreed in the run up to the META-Forum which was organised by META-NET in Riga, Latvia.

This is not going to be an easy initiative to win. Therefore we need to work in partnership with you on this issue and on other language related issues. We need to bring the issue of languages and linguistic diversity back on to the European agenda. Together we can do that.

I wish you well with this conference, and I'm looking forward to being part of the fascinating discussions. In my mother tongue Swedish: tack så mycket! Thank you very much!

**Bibliographical information**

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