

Tamás Váradi and EFNIL

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1. European Federation of National Institutions for Language

EFNIL, the European Federation of National Institutions for Language, has been an important part of Tamás Váradi's professional life for 17 years and still is. Here is a short history of EFNIL with a focus on Tamás' merits as administrator and impulse-giver.

EFNIL was founded at a conference in Stockholm in 2003 after three years of preparation at conferences in Mannheim, Florence and Brussels and several meetings of a steering committee that had been elected in Brussels. The idea was to establish a network between the central national language institutions of all member states of the European Union.

At the Stockholm conference in 2003, representatives of language academies and other central language institutions from 13 European countries decided to found the new organisation: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Representatives of language organisations from Austria, Iceland and Norway were present as observers. The founding members agreed on a constitution and the somewhat clumsy name *European Federation of National Institutions for Language* (abbreviated *EFNIL*) for the newly established organisation. Since then, the objectives of EFNIL have been:

- To promote European linguistic diversity as a means of preserving and extending the richness of European culture and developing a sense of shared European identity
- To support the European national languages as the best guarantors of linguistic opportunity within their respective member states.

- To support the European language organisations in their roles as centres of excellence for linguistic analysis and description and as advisory bodies on language policy to relevant political institutions.
- To facilitate the exchange of information and the development and promotion of joint European linguistic research projects between language institutions.
- To encourage, within each member state:
 - the teaching of the national language or languages at all educational levels in schools, in order to promote the written and oral competence that is necessary to enable people to play a full role in society;
 - the teaching of foreign languages within the educational system (in accordance with common European performance standards) from the earliest possible age;
 - opportunities for non-native speakers (both children and adults) to learn the national language of the state in which they reside, and also to maintain competence in their native tongue;
 - exchange opportunities for students and teachers within the European Union.¹

The founders of EFNIL all came from member states of the 'old' European Union, that is before its various enlargements from 2004 until 2013. Only a few years after the various enlargement steps, central language institutions from the new member states of the EU also joined EFNIL. As the constitution of EFNIL allows institutions from other European countries to become associate members, language institutions from Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Serbia also joined the federation. Over the years, a few institutes had to interrupt their membership due to financial problems. The present Executive Committee and the president of EFNIL are trying to win them back.

Tamás Varadi's involvement in EFNIL began back in 2004. Tamás and Gerhard Stickel met on 7th November 2004 in Paris. The Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France, a founding member of EFNIL, was the hosting organisation. The French colleagues had

¹ See the website of EFNIL at <http://efnil.org/documents/principles>

chosen the castle of Sèvres as the site of EFNIL's second annual conference. Gerhard reports that Tamás and he had both arrived early for the conference. So they took a walk discussing various linguistic topics in connection with EFNIL. Tamás was highly interested in EFNIL as a European language organisation and its aims. Gerhard explained to him that EFNIL itself was not a research project but an organisational initiative to maintain the various official standard languages of the European states and to promote and develop the European linguistic diversity. EFNIL, however, could organise and support special projects that would serve its general aims.

At the Paris conference, the members of EFNIL and Tamás, as one of the observers, discussed both the general linguistic situation in several states of the European Union and the problems and solutions concerning legal terminologies in different European languages. Some of the papers read mentioned the computational means of collecting, comparing and adapting the different national terminologies, an aspect Tamás has always been especially interested in.

In the course of 2005, Istvan Kenesei, the head of the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Nyelvtudományi Intézet) and Tamás, as his deputy, decided to apply for membership of their institute in EFNIL. Both subsequently attended the annual conference 2005 in Brussels where the application was accepted by the general assembly of EFNIL with applause from the other delegates.

Like the other EU states, Hungary could now be represented by two delegates, one of these being Istvan Kenesei until 2017, the other one a number of times (Madrid 2006, Riga 2007) an official from the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education. Tamás has been a delegate for his institute at the other EFNIL conferences.

Since 2004, Tamás has attended most of the many annual conferences of EFNIL – the conferences in Dublin, Thessaloniki, London, Budapest, Vilnius, Florence, Helsinki, Warsaw, Mannheim, Amsterdam, and Tallinn (2019). In 2010 he was elected member of EFNIL's executive committee (sometimes called the board) and appointed General Secretary of EFNIL. The same year, the Secretariat of EFNIL was moved from The Hague to Budapest. As General Secretary, Tamás, with the support of an assistant and in close contact with the president of EFNIL, has since been responsible for the various tasks of the Secretariat, including:

- preparation of the annual conferences in cooperation with the local organisers
- finances of EFNIL including the annual accounts
- preparation of meetings of the Executive Committee
- preparation of annual reports on EFNIL's activities and plans for further activities
- minutes of the various conferences and meetings
- website of EFNIL and its various parts including a news section
- contacts with and between the member institutions
- archive of documents pertaining to EFNIL

As Tamás proved to be the 'backbone' of EFNIL's organisation, he was re-elected General Secretary three times (2012, 2015, 2018) and has held this office now (2021) for ten years.

Beside the exchange of information between its member institutions and contacts with national and international political institutions, the activities of EFNIL have been highlighted by the annual conferences on topics related to the policies and aims of its members and EFNIL in general, and by several projects also related to EFNIL's principles. Tamás has been involved in the thematic orientation of several conferences as well as in two major projects.

Information technology, especially computational linguistics, has been a major field of Tamás' research work. He was, therefore, the highly competent co-editor of two of EFNIL's annual conference publications: the 'yearbooks' 2010 (Thessaloniki) and 2012 (Budapest) on the general topics:

- Language, Languages and New Technologies. Thessaloniki 2010 (Stickel and Váradi, 2011).
- Lexical Challenges in a Multilingual Europe. Budapest 2013 (Stickel and Váradi, 2013).

Beside his tasks as General Secretary, he was and still is especially involved in two international projects of EFNIL: EFNILEX and ELM. A short description of these projects follows.