

Welcoming address by Secretary General Matti Saarnisto

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters is an independent community of researchers encompassing all disciplines.

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters is located in Helsinki, but its membership represents Finland's universities and institutes of higher learning on quite an equal basis. Of the 230 members appointed in the 2000s, approximately half are from outside the Helsinki metropolitan region. We now have a total of 620 members, including the 19 invited in the annual meeting held this morning. A broad-based and regionally comprehensive Academy of Science and Letters is suited to Finland, where all education, including the academic level, is available to everyone.

Academies of science and letters are an old institution. The first of these academies along present-day lines were founded in Italy, France and England in the 17th century. Finland's first general scholarly society, the Finnish Society of Science and Letters, was established in 1838.

The founding of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1908 was due to issues of language policy and general political concerns, as analysed by Dr. Jyrki Paaskoski in his recently published 100-year history of the Academy. Policies of reform were instituted in Russia after the lost Russo-Japanese war and the first attempt at revolution in 1905. This also led to liberated conditions in Fin-

land, where parliamentary reform was carried out and the founding of associations and societies was made easier. The founders of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, Gustav Komppa, Eliel Aspelin-Haapkylä and Kaarle Krohn took advantage of this opportunity.

In the early 1900s, the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters was led by constitutionalist pro-Swedish and so-called Young Finnish professors, and no scientists or scholars of the opposing Old Finnish side were elected to it. The growing number of Finnish-speaking professors felt that they were being discriminated in the appointment of members to the Society. The newly founded Finnish Academy of Science and Letters thus quickly assembled the leading Finnish-speaking professors.

In 1957 the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters faced a situation similar to that of the Society of Sciences and Letters half a century earlier, when Finnish-speaking technology professors left the Academy and went on to establish a separate Finnish Academy of Technology. Underlying the founding of the Academy of Technology was the view of these professors that their specific fields carried less weight in the academies of science. A Swedish-speaking academy of technology had already been established in 1921.

The founding of the new academies aroused conflict and debate, but seen from today's perspec-

tive we can say that these events were a natural course of development in the organization of an expanding corps of professors. All the academies work best independently from their own, somewhat divergent starting-points for the benefit of science in Finland.

During the years between the world wars the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and the state had close contacts, and the Academy had direct influence on matters of research policy. Seven professor members of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters served as prime ministers of Finland between 1918 and 1944. The Academy was a respected body among political decision-makers. This is shown by the fact that the Kalevala Fund established by the Finnish Parliament in 1935 was entrusted to the care of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters.

Between the world wars the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters also financed several major research initiatives from its own funds and with support from the state. Perhaps the most significant of these was the anthropological commission, the projects of which led to over ten doctoral dissertations. In 1914, soon after its founding, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters founded a geophysical observatory in Sodankylä in Lapland.

The role of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters as an active body influencing research policy was at its height in the 1950s. In these years, the Academy of Science and Letters and the Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters for practical purposes chose the members of the state research council and to a large degree the research projects and initiatives that received funding and support. The reforms of the research councils in the early 1960s spelt the gradual decrease of the right of the academies of science to appoint members to the councils.

By the early 1970s, the influence of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters on research policy had become almost non-existent. The learned societies found themselves in sharp conflict with the Ministry of Education and the newly organized

Academy of Finland. The board of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters maintained the autonomy of science and did not accept the growing interest of the state in research policy, much less seeking to influence the latter positively. The 1970s are fortunately history now, a period from which all parties concerned should learn.

The weak position of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters was also due to its poor finances. Post-war inflation eroded the value of the donated funds, which had been bound to bank deposits, and the Academy repeatedly had to seek funds from the Ministry of Education, the Kordelin Foundation and the Wihuri Foundation, among other bodies.

The present secure state of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters is based above all on a donation from Vilho Väisälä in 1963, through which the Vilho, Yrjö and Kalle Väisälä Foundation established in connection with the Academy now became a major shareholder of the Vaisala corporation. The foundation began to grow financially in the 1990s and it now awards several dozen grants annually to young researchers in mathematics, physics and geophysics for their doctoral work. Research in the humanities, in turn, received a decisive donation when Academician Eino Jutikkala, who died shortly before Christmas in 2006, bequeathed his considerable property to the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters. As a result, the Academy can serve science and scholarship in Finland also on an economically independent basis.

In 2005, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters drew up a statement of its principles concerning science and research policy, underlining, among other matters, the role of the Academy of Finland as the main body for funding basic-level research and calling for considerable increases to its funding to be available to competitive research units and networks. This requirement is as timely today as it was three years ago.

In its statements on science and research policy in 2005, the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters was pointing the way when it proposed that in

order to strengthen European science the interaction of basic-level research with applied research and the business community should be increased to generative internationally attractive research and innovation environments. I am not quite sure if the board of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters precisely had the current development programme for Finnish universities and institutes of higher learning in mind, but I am certain that science in Finland would benefit if the state were also to make use of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters as an independent organization representing the highest level of scientific and scholarly expertise.

Honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The founding of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters was largely dictated by the language issue of the roles of Swedish and Finnish in

research and public life. Language is still a topical issue but now in a completely different perspective than a hundred years ago. The results of research must be passed on in the mother tongue to both decision makers and the general public and scientific terminology should be made understandable whenever possible. Concern for the mother tongue in Finland is more topical than it has been in decades now that Europe is integrating and the world is living in real time, here and now. Both Finnish and Swedish are small languages, and the role of small languages is defended only by those who speak them. There is no basis for the struggle if the mother tongue is not cared for in Finland. This is the requirement of today's, shared, language struggle.

Welcome to the centenary celebration of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters.