

**The Vigdís International Centre of Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding**  
**First Meeting of the Board – 10 September 2015 at 13:00 GMT**

**Location: Room 303 in Háskólatorg at the University of Iceland / UNESCO headquarters,  
Paris by skype**

Present: Dr. Eiríkur Smári Sigurðarson, Director of Research, School of Humanities (who chaired the meeting), Dr. Guðrún Kvaran, Professor emerita of Icelandic, Dr. Auður Hauksdóttir, Chair, Professor of Danish, Dr. Ásdís R. Magnúsdóttir, Professor of French, Dr. Þórhallur Eyþórsson, Professor of Linguistics, English department.

Mr. Alfredo Perez de Armiñán, Assistant Director-General for Culture, was represented by Ms. Rochelle Roca-Hachem, Program Specialist, who participated in the meeting via skype from the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The minutes were written by Guðrún Kristinsdóttir, Project Manager.

Program:

- Dr. Auður Hauksdóttir Chair opens the meeting and gives welcoming remarks.
- Status of the preparations of the Vigdís International Centre.
- Main focus during the first years.
- Other items.
- Date for the second meeting of the board.

Dr. Auður Hauksdóttir, Chair, Director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages, opened the meeting and gave welcoming remarks.

Eiríkur Smári went through Article 8 in the Agreement between the Government of Iceland and UNESCO concerning the Governing Board of the Centre.

Ms. Roca-Hachem asked whether the Vigdís International Centre, a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, had a clear budget already.

Auður explained that the Vigdís International Centre (VIC) is just starting its activities and that the Rector of the University of Iceland had said that the hiring of an Executive Director for the VIC should take place in the near future.

### **Status of the preparations of the Vigdís International Centre**

Auður presented the background of the VIC project and gave an overview of the state of preparation of the VIC. In her talk, she emphasized the important role of the International Advisory Committee of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute for the international scope of the project, the objectives and the functions of the VIC and the status of the construction of the new building.

Ms. Roca-Hachem congratulated the board for this ambitious and well thought through project as well as the beauty of the architectural design. She understood that the project was finalizing its formulation and brainstorming phase.

Eiríkur Smári summarized the previous comments: the building is under construction and ongoing, an Executive Director will be hired next year, and the team is currently in the phase of formulating a short term and a long term plan.

### **Main focus during the first years**

Auður stressed the importance of a good start with the first project of the VIC and proposed that the Centre work for the first years on Language and Culture Contact in the West Nordic Region. This is an area that Icelandic scholars know very well and where they have existing network.

In his presentation, Þórhallur argued that there is much expertise within the University of Iceland on the West Nordic Region. Also, by selecting this specific area, the scholars wished to express a commitment to Madame Vigdís Finnbogadóttir who on many occasions has pointed out this region as an interesting linguistic and cultural system. Finally, this project would provide a reference frame for subsequent studies.

Auður added that this would provide material for comparative regional studies in a North – South perspective, as suggested by the representatives from UNESCO laying out the text of the

Agreement. In addition, research on the languages and cultures of the Arctic region would be crucial as this area is at risk of profound changes during the coming decades.

Ms. Roca-Hachem noted that the VIC could map and share best practices and models developed in the Nordic region. The UNESCO mandate contributes to peace and development. Languages and cultures are important to development and can contribute to the UN Post-2015 Development Agenda. She recommended that the VIC board think about the government ties of the Centre and develop not only linguistic policy but more broadly education and cultural policy to contribute to sustainable development, and expressed the wish that the VIC share findings resulting from its research and projects, big and small, with UNESCO. UNESCO in the past worked with its Member States to promote the use of the mother tongue in primary and secondary school as an important factor to raise educational levels. Indeed, children who enjoy instruction in their mother tongue tend to stay longer in school. UNESCO always welcomes new findings and evidence to present to policy makers, not least to those who make decision concerning indigenous people. She also mentioned that she would put the VIC in contact with the person in charge of the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger in the Communication and Information Sector, and she pointed out that the Culture Sector does not have programme or budget on languages or multilingualism. Finally, she noted that access to information and multilingualism in cyberspace was a programme topic in the UNESCO Communication and Information Sector and that the VIC should look out for potential synergies with UNESCO and share its findings. Concerning the mapping of translation flows, she did not expect that UNESCO could fund this project, especially in light of the funding problems linked with the Atlas.

Eiríkur Smári thanked her for these valuable points.

Ásdís presented translations and translation studies as an important objective of the Agreement and, as such, an intrinsic part of regional studies. The Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute counts many translators of literary works and the University of Iceland has specialists in translation studies who could conduct research in the historical and linguistic influence of translations in the West Nordic Region.

Concerning the mapping of translation flows, Eiríkur Smári noted that the VIC board members should discuss the objectives of the Agreement with the International Advisory Board on 11-12 September and aim to follow the Agreement to the best of our ability. He suggested that the Board agree on focusing on the West Nordic Region during the first years.

Ms. Roca-Hachem added that the VIC could gain by exchanging experience with other Category 2 UNESCO centres, especially if we had overlapping interests or roles.

The suggestion was put to a vote. All agreed.

### **Other items**

Ms. Rocha-Hachem asked about the staffing of the Centre.

Auður explained that the Centre would be linked to the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages at the University of Iceland and its 40 scholars. These scholars are all paid by the State. The VIC will hire an Executive Director who will coordinate the research and organize conferences and seminars. The VIC and the VFI will work in close relation. If a specific project requires much additional resource, a specialist will be hired out of specific funds linked to the project.

### **Date for the second meeting of the board**

The rules of the Centre stipulate an Annual meeting and offers the possibility of an Extraordinary meeting. The board members agreed to find a suitable date in the coming week for an Extraordinary meeting in early 2016.

The meeting was adjourned at 14:45 GMT.