

# Summary by the chairman

*Eva-Mari Aro*

## **The Year 2015**

One could well describe 2015 as the year in which the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters embarked on its programme of reforms. The needs for change in its activities and ways of working were numerous: increased openness and transparency, a clarification of the Academy's role in the scientific community and in society in general, greater efficiency in the promotion of science and learning and in improving its visibility, the achievement of a better balance between the branches of science and letters in the Academy's activities, greater equality in general, and so on. Fresh blood was flowing through our veins at the beginning of the new year and we set out determinedly on the path of reform.

One essential requirement for reform was that the Academy's regulations should be brought up to date, and a working group already existed for that purpose. In addition, working groups were appointed for reforming the system of subject groups and the manner in which grants and scholarships were awarded. The year 2015 also became one of active discussions and meetings of various kinds aimed at implementing the proposals made by Kari Raivio, former chancellor of the University of Helsinki, on the use of research findings to pro-

vide practical advice for political decision-makers and on the role to be taken by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in this process. Concrete action was taken in this direction by arranging an international forum in collaboration with the European Academies' Science Advisory Council (EASAC) when the EASAC's Energy Panel met in Helsinki in the spring. The Academy also assumed responsibility for drawing up an EASAC report on "Sustainable Forests" under the leadership of Prof. Jaana Bäck. These EASAC reports are intended to serve the decision-making needs of the EU Commission and Parliament and of political bodies in the member countries.

## **Reform of the Academy's regulations**

The principal aim of the alterations in the rules were to raise the profile of the Academy's role both as an advisor to government bodies and as a participant in higher education policy discussions for the improvement of conditions for the study of science and letters – not forgetting the lives and work of young scientists and their career prospects. Another important aim was to release the secretary-general from membership of the Governing Board in order to carry out the reforms according

to the guidelines laid down by the board, and to make the position of secretary-general a full-time post, initially in order to speed up the reforms and at a later stage to increase the scope of the duties belonging to the position.

The Governing Board approved the new draft regulations at its first meeting in 2015 and decided to put it before the Academy members at the February meeting and again at the Annual Meeting in April, since the existing regulations required that changes should be approved by members at two plenary meetings. Information about the reforms and copies of the existing and new regulations were sent to members with their January newsletter. When the changes to the regulations were discussed at the Academy's February meeting, following an introduction by the chairman, one proposal was made that the clause concerning the secretary-general should be rejected and another that it should be reformulated, but in all other respects members were in favour of the changes, some emphatically so. Since two members asked for the matter to be left in abeyance, it was decided to continue the discussions at the March meeting. On that occasion the clause regarding the secretary-general was put to a vote, in which the wording proposed by the chairman, "*The Academy shall also have a secretary-general, to be appointed and dismissed by the governing board. The secretary-general shall be responsible for placing business before the governing board and for putting the board's decisions into effect. The secretary-general shall also act as head of the Academy's office.*" was approved by 42 votes to 14, after which the new regulations as a whole were approved by 54 votes to one.

The second hearing on the new regulations took place at the Annual Meeting on

17th April 2015, when they were approved unanimously. They were subsequently accepted by the National Board of Patents and Registration on 11th May 2015.

### **Appointment of a new secretary-general**

Preparations for appointing a new secretary-general were made during the summer months and an announcement of the vacancy was published in the newspapers *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Turun Sanomat*, *Aamulehti*, *Keskisuomalainen*, *Savon Sanomat* and *Kaleva* on the last Sunday in August. Announcements were also made on the Academy's website, in the membership newsletter for August and on the TE-Services web pages, in addition to which information was sent to the heads of media communications at all the universities in Finland with a request that it should be posted on their websites. In this way we hoped to achieve a wide circulation in order to ensure as the best possible outcome. Altogether the Academy's office received 38 applications by the closing date, whereupon the Governing Board appointed a working group to select and interview the most promising candidates. Finally, five shortlisted candidates underwent a psychological suitability test arranged by Cresco.

The Academy's Governing Board decided unanimously at its December meeting in 2015 to appoint Dr. Pekka Aula, professor of media and communications at the University of Helsinki, as the new secretary-general.

### **Reform of the group system**

The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters is divided into two sections, Science and the Humanities, and these are then subdivided into subject groups. It has been evident for years that these groups and their

sizes do not correspond to the current situation, but their reorganization and updating to conform to recent developments has quite simply proved an impossible task. The question had been raised at meetings of the Governing Board on many occasions in the past but all efforts at resolving it had remained at the level of discussions or even differences of opinion. The current Group Reorganization Committee continued its work throughout the year but postponed its decisions until the new year so that the matter could be resolved by the new Governing Board.

#### **Reform of the grants awarded by the Väisälä Foundation**

By far the largest separate funds administered by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters are the Eino Jutikkala Fund, which distributes grants for scientific work in the humanities, and the Väisälä Fund, which supports research in the fields of science in which the Väisälä brothers were active in their day.

The Academy's chairman was anxious that the Väisälä grants should be made available to all those working in the field of science, but it was predicted from the outset that this would be very difficult to accomplish. The Governing Board held extensive discussions on the matter and eventually decided to extend the scope of the awards but to retain a special emphasis on the subjects studied by the Väisälä broth-

ers. The autumn distribution of grants then took place according to this ruling. The outcome, however, was that a letter was received, signed by 87 members working in fields represented by the Väisälä brothers, demanding that an extraordinary general meeting should be called to discuss the issue further. After negotiations between representatives of the Governing Board and the signatories it was agreed that the question should be referred to the 2016 Governing Board.

#### **Epilogue**

Perhaps we set out too enthusiastically on the path of reform at the beginning of 2015. The aim was that the Academy should have regained the role that it once had as an influential force in Finnish society, but this was not an easy task. We live nowadays under quite different, rapidly changing and in many ways troublesome conditions that call for quick reactions on the part of the Academy, much quicker ones than at any time in the past. If we can achieve a capacity for this, we should be able to act as an exemplary pioneer in opening up new ways of promoting science and supporting political decision-making processes in the light of research findings. I believe that the Academy will want to continue on this path of reform, and I hope very much that the present chairman and future holders of the office will have the courage and stamina to undertake this task.