

The European Academy of Sciences and Arts: Its Impact on Latvia

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Abstract: *Soon after the establishing, in 1990, of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA) its president, Professor Felix Unger, whose family history reaches back to medieval Livonia, initiated contacts with the Academy of Sciences in Latvia. In the frames of Academy cooperation, the European–Latvian Institute for Cultural and Scientific Exchange ‘Eurolat’ was established in 1993; and regular academic symposiums on topical science issues have been held in Latvia since 1995. The year 2001 saw the institution of the Felix Prize (the European–Latvian Prize of EASA), awarded to outstanding Latvian scholars. At present, EASA membership exceeds 1,300 members across 58 countries, including 20 Nobel Prize laureates, and its Protectors include, since 2009, President of the Republic of Latvia Valdis Zatlers (before him, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga during her presidentship). The EASA strategy and its place in European science, as well as topics of the symposiums organized in Latvia, are overviewed.*

Keywords: *‘Eurolat’, European Academy of Sciences and Arts, European values, family history, Felix Unger, international cooperation, Kaupo, the Felix Prize*

Alongside ordinary national academies of sciences, the highest autonomous institution of science in a country, there are also transnational academies of sciences or unions of academies. The European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA), *Academia Scientiarum et Artium Europaea* (seated in Salzburg), is not an ordinary academy of sciences. To the wider academic community, it has

acquired an unofficial name of ‘Unger’s Academy’, which comes from the name of the academy’s founder and president, heart surgeon Felix Unger. The EASA was established on 7 March 1990 and in 2010 it celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Indeed, Unger’s Academy is a distinctive body, it is not a “classical” academy of sciences, which encourages and promotes exact, basic sciences and research, but it is the watch tower of European basic values – science, religion and philosophy, and the mission of which is to contribute to the future of Europe and its unity by promoting knowledge, cooperation and tolerance.

The Academy was taking its shape at the time, when the wall between the Eastern and Western Europe fell, the so called “socialist camp”, the Soviet Union and Tito’s Yugoslavia collapsed and far-reaching changes were started in the Catholic Church—modernization and dialogue with science and other confessional denominations. This process actually started well before the pontificate of Pope John Paul II: it started as early as the pontificate of Pope John XXIII and even that of Pope Paul VI, after the Vatican Council in 1962–1965. In Austria, fresh ideas emerged about the Austrian identity and enlivened reminiscences of the Holy Roman Empire, based in Vienna, and of the emperor Charles the Great, crowned in Aachen. The idea of Pan-Europe acquired topicality and intentions emerged to bring closer Western Europe and Eastern and Southern Europe that were for a long time disunited politically, ideologically and in understanding of basic values (Unger, 2009).

Against that background, then still a youngish and ambitious Austrian heart surgeon Felix Unger (born in 1943), graduate of the University of Vienna (1971), the Fulbright Scholar (1975) and the chairman (since 1985) of the Department of Cardiac Surgery at the Paracelsus Medical University in Salzburg, together with Austria’s Cardinal Franz Koenig (who was very close to Pope John XXIII) and Nikolaus Lobkowitz, professor of the philosophy of religion, established a new, unofficial academy of sciences and co-opted more persons who shared their views. The Academy has gained international recognition and at present its 1,300 members represent most European countries and other countries all over the world (58 altogether). Nowadays, the Academy membership includes more than 20 Nobel laureates (including Mikhail Gorbachev, former president of the Soviet Union), and, what is quite unusual for an academy of sciences, the current Pope Benedict XVI is the member of EASA (he was elected to membership in 1992 as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger).

The European Academy of Sciences and Arts names Protectors – heads of states, who have undertaken to support science and art in their respective countries.

Currently among the Protectors of the EASA are such eminent persons as the presidents of the Republic of Austria and the Slovak Republic, the King of Spain Juan Carlos I, Crown Prince Philip of Belgium, the Grand Duke of Luxembourg, the presidents of Greece and Slovenia, and since October 2009 the president of Latvia Valdis Zatlers. In the past, the title of Protector has been awarded to such distinguished statesmen as H. Kohl, A. Göncz, H-D. Genscher, V. Havel, C. Ciampi, J. Santer, R. Prodi, M. Kučan, G. Verhofstadt and also State president of Latvia V. Vīķe-Freiberga. After the expiry of the term of office as president he or she remains an honorary senator of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. The current president of the European Parliament J. Buzek is also member of the EASA (EASA, 2009).

Unger's Academy was among the first foreign academies of sciences to establish official contacts with the Latvian Academy of Sciences (LAS) on 13 April 1991, even before the restoration of Latvia's independence in August of that year. Unger visited Riga on his personal initiative (Stradiņš, 1998). Professor Unger's both moral and financial support made it possible to organize the first Congress of Cardiac Surgeons of the Baltic Sea States in Riga in 1993 and the same year the European-Latvian Institute for Cultural and Scientific Exchange 'Eurolat' was established in Riga (its first curators were Jānis Stradiņš and Uldis Viesturs, the scientific secretary was Dr. Māris Jākobsons, 1993–1998, afterwards Dr. Anita Draveniece, 1998 to present). It would be worthwhile to mention here that the late biotechnology professor Uldis Viesturs (1936–2010) was the very first, who became acquainted with Felix Unger in the fall of 1990 and invited him to visit the Baltic countries (Stradiņš & Viesturs, 1998).

Upon recommendation of Professor Unger the first members from Latvia were elected to the EASA, they were: physicist J. Lielpeters, chemist J. Stradiņš, biotechnologist U. Viesturs, heart surgeon J. Volkolakovs, physicist E. Blūms, biologist R. Kondratovičs. When, in 1993, the first members were elected to the EASA, the Latvian Delegation of the EASA began taking shape and J. Stradiņš was nominated the head (ambassador) of the delegation. In later years, historian A. Caune, biomechanist I. Knēts, physicist J. Ekmanis, chemist T. Millers, philosopher M. Kūle, physician J. Vētra, demographer P. Zvidriņš, pharmacologist V. Kluša, lawyer and politologist T. Jundzis and heart surgeon R. Lācis became members of the EASA, and presidents of Latvia V. Vīķe-Freiberga (in 2000) and V. Zatlers (2009) were named the Protectors of the Academy (Draveniece, 2009; EASA, 2009). In 2010, the following Latvian nominees joined the EASA membership: art scholar I. Lancmanis, Rector of the Art Academy S. Naumovs and orchestra conductor M. Jansons.

The EASA includes several members from Lithuania (J. Antanavičius, B. Juodka, J. Požela, A. Praškevičius) and even more from Estonia (H. Aben, J. Arrak, J. Engelbrecht, K. Haller, A-E. Kaasik, J. Kalda, A. Krikmann, N. Kristoffel, E. Oja, T. Paul, T-A. Sulling, T. Tiivel, P. Tulviste, J. Undusk). Unger's Academy is a member of ALLEA, presently presided by Professor Jüri Engelbrecht (Unger, 2009).

As regards Felix Unger himself, in January 1992 he was elected the foreign member of the LAS and, in 2003, he was conferred the degree of honorary doctor of Riga Stradiņš University. In 2009, he was awarded the Pauls Stradiņš Prize for founding the EASA and for continued generous support to Latvian science (Draveniece, 2009).

What has made Latvia so interesting to professor Unger, why does he have special attitude towards Latvia? Indeed we have close personal relationship since 1991, when professor Unger visited Latvia for the first time and we organized for him tours to Vidzeme, but the true motive behind his deep interest is as follows. Felix Unger family's history reaches back to medieval Livonia, the families of von Lievens and the Ungern-Sternbergs. Felix Unger is a direct, but far-off descendant of Kaupo, the Liv chieftain, whose name is well-known in Latvia's history (von Lieven, 1910/1911). He is described in the thirteenth-century Chronicle of Henry of Livonia (*Heinrici Chronicon Lyvoniae*). It may be possible that in the face of Professor Felix Unger we see some facial features of Livs. The elder daughter of Kaupo got married to knight Johan von Sternberg, who was nicknamed Hungarian (Unger) because he had come from Hungary. In medieval times, von Lievens owned Turaida and Krimulda (nowadays the town of Sigulda), but Kaupo's daughter's descendants – the Ungerns – owned Madliena, Aderkaši, Meņģele and Ogre district (in Latvia). Interestingly, the Latvian toponym Madliena was coined by Ungers' ancestor in commemoration of his sister-in-law, Magdalena, the youngest and unmarried daughter of Kaupo (Ungern-Sternberg, 1872; Taube, 1940). In this place (Madliena) the Magdalena Church was built in honor of Magdalena who was regarded as a saint in medieval Livonia. Professor Felix Unger belongs to the branch of the Ungern-Sternberg family which moved, in the 16th century, away from Livonia to Central Europe, to Austria, and the reason for this step was that during the Age of Reformation they remained faithful to Catholicism and did not wish to convert to the Lutheran faith. The role of Ungern-Sternberg family in the history of Estonia, Latvia and the former Russian Empire is being recognized.

The EASA emblem, which was adopted in 1990, is made up of a quartered shield and the lines that divide the shield form a knight's cross that symbolizes

Christian faith; the top left and bottom right fields carry the seven stars from the coat of arms of von Ungern-Sternbergs, and the top right and bottom left fields carry the three lilies from the coat of arms of von Lievens. Professor Unger himself interprets the stars (six-pointed stars as in the Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, not five-pointed stars that inspired the French Revolution) to be symbols of metaphysics, and the lilies the symbol of natural sciences, but in the centre there is a big cross because, as he says, there can not be science without a cross, without faith. According to him, blue color is a night's color, color of the humanities, and gold color symbolizes the natural sciences. Thus, the emblem of the most prestigious EASA is made of the coats of arms of knights who resided in medieval Livonia.

From the very beginning the collaboration, initially driven by professor Unger, among the EASA, the LAS and the 'Eurolat' Institute, headed by Stradiņš until 1998 (since then headed by Prof. M. Kūle and recently transformed into a virtual, unfinanced organization), took the form of international discussions/symposiums which were held every 2–3 years, and in recent years have reshaped into joint meetings of the LAS and EASA that are sometimes named the EASA assemblies (Stradiņš, 2000).

In 2001, a tradition to award EASA Latvian Prizes was established and J. Stradiņš made a suggestion to name the prize after Professor Felix Unger, namely the Felix Prize. Each prize carries a monetary award: the "big prize" of 2,500 euros and the "small prize" of 750 euros. Since then, the prize-awarding ceremony is associated with a scientific conference. The LAS and the EASA have hitherto co-organized the following scientific events / conferences: *Dialogue between Christianity and Secularism in Latvia* (1995), *National Identity and Vision of Europe* (1998), *Safety and Certainty* (2003), *Society between Past and Future: Ageing and Succession of Generations* (2006), *Higher Medical Education and Health Care Policy: Contemporary Challenges for Latvia* (2009). Those who have been honored with the Felix Prize (the so-called "big prize") include President of Latvia, folklorist and psychologist V. Vīķe-Freiberga (2001), philosopher M. Kūle (2003), philosopher V. Zariņš (2006) and physician J. Vētra (2009) and "small prizes" have been awarded to archeologist I. Ose and philosopher I. Šuvajevs (2001), linguist D. Baltaiskalna-Joma and historian Ē. Jēkabsons (2003), ethnographer R. Blumberga and politologist A. Sprūds (2006), philosopher R. Bičevskis and physician A. Irmejs (2009). These events have given considerable impetus to the academic community of Latvia; they have been attended by eminent scientists, public figures, Latvian religious leaders, physicians, ministers and state presidents. The proceedings of two conferences have been published in the Annals of the EASA (*Dialogue between...*, 1996;

National Identity..., 2000). Besides, the EASA also kindly published extended papers of the reports delivered at the 7th Baltic Conference on Intellectual Cooperation (in 1999 in Riga) in a special issue of the *Annals* under the title *Towards a Baltic Europe* (Stradiņš, 2001) Let us note that the symposium on national identity and vision of Europe, in 1998, gathered 70 participants from six countries. The speeches were delivered by G. Meierovics, founder and honorary president of European movement from Latvia, R. Umblija and V. Birkavs, both ministers of the Republic of Latvia, Professor P. Tulviste, then rector of the University of Tartu, Professor L. E. Larsen, chairman of the Danish Council of Science, and others. The symposium played a role in Latvia's preparation for accession to the European Union. The volume of the *Annals* which contained full texts of the speeches in the English language, and of which 1,500 copies were printed, was delivered to prominent scientists and to the leading European politicians – members of EASA.

The EASA is located in Salzburg – the city of Mozart and Paracelsus; it receives government subsidies, but it is not Austrian national academy of sciences, it is an independent, transnational academy. EASA is an independent member of ALLEA.

During the past 10–20 years the European Academy of Sciences and Arts has become an internationally recognized scientific institution which associates several small research units in Austria, Germany, Rumania (Transylvania) and Latvia, and several foundations in Germany, Austria and Switzerland lend support to the academy. The EASA holds visiting or jubilee sessions in many European countries (including regular sessions in Aachen dedicated to Emperor Charles the Great), and awards prestigious prizes (Tolerance Prize). The authority and prestige of the academy comes, to a great extent, from Felix Unger's distinctive personality, from his promptitude and seemingly inexhaustible creativity. He, perhaps, personifies the academy itself and builds it rather dissimilar from other academies of sciences in Europe. The mission of the EASA is different from the traditional mission of academies of sciences that includes advancement of research. The EASA mainly deals with the humanities, religion, history of arts, ethics and related disciplines, but it is also highly respectful to medicine, demography and global issues. It is with pleasure to feel Professor Unger's particularly favorable attitude towards Latvia. We should derive benefit from this and popularize in Europe our works in science and arts, done in the Baltic countries, and draw inspiration from the "Old" European culture.

At the festive plenary session of the EASA in Salzburg on 7 March 2010, the Latvian Academy of Sciences was represented by the vice-president T. Jundzis,

who read the congratulatory address of the LAS signed by president J. Ekmanis and the chairman of the Senate J. Stradiņš and also passed to Professor Unger a congratulation signed by the EASA Protector V. Zatlers, State President of Latvia.

As an “independent knowledge pool”, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts focuses on interdisciplinary discussion across specialized areas, ideologies and scientific cultures, as well as on promoting transnational dialogue and visionary developments of new scientific knowledge and academic thinking. The uniqueness of the EASA lies in its ability to work across boundaries for the aesthetics of science. EASA focuses on three core areas: namely, developing knowledge, disseminating scientific information and implementing major multinational projects. Ethical principles in scientific discussions are fundamental. No one topic is discussed abstractly, but it impacts on cultural, ethical and consensual values and developments are always considered.

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