



**With knowledge and a big heart - 30 years of lobbying in Brussels**

**President of MTK, Juha Marttila**

Finland joined the European Union at the beginning of 1995. This was preceded by many years of intensive preparation, negotiation and campaigning. Agriculture was always at the heart of politics and civil discourse. MTK had a significant advantage, having settled in Brussels even before the EU-membership was seriously discussed.

Much of the Finnish discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of membership was based purely on imaginations. Someone promised cheap food, another was scared of Russia. MTK's direct channel to Brussels, highly skilled staff and strong organizational reputation made the organization a powerful player in EU policy during those risky years of development for rural areas. This is the tradition that we have maintained for 30 years. Agricultural policy has always been in the hard core of the EU. The common policy has guided agriculture and the food sector for 60 years. It was then stated that food supply could not be left to the mercy of market forces. The same wisdom applies today and will continue to do so in the future.

Finland's accession negotiations came at a time when the common agricultural policy was geared towards reform. Finnish agriculture jumped on a moving train. There was a shift from price support to decoupled payments. MTK's experts had to be able to influence both the negotiations on Finland's separate solutions and recognize the winds of change in the EU.

Indeed, politics have changed in 30 years. The EU is part of the global food market. An increasing proportion of the funds in the agricultural budget

are paid out on an environmental basis. The range of policy objectives is so wide that it is impossible to draw up a reasonable and understandable set of measures. Year after year, MTK has reminded us that politics must not forget the most important thing – the farmer.

From the very beginning, forest issues have been included in the agenda of MTK's Brussels office. The weight of forestry issues has increased year after year and there is no end in sight to this development. The EU does not have a common forestry policy, but it is very keen to exert influence of environmental and climate policy on forests.

MTK's forest mission in Brussels is to defend the Finnish model of sustainable forestry. A lot of time is spent on providing basic information and correcting misinformation. For many decision-makers it is new information that thinned forests grow better. It is also surprising that the forest is always regenerated after the final felling. The joy of success comes when someone understands how one felled tree becomes raw material for sawmills, the fiber industry and energy production. All this information plays a crucial role in the process of creating directives and regulations.

EU decision-making usually proceeds quite slowly. The lobbying work has different stages. Anticipation is important to understand in which direction the wind is turning. The staff of the Brussels office are carrying out this intelligence activity in a continuous manner. This requires a lot of good and confidential contacts in the various EU institutions.

The Commission prepares the legislative proposals to be decided. That is why we should know the Commission's working methods and the people who prepare the dossiers. The Commission is an expert organization and is not influenced by shouting and muscle-flexing. You must be able to justify your case and be able to offer solutions. In this work, MTK has proven its skills and gained a lot of appreciation.

The legislative proposals will proceed to the political decision-making process. This starts in the commission college deciding on the final legislative proposal. At this stage, the Finnish Commissioners have often been the support and security of our agriculture and forestry when it has been necessary to prevent or speed up particularly important issues.

The process in Parliament and the Council of the Member States is politics at its best, meaning the noble art of compromise. The uncooperative will not be successful in this environment. Parliament's increased power is also reflected in MTK's influencing work. We work closely with the rapporteurs whenever possible and offer advice for voting in a best possible way.

The success of a small country in the EU requires strong cooperation between the whole team. Disputes should be quarreled at home in order to pull together in Brussels for Finland's benefit. It has been possible to manage agricultural and forestry matters mainly based on this principle, with very few exceptions.

The chairman of MTK travels to Brussels often. The program is filled with meetings and appointments carefully prepared by the office. Maarit conjures up visits to the Commission or Parliament with incredible success. The meeting requests are refused seldom. The office director is the most important partner in planning the meetings and their content.

In Brussels' influencing culture, lunch and dinner meetings must be fully exploited. Meat and fish are still largely accepted on the menu. It is good to promote our message with tasty food and these discussions are great opportunity to get to know new people. Advocacy is largely a combination of knowledge of human nature and communication.

MTK's tradition is the meeting of Finnish MEPs in Strasbourg in September. The time and place of the evening have remained the same throughout the Finnish EU membership – of course, the covid pandemic caused a break of a couple of years. As a result of the introductions and

lively discussion, many important policies and new openings impacting rural areas have been initiated.

The establishment of the office in Brussels in 1991 showed great wisdom on the part of the decision-makers. The same wisdom has been in the fact that the people of Brussels are not left alone in their work. EU affairs are part of the job description of each of the experts in the organization. This requires frequent contacts and good cooperation between home and Brussels. The Brussels office is at the forefront of supporting the EU advocacy of the entire organization.

Along the way, many experienced Brussels influencers have stated that MTK's systematic and effective EU lobbying is at its own level among Finnish organizations and companies. The comparison is pointless, but the feeling is that we are doing the right things and in the right way.

Advocacy is done not only with competence, but also with a big heart. The EU is an important partner for rural areas, for better or for worse. It is present in the everyday life in the countryside. The lobbyists in Brussels are defenders of the Finnish countryside. The task is crystal clear.

Juha Marttila

President of MTK



**Agriculture and forestry have solutions and know-how to meet the challenges of our time – lobbying in Brussels 2012-2021**

**Hanna Leiponen-Syyrakki, Director of Brussels office**

The Office of Finnish Agriculture, Forestry and Cooperatives celebrated its 30th anniversary in autumn 2021. We can safely say that the Finnish

farmers were very wise when they sent their representatives to Brussels in the autumn of 1991, four years before Finland joined the EU. They were right that EU issues will affect our agriculture and forestry, and that is why it is important to have an impact on the ground.

The task of the Brussels office is to ensure that the members of MTK, SLC and Pellervo have a voice and that their needs are considered in EU decision-making. The effective delivery of the message can be achieved through excellent cooperation with the experts of the organizations and through long-term network building. It is also important to be a reliable partner and a producer and intermediary of fact-based and big picture-based information.

Our main message to Brussels in recent years has been that agriculture and forestry have solutions and know-how to meet the challenges of our time and are, by no means, the cause of the problems. The common goal is sustainable use of natural resources and food security, as well as profitable economic activities. Sustainability can and will be improved, and the resulting costs must be equally shared throughout the chain.

In lobbying, we do not need confrontation, but an open and opposites listening debate. It should also be noted that decision-makers today know little about practical farming and forest management or the operation of the food chain.

Globally, responsibility must be taken for food security and improving sustainability, as well as for the competitiveness of food production in the EU. We cannot preserve the food production in museums, but we need to introduce innovative technologies and new ways of producing food more sustainably and efficiently. The potential of the circular bioeconomy must be utilized to the full. Forests, especially in Finland, have enormous potential to replace fossil fuels, sequester carbon, reduce emissions and, of course, produce economic and social goods, all in one package.

The 30th anniversary of the Brussels office will culminate in a seminar and evening celebration on 26.10.2022 in Brussels. Welcome to celebrate with us with Finnish food!

Hanna Leiponen-Syyrakki

Director of Brussels Office