



Press release

Associations at the heart of Europe: a conversation with Esa Härmälä, Director General at EFMA (the European Fertilizer Manufacturers Association)

June 2009

On the morning of 16 June, ESAE welcomed an active audience of association professionals from across the continent for morning of conversation with experienced association director, negotiator, and industry leader **Esa Härmälä**.

Starting with an overview of the current crisis he outlined the pivotal role played by EU institutions - particularly associations, who are well positioned to lay the groundwork for improvements and a positive awareness of Europe as a player on the world stage.

He illustrated his observations with an impressive array of personal case studies based on many years' experience working as President of The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners in Finland (MTK), EC accession negotiator for Agriculture and Fisheries within the Ministry for Foreign and Counsellor for Agriculture and Fisheries at the Finnish Mission to the European Communities.

The critical role of partnerships was stressed – partnerships between EU institutions and local groups, between the sometimes conflicting audiences within an individual association, and with larger umbrella industry groups such as CEFIC in his own industry. “Be selective in terms of who you cooperate with, and how you cooperate,” he stressed, emphasising the need for ongoing two-way communication, particularly at the local level.

His experience in working to develop what are often challenging institutional partnerships is echoed in the difficult links between local institutions and European ones – a delicate balance needing attention against the background of deepening European integration. “Flexibility is crucial,” particularly in the case of prospective member states such as Turkey where attention to local and cultural needs will encourage a smooth path to integration – as opposed to alienation.

Brussels politicians face the particular challenge of streamlining local needs into a European framework. Translating a positive message on EU policy is an ongoing challenge even if taxation, jobs or quality of life are improved as a result of European legislation. Local issues tend to be paramount, and any lack of understanding on the part of an EU institution - even when justified - is often an excuse for overarching local anti-EU feeling. “Is there a European awareness on the part of the average EU citizen?” It is in everyone’s best interest to foster this – yet difficult to communicate a balanced, clear understanding of the interaction between EU and local institutions when there is no single, well-recognised European news vehicle.

An insightful, stimulating debate, enlightening all participants and encouraging greater awareness of the role played by associations in Europe.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

ESAE - the European Society of Association Executives - is the premier, European association supporting and representing association managers in Europe. ESAE provides an international framework for round-tables and presentations throughout the year, highlighted by keynote speakers from senior levels in industry, government and association management.

ESAE members enjoy a range of opportunities to learn and exchange ideas and insights with other association executives across the continent and beyond. Throughout the year, members can access a wealth of events, seminars, networking initiatives and educational activities supporting their ongoing requirements for continuing education, professional recognition and information exchange.

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