

Vol. 33 Coden: KMKMAA ISSN 0355-1628

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Tilauhinnat

Kotimaassa 80 euroa, muut maat 120 euroa
Kouluille 40 euroa, www.aikakaus.fi
Prenumerationspris i Finland 80 euro,
övriga länder 120 euro
Subscription price (out of Finland) EUR 120
Irtonumero/Lösnummer/Single copy EUR 10
(special issue 6/2006 EUR 15)

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Aikakauslehtien Liiton jäsenlehti

Painos • Upplaga • Printing order 9 000
Forssa 2006
Forssan Kirjapaino
ISO 9002



EDITORIAL

Hard REACH Hallelujah

“Another great example of quality Finnish endeavour!”—that was how President **Tarja Halonen** summed up her congratulations to Eurovision Song Content winner **Lordi** when she handed over the Association of Finnish Work’s ‘Key Flag’ to the group’s lead singer, **Tomi Putaansuu**, in May.

Lordi’s achievement was not the result of a simple lucky break or the success of a concept that had just been created for the Eurovision content. The band’s roots go all the way back 25 years, when seven-year-old Tomi began his first chemical experiments, using what he found in the kitchen at home and in his mother’s cupboards. Tomi’s strengths reflect those typical of Finns generally: the ability to take a long-term view, patience, and a practical mindset.

The same qualities will be needed this autumn in the discussions to be led by Finland aimed at ensuring that the EU’s REACH initiative, long in the drafting, is finally approved.

REACH is currently in its second reading by the European Parliament following its approval by the Council of the European Union in June with the support of the EU Commission. The goal is to reach consensus on the final content of the regulation by the end of this year during the Finnish presidency of the Community.

Although approval is not a foregone conclusion, work on the initiative is so far advanced that, even it were to be delayed, it is unlikely that it would collapse altogether.

As a small member state, Finland is not in a position to try and push through its own views should significant conflicts of opinion emerge. Its best policy in situations like this will be to propose solutions that it has already canvassed and approved with the EU’s larger countries. History has taught Finland the importance of negotiating with those bigger than you, searching out practical solutions, and keeping to agreements once made.

The European Chemicals Agency, which will soon begin operations in Helsinki, will play a key role in the implementation of the REACH programme. The Agency is expected to employ up to 500 specialists, the first of whom were selected in July from nearly 900 first-round applicants from 24 countries.

Nobody knows as yet exactly what impact REACH will have. It is probably not exaggerating to say, however, that it will affect each and every company operating in the EU in one way or another at some point.

Detailed rules and technical guidance covering how REACH will be implemented are now being drawn up, and companies would be wise to check that they already comply with all aspects of current chemical and environmental legislation, as this will certainly smooth the path for REACH compliance.

The 673 pages of the REACH document could well seem almost as scary as the members of Lordi in their full regalia, but, whether we are talking about REACH or Lordi, it pays to look beyond the surface. Lordi is about music in the best sense of the word, and REACH too is less about making unnecessary waves for people and all about promoting a cleaner environment and a healthier life for all of us.

The time for lobbying is over. From now on, we need to look forward. Hard REACH hallelujah!

Leena Laitinen