

Member Spotlight: Lauri Railas

From Maritime law to Karelian culture, Lauri Railas believes variety is the spice of life



Dr. Lauri Railas is a Finnish attorney with a former career as a European Union official and an executive of the International Chamber of Commerce. Lauri's practice ranges from private to public law aspects of international trade and he is also a renowned expert of logistics, distribution and insurance law. Moreover, Lauri is the statutory Average Adjuster in Finland and also acts as an arbitrator in commercial disputes.

Lauri also has academic credentials as an Adjunct Professor of Civil Law at the University of Helsinki and is a regular contributor of conferences organized by international organizations including as the International Chamber of Commerce, the UN suborganizations, and the OECD.

Lauri has contributed to a number standard form contracts and trade rules such as Incoterms® 2010 trade terms, the ICC Model International Sales Contract and the ICC Model Anti-Corruption Clause. Most recently, Lauri was one of the authors of the ICC/ECCO Guide for Offset Contracts. Within IR Global, Lauri was one of the contributors to Business in Brexit.

Lauri Railas has had a varied career that includes maritime law, academia, working for the European Commission in Brussels and chairing the Karelian heritage association, which straddles Finland and Russia.

As an ethnic Karelian Lauri works hard to keep the culture of his ancestors alive and maintains relations with the Karelian population in Russia.

Karelia is a territory that stretches from the White Sea coast to the Gulf of Finland. It is the source of the Finnish national saga Kalevala, and it has inspired Finnish artists and composers including Jean Sibelius. Part of this land was annexed by the then Soviet Union in 1940, conquered back by Finland in 1941 and lost again in 1944, after which Karelians living in this part were evacuated to the current territory of Finland – and this included Lauri's father.

The Soviet Union feared ethnic separatism, so the Karelian people, many traditionally living in Russia, were once suppressed culturally. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union it became possible to cooperate again. "We maintain contact with them and encourage and support them to preserve their culture," he smiles. "I don't speak the language so well, but of course my father was fluent."

It's all a long way from Lauri's day job as a trade and maritime lawyer in Helsinki. He runs a boutique firm as a sole operator and, at 63 years old, he says he has "fairly good knowledge" in his fields of interest. "I take assignments where I can be useful," he smiles, modestly.

Indeed, Lauri exudes modesty but this belies his expertise as one of the few people in Europe who understands international trade and transport law from a legal, practical and academic perspective. Certainly in relatively rare field and there are few other countries. As well as his day-to-day practice, Lauri also provides expert opinions for colleagues who are not maritime lawyers in court cases: "I have done academic studies and I passed a doctorate, which makes me a natural reference point."

DIVERSE CAREER

This also hints at Lauri's diverse career – he has not always been an attorney. He studied in Norway and the UK (living in London's Notting Hill long before it was gentrified) and then started his career as a marine insurance lawyer in an insurance company. Lauri then moved on to the Finland Chamber of Commerce and the International Chamber of Commerce before becoming an EU official, living in Brussels for many years before returning to Finland with his family.

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During his time with the EU, Lauri was involved in the interpretation of the Act of Accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden into the European Union. In late 1997, three years after the accession, Finland

and Sweden obtained access to fish in the North Sea. "For Finland, this did not matter economically, but was nevertheless significant, and my best own fish catch" he says. "I appealed to the vanity of my superiors in the Council of the EU with the result that the Commission changed its proposal fearing legal hurdles.

"I am proud of having been involved in shaping the codification of contract and trade practices in international organisations. I am a believer in cooperation between businesses in shaping expedient business practices."

It was only when he was in his mid-40s that he came back to legal work, having also completed a doctorate in international trade. What brought him to the profession was an interest in the work from not just from a legal perspective but an academic one. "These legal problems were very interesting, especially trying to find a solution. I became a semi-academic attorney, spending time working on things like international rules and project work for the Finnish government also."

"But in the past few years I have been led towards fighting arbitrations or sometimes arbitrating myself and I have gradually become a lawyer again," he laughs.

"I am proud of having been involved in shaping the codification of contract and trade practices in international organisations."

On top of all that Lauri is also an average adjuster in Finland, working with marine insurers and policyholders on marine casualties to define what the damages are, how much must be indemnified and so forth. The law on average adjusting in Finland has recently changed: "The Finnish average adjuster is the first instance in court in marine insurance disputes. As the adjustments can now be enforced like court judgments, this brings in the EU Brussels I Regulation (1215/2012) mean-

ing that Finnish adjustments could be enforced throughout the European Economic Area and could be subject to choice-of-court clauses.

"This is a unique position meaning efficient dispute resolution, although insurance builds traditionally more on good reputation than the formal status."

PLACE AT THE TABLE

Lauri believes there is a place for small firms such as his, which can help larger more general law firms to negotiate the intricacies of Finnish contract law. "Finnish law contains general principles, most notably the requirement of good faith and fair dealing, which must be considered on top of the provisions of the often-biased written contracts," he says. "This has generated clients in the past and may do so in the future, too."

"I am a believer in cooperation between businesses in shaping expedient business practices."

While Lauri enjoys the freedom of being a sole trader, he acknowledges it can be hard work: "I find fighting disputes always somewhat unpleasant. To some extent, both parties almost always have reasons for their behaviour and stances and may have much to lose. This makes disputes very emotional, which adds pressure on the lawyer."

Nevertheless, he is a big believer in using technology to make his job easier: "I have noticed how much easier it is to work when your database is in order. You do not have to consult paper files. In my view, management of materials is key to a good professional."

He also has strong views on providing clients with the service they expect: "Good working relations including reliability and promptness are key. You must treat other people with respect. That is a way to get respected yourself in return. 'The forest responds the way you shout at it', as we say in Finnish. "It is said that clients do not want long

memos in the middle of hectic business, but professionalism nevertheless counts in the end."

His attitude also clashes with some others in the profession. He isn't driven by making as much money as possible and taking every decision with a view to the commercial aspect of it. "That's not my approach," he says. "I find satisfaction in being able to influence how things go in the field."

Looking to the future, Lauri is not planning to retire any time soon – "I enjoy the work" – but he is also not looking to grow his business either. "But I wouldn't oppose the prospect of organic growth or cooperation with colleagues."

"I find satisfaction in being able to influence how things go in the field."

Outside his work, one of Lauri's passions is ice hockey and as his sons have played he has been a regular spectator at their games. "I also like cycling, swimming and outdoor activities, but I don't run any more. Those days are over for me," he smiles. He admits much of his spare time is spent on his Karelian cultural work including a heritage association, and singing as a first tenor in the Singing Fellows of Vyborg having been established in the once second biggest city of Finland, Vyborg, now belonging to Russia after post-war annexation.

The pandemic permitting, Lauri travels frequently to Russia, also being a regular contributor to legal conferences there as well as an arbitrator under the Russian Maritime Arbitration Commission. Russian people and society benefit from contacts with the rest of the world. "No matter if someone there might consider a foreigner like me with friendly ideas a spy" Lauri laughs, modestly.

Lauri Railas

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Railas Attorneys Ltd. is a Finnish law firm giving legal advice in international business law with a long experience and reasonable prices. The firm advises by drafting, interpreting and negotiating contracts in the various fields of trade law and logistics and takes care of disputes relating to them.

On top of private law, also public regulations on trade such as competition, procurement and sanctions form part of the assignments.

During its four years of existence, the firm has had clients in more than a dozen countries and has had the privilege to advise the Finnish government, too.

