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**BLUEFORS**  
manufactures cryogenic  
refrigerators for science  
and quantum computing

**PRIME MINISTER**  
Petteri Orpo on Finnish  
entrepreneurship

**DAREKON 40 YEARS**  
A grand celebration for  
the entire staff

**PROFILE**  
Kai Orpo, CEO of  
Darekon Ltd

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AUTUMN • 2025

CUSTOMER MAGAZINE OF DAREKON LTD



Bluefors

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“Technology, responsibility and humanity go hand in hand.”

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**Publisher:** Darekon Ltd

**Editor-in-chief:** Kai Orpo

**Production:** Lampila Publishing Ltd

**Editor and layout:** Jouko Lampila

**Cover:** Darekon magazine interviewed the Prime Minister. Photo: Mikko Säteri

**Printer:** Offset Tuovinen  
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## 40 years of Darekon – together into the future

We are now embarking on Darekon's next decade. I have had the privilege of serving as CEO for the past 35 years, witnessing the development of Darekon, our people, and our customers. Our customers have been the guiding light of our progress, and darekonians the very heart of it. Darekon's future will be built on collaboration, courage, and the ability to renew. We do not merely react to change – we look ahead, create new opportunities, and build sustainable growth.

In May we celebrated Darekon's well-deserved 40th anniversary in Helsinki together with our employees. It was heart-warming to see participants from all five of our manufacturing centres, with nearly 300 people joining the festivities. The atmosphere was wonderful, and in this magazine you can find stories and photos from the event. To mark the occasion, we were also honoured to have an interview with the Prime Minister of Finland about entrepreneurship in Finland and how to strengthen its conditions.

Although we can look back on good times, our eyes are firmly on the future. Now we are in uncertain times but that is precisely why we want to be an even stronger partner for our customers – enabling a future where technology, responsibility and humanity go hand in hand.

We are constantly developing our operations, investing in competence and seeking new solutions that support both our customers' success and our own. A key part of this era will be strengthening our resilience and we are determinedly building it into our operations. We are reinforcing our organisation and developing our supply chains to withstand possible future challenges.

This issue's customer feature highlights Bluefors – a world-class expert in cryogenics and a key enabler of quantum computing. Around half of the world's research institutes and technology companies rely on Bluefors cryostats to cool their quantum computers. It is a remarkable company that began at Aalto University's Low Temperature Laboratory. The article is well worth reading.

They say all good things come to an end. Our Darekon magazine has been published for 16 years with one issue per year. This is the final edition in its current format. The magazine has been produced throughout by Jouko Lampila. Our heartfelt thanks to him for his dedication to this annual endeavour.

Many thanks also to all our employees, customers and other stakeholders for the past year. Thank you for being part of this journey. Together we will go towards the next forty years.

Kai Orpo



We want to be an even stronger partner for our customers.”



## Darekon showcased at the SecD-Day security event

**A**t the end of January the SecD-Day event brought together the full breadth of Finland's defence industry. The event attracted more than 4,000 professionals from both Finland and abroad.

"SecD-Day was an excellent event and offered us a great opportunity to meet and network

with companies in the sector," says Darekon's sales director, **Petri Kettunen**. "There were 190 exhibitors from 15 different countries, and the exhibition space was completely sold out."

According to Kettunen, many of the exhibitors are Darekon's customers, and the two-day event provided a valuable chance to exchange the latest news with them. In the defence indus-

try, supply chains are often long and change takes time, which makes it important to get to know new partners well in advance.

"We have been working in compliance with demanding MIL standards since the early 2000s and have solid experience in the field. We will also be taking part in the event in February 2027," Kettunen concludes. ■

## Darekon AB in Stockholm joins development initiative

Produktionslyftet, the development programme Smartare Elektroniksystem and the trade organisation Svensk Elektronik are working together to strengthen the ability of small and medium-sized Swedish enterprises to improve, innovate and adapt. For 18 years the Produktionslyftet programme has helped companies address possible challenges in both production and organisational development.

**P**roduktionslyftet is based on a stakeholder model, aiming to create value for five key groups - customers, employees, owners, partners and society at large. The programme is rooted in lean thinking, which for Produktionslyftet means sustainable development, consistent working practices and continuous improvement.

### Towards a development process

Most companies need to develop and respond to the many new challenges in their operating environment. To support the needs of electronics manufacturers, Produktionslyftet has initiated cooperation with Svensk Elektronik, Sweden's electronics industry association.

"Lean thinking is of course already familiar to us," says **Sven Blomberg**, CEO of Darekon AB. "But initiating change is often difficult. This initiative came at a very suitable time

for us, as we are currently building development plans based on 'lean' and several other models."

So far, the five coaching sessions carried out within the framework of the project have provided many new perspectives, according to Blomberg: "We have gained a new overall view of our challenges, learned alternative ways of defining objectives and found methods to put ideas into practice."

### Change through small steps

Darekon AB has already taken several - and significant - steps towards change. The company's background lies in IHAAB Component Systems AB and its subsidiaries SMD Production AB and Kelab Systems AB, which Finnish Darekon Ltd acquired in 2021. Blomberg was appointed the new CEO of the company soon after the acquisition. The next step was a move to new premises twice the size of the previous facilities, in spring 2024.

Not every change requires steps of this scale. In Darekon AB's case, the focus is now more on consolidating the new situation than seeking further changes. Nevertheless, new insights and new ways of thinking are, in Blomberg's view, the most valuable outcome of the initiative. ■



Sven Blomberg is satisfied with the insights and new ways of thinking provided by the project.

## Hannu Hänninen appointed as Darekon's new CFO



**Jorma Miettinen**, Darekon Ltd's chief financial officer, retired last summer after 20 years of service with the company. He has been succeeded by MSc (Econ.) **Hannu Hänninen**, who took up the role at the beginning of June.

Originally from Punkaharju, Hänninen graduated from the Helsinki School of Economics with a Master's degree in Economics. Since 2000 he has held international financial management positions in both Finnish and foreign companies, including Nokia Networks and Husqvarna AB.

"Darekon has an interesting history and I am very excited about my new appointment," says Hänninen. "My task is above all to develop the company's financial management into strategic support for the business. For this, I have received clear guidance from Darekon's board to help achieve the goal.

"Jorma Miettinen has done commendable work and now passes the baton to me. Darekon has good tools and systems in place. Over the years, the group has also accumulated a great deal of tacit knowledge, which I will be able to put to use."

Hänninen's aim is to promote Darekon's next leap in efficiency, which will be achieved by developing existing working methods. Recurring tasks will be handled through automation, reducing manual administrative work. In Hänninen's view, Darekon has already reached the size and scale where sufficient resources exist to carry out these changes.

"A 40-year-old family business is an achievement worthy of respect," Hänninen concludes. "I aim – and believe I am able – to further develop Darekon and help turn a good company into an excellent one. The change required is only small, and the starting point is stable." ■

## New flying probe tester for Haapavesi

Printed circuit boards are becoming increasingly complex, with smaller components and higher packing density. This places ever greater demands on both board manufacturing and the testing of finished boards.

**D**arekon has invested in a new Spea 4060 tester at its Haapavesi plant, enabling even more efficient, faster and more reliable testing of complex printed circuit boards.

### Mixed technology on both sides of the board

Ever more densely packed circuit boards present new challenges for testing. For example, the needles of a bed-of-nails fixture simply cannot make contact with all the required – and increasingly smaller – test points when components are in the way. In high-frequency boards, there may be no test points at all, as they could interfere with the circuit's functionalities.

The new-generation tester solves these issues with ultra-thin test probes whose alignment accuracy is measured in microns, while testing both sides of the board simultaneously. The system features four needles above the board

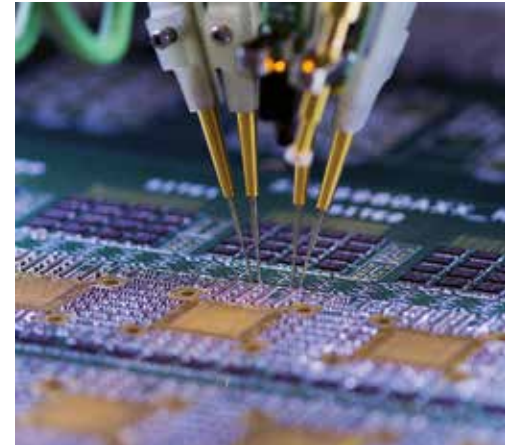
and two below. This precision is sufficient to make contact even with the tiniest solder pads.

To maximise speed and gentleness, the probes are driven by linear motors whose movement follows an S-curve profile. The probe travels fastest at mid-stroke, then descends smoothly with minimal force onto the test point. This ensures that even the most delicate components remain unharmed, despite multiple probe stings.

### Fast changeover and versatile probe heads

A flying probe tester requires no pre-manufactured bed-of-nails or test jig, as the movement of the probe heads is fully software-controlled and programming can even be generated directly from the PCB's CAD file.

In addition to needles, a variety of probe heads can be used in testing, including temperature sensors, light sources and photodetectors. A modern tester is no longer

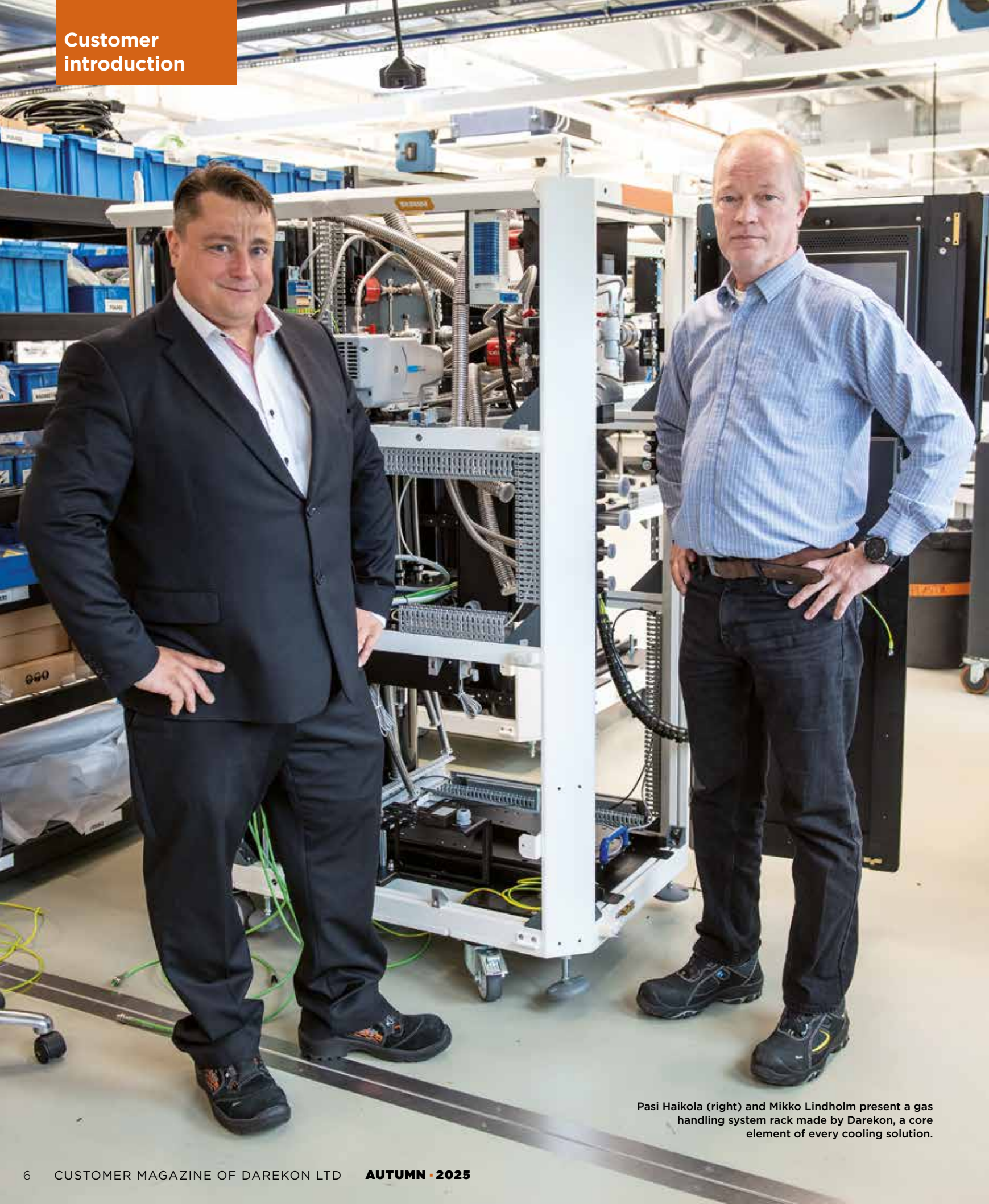


The tester's probes dance across the board at breathtaking speed.

just a 'flying ohmmeter', its electrical test capabilities now fully match those of in-circuit testers. With different probe heads, it is even possible to test the functionality of a touchscreen or indicator LEDs.

### Only flawless products for the customer

Darekon's guiding principle has always been reliability and zero defects. Nobody is entirely error-free, but ever more precise and comprehensive testing ensures that customers receive products proven to function flawlessly. ■



Pasi Haikola (right) and Mikko Lindholm present a gas handling system rack made by Darekon, a core element of every cooling solution.

EASY-TO-USE AND RELIABLE COOLING SOLUTIONS FOR SCIENCE AND QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY

# BLUEFORS DELIVERS THE FUTURE OF QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY – TODAY

Quantum computers are one of the hottest topics and development areas in information technology. They promise answers to some of the greatest questions in physics, materials science and engineering – questions that require unimaginable computing power to resolve. That computing power can only be achieved with devices cooled to temperatures very close to absolute zero.

**B**oth the private and public sectors are investing heavily in quantum computer development and practical prototypes have already been created. Promising early experiments have been seen in fields such as materials research, molecular modelling in medicine, logistics optimisation and cryptography testing.

## Roots in the Otaniemi Low Temperature Laboratory

Our article's title focuses on quantum technology for the simple reason that quantum technology and the superconducting materials it requires have become by far the most significant application and development area for cryogenics.

Finland is, in fact, one of the world's pioneers in cryogenics, or low-temperature physics as its also named. Professor **Olli Lounasmaa** founded the legendary Low Temperature Laboratory in Otaniemi in 1965, with main research areas in low-temperature physics, nanoelectronics and brain research.

The laboratory became a centre of excellence in low-temperature physics and neuromagnetic brain research. It achieved groundbreaking results and as a by-product set world records in cold that made it famous. In 1970, the first cryostat built in Otaniemi became the first in the world to cool a sample below one millikelvin ( $^{\circ}\text{mK}$ ).

In 2005 physicist Dr **Rob Blaauwgeers** joined the Low Temperature Laboratory (today called the Low Temperature Laboratory at Aalto university). As a result of development work he created a simpler dilution refrigerator, which sparked considerable interest and led to the idea of commercialising the system.

Blaauwgeers contacted his former fellow student, cryogenics engineer and Master of Science in physics **Pieter Vorselman**. Together they developed and optimised a system capable of producing the lowest temperatures in the universe. In 2008 they founded BlueFors Cryogenics, the company name reflecting their surnames.



Key parts of the cooling solution (from left): pump unit, gas handling system, dilution refrigerator, sample exchange unit, instrument cabinet and display.



KIDE is Bluefors' true industrial-scale cryogenic platform, designed for the needs of large-scale quantum computing systems.



The inside of a KIDE cryogenic platform reveals an extremely complex - and beautiful - machine.

### Cold requires complex technology

Many articles about quantum computers - including this one - are illustrated with pictures of intricate golden-coloured metallic structures. These are not the quantum computers themselves, but the cooling systems built by Bluefors, the world leader in their manufacture. The actual quantum computer is located at the very bottom of the structure. In operation the entire system is enclosed in a vacuum chamber.

A dilution refrigerator is a cryogenic device that provides continuous cooling down to 2 millikelvins, without moving parts in the low-temperature section. The cooling power comes from the enthalpy of mixing helium-3 and helium-4 isotopes.

Helium gas circulates in the refrigerator, cooled under low pressure in several stages to below one kelvin (°K). At this point the two stable isotopes of helium, helium-3 and helium-4 ( $^3\text{He}$  and  $^4\text{He}$ ), spontaneously phase separate in the mixing chamber into concentrated  $^3\text{He}$  and dilute  $^4\text{He}$ . The mixing chamber is the coldest part of the refrigerator and helium circulates through the different stages in a closed loop.

The result is a temperature of a few millikelvins, where the physical properties of materials change radically. For example, electrical resistance in conductors disappears and current flows without obstruction. This phenomenon is essential to the operation of quantum computers and many scientific research instruments.

For those interested, more detailed information on the principles of cryogenic refrigerators can easily be found online.

### Success with a comprehensive service package

Bluefors is an exceptional company in many respects. Its development has also been remarkable. Founded in 2008, the company has grown profitably and is almost entirely

self-financed. Today, Bluefors has a turnover of €200m and employs 700 people of 50 different nationalities.

It was not until 2021 that DevCo Partners Oy joined the company with a minority stake. DevCo helps to build globally leading companies in selected niche industries. In 2023, Bluefors acquired the US company Cryomech, which manufactures cryocoolers capable of cooling to around one kelvin.

Bluefors' product range includes a wide variety of cooling devices, with cooling power and temperatures tailored to every need. In practice each delivered system is to some extent unique, as customer requirements vary. Bluefors has supplied around 1,500 units to nearly as many customers. Cryomech's systems are more standardised, with some 15,000 delivered.

In addition to the cooling systems themselves, Bluefors supplies everything a customer needs for their applications: control systems, software, gas handling and more. A key feature of Bluefors systems is not only reliability but also ease of use - everything operates at the push of a button.

Bluefors also provides laboratory services for start-ups, research groups and other organisations. Customers can test their applications with Bluefors dilution refrigerator measurement systems without investing in a complete system.

KIDE is Bluefors' industrial-scale cryogenic platform. It is designed for large-scale quantum computing systems. Its vacuum chamber provides ample space for cooled devices and its capacity is sufficient for systems with over one thousand qubits. This means both adequate cooling power and extensive cabling options. The KIDE system weighs several tonnes and typically consumes 5-10kW of electricity.

### Evolving cooperation with Darekon

Darekon manufactures both electronics and mechanical solutions for Bluefors' systems. Those electronics have been

produced in Haapavesi for some time and the Ylivieska plant has been making mechanical solutions since before Darekon became the unit's owner. The Klaukkala plant plays an important role in producing various assemblies.

"It is easy to work with Darekon," says Bluefors' sourcing and procurement director, **Pasi Haikola**. "We don't need to explain the obvious and their operations are reliable; we know their promises hold. Darekon is an efficient, flexible and competitive partner, all things that matter to us. The short distance to Klaukkala is also a plus when we need deliveries of different versions a couple of times a week."

"Darekon has also been able to improve the design of our devices in ways that affect manufacturability and costs," adds sourcing manager **Mikko Lindholm**. "Designs are constantly evolving, and assembly instructions are not always perfect in every detail. It helps that we can just drop by and make sure everything is clear."

Darekon produces, for example, hundreds of racks each year for Bluefors, equipping them as required. For gas handling, racks are fitted with gas tanks that must be absolutely leak-tight and thoroughly tested. Helium is a highly valuable gas and its molecular structure makes it prone to leakage.

### **A strong and growing partnership**

"Just three years ago Darekon was one of many suppliers," continues Lindholm. "Since then, the firm's volume and importance have

grown significantly. We have strict commitments to our customers and schedules are sometimes tight. With Darekon we only need to specify the delivery week and we can rely on them to meet it."

Sometimes, according to Lindholm, requirements can be particularly demanding, for example when an academy requests very specific details. "We've had to scratch our heads together and perform a few tricks to meet the requirements." Variations in devices, required dimensions and numerous details mean that each system is to some extent unique, even though standardisation is pursued.

"Darekon also manufactures volume products," notes Haikola. "We know how to make cold but we may not be the world's best at making racks. From them, we learn about cost-effective structural solutions for volume products. Cost-efficiency is vital, as competition is extremely tough. The devices must be the best in the world but costs must be kept under control. Supply chain efficiency is key."

Haikola sees Darekon's size as an important factor in deepening the cooperation: big enough, but not too big. Darekon holds all the necessary certifications for globally delivered devices and has the capacity required. At the same time Darekon has the willingness and ability to grow and develop with Bluefors and to invest proactively in production.

"Communication with Darekon is easy and transparent. The partnership is positive and is beginning to show in our production. Darekon is not our largest supplier, but today it is among the most important," Lindholm concludes. ■



Sometimes a little magic is needed to meet customer demands.



Bluefors' production is constantly focused on improving quality, speed and, above all, volume.

# PRIME MINISTER PETTERI ORPO ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN FINLAND

At the beginning of September we had the opportunity to interview the Prime Minister and hear his views on entrepreneurship and its future in Finland. A wide base of entrepreneurs is a strength for Finland and the government is working to improve conditions so that small businesses can grow.



Mikko Säteri

**P**etteri Orpo's and Kai Orpo's fathers were brothers. After school, Kai went on to study at the Helsinki School of Economics, while Petteri studied economics at university. The two have known each other since childhood and followed each other's career paths

over the decades. This connection provided the chance to interview Prime Minister Petteri Orpo for Darekon's 40th anniversary publication.

**Jouko Lampila** visited the Prime Minister together with Kai Orpo on September 4. What follows is the subsequent discussion.

## Finland's stagnant economy

**JL:** Finland's economy stalled with the 2008 financial crisis, and there has been little progress since. What is the remedy?

**PO:** I remember when I entered Parliament in 2007. The world changed overnight. There was no going back, and crises have followed one another ever since. The problem has been that Finland's economy has not been reformed, and we have lost competitiveness. At the same time, the public sector has been expanded beyond what we can afford.

But what is the remedy? For the past two years we have been pushing to fix competitiveness and the foundations of entrepreneurship. We have carried out the major reforms that business leaders have been waiting for and demanding for 20 to 30 years: labour peace legislation, social security, earned income taxation and countless others. We want working to be more rewarding than idleness.

This is a major systemic change. For years many Finnish companies have struggled to find skilled workers while we have hundreds of thousands of unemployed people.



We have also invested heavily in research and product development, affordable clean energy, and logistics. We have dismantled more than 130 regulations, aiming to cut 300 during this government term – and we have lightened income taxation. Most entrepreneurs applauded the fact that we have dared to lower the top marginal tax rate to 52 per cent.

I believe in what we wrote in the government programme in 2023 and we are determined to see it through. Judging by this summer, several indicators suggest that the economy has started to grow. That's when the reforms begin to take full effect.

### Many small companies

**JL:** *Finland has 455,000 companies employing nearly 1.5 million people. Of these, 95.7 per cent have fewer than 10 employees. Of companies' €540bn turnover, 54 per cent comes from SMEs. Is this a good situation or what needs to change and how?*

**PO:** It is good that we have a broad spectrum of companies, from micro-enterprises to SMEs. The problem is that we need more growth stories. Too often, once a company reaches a certain size, it is sold abroad. Conditions should be such that more SMEs grow into large companies.

**JL:** *And how can they be grown?*

**PO:** The state tries to ensure a good operating environment for entrepreneurship, but growth financing is a challenge. Among other things, we have strengthened Finnish Industry Investment and Business Finland.

**JL:** *Finnish companies in the space sector seem to be doing well, and Europe's defence investments are visible there. Is defence industry the key to Finland's rise?*

**PO:** It is one of the keys. There are many sectors where we are strong. Energy and the green transition are progressing well. The shipbuilding industry has risen from ashes into a new boom. And then the defence industry – currently there are hundreds of Finnish companies with excellent products and a strong will to succeed.

### Production returning from faraway countries

**JL:** *A few years ago contract manufacturing was moving rapidly to China and other low-cost countries. Now the trend is reversing and production is coming back. Is Finland competitive enough and do we need to bring in labour from the east or south?*

**PO:** To answer the latter first: Yes, we must. Our demographics mean we cannot cope without skilled workers coming to Finland. Contrary to common belief, the government is not weakening labour immigration – quite the opposite.

We are tightening humanitarian immigration considerably, but simplifying labour immigration is written into the government programme and we have been working on it. We have chosen partner countries such as India and the Philippines where English skills are relatively strong. This work is essential.

As for competitiveness: I understand that Finnish engineering work is currently very cost-competitive. We also have the world's most reliable, clean and affordable energy, which is crucial in many sectors.

Now, with corporate tax being reduced to 18 per cent from the beginning of 2027, this will further improve competitiveness. These and other tax measures are necessary. As you said, production can move easily around the globe. The trend has now turned: supply security must be safeguarded and production chains are being brought closer.

### Should we be worried?

**JL:** *Employment in Finland has long been lower than in other Nordic countries, while unemployment is high. Half of the Finns in work are now employed in private services. What needs to be fixed and how?*

**PO:** The fixes are exactly those I mentioned earlier: structural reforms in labour markets, taxation, social security and so on. Then we need to create new jobs and attract investment to Finland. I believe it can be done.

In 2022 the situation was good and, despite the pandemic, companies managed reasonably well. There was even considerable labour shortage. But public spending was then increased heavily, boosting demand.

Now Russia's continued and worsening war of aggression, along with uncertainty from **Trump**, have repeatedly dampened growth expectations. In spring, it seemed growth was beginning, but in the end, the first two quarters saw nearly zero growth. This summer, however, growth has finally appeared in the statistics. Next year, growth of up to 2 per cent is forecast.

Household consumption accounts for almost half of our GDP. Once the economy starts to grow and households gain confidence, buying cars, moving homes, eating

out and spending, growth could become very strong.

Simply avoiding a new trade war with Trump was a positive development. The day peace comes to Ukraine and reconstruction begins, then things will really start moving.

**JL:** *Finns are worried about Finland's and their own financial situation. Reasons include tariffs and trade wars, cuts to healthcare, the global economic crisis and high unemployment. Is there reason to worry and what can help?*

**PO:** Let me begin by saying I fully understand people's concerns. Russia has become so aggressive and threatening and that worries Finns. Add to that the wider global uncertainty. This directly affects confidence in the future and, in turn, economic behaviour.

I have travelled widely in Finland in recent weeks – a day in Kainuu, a day in Northern Ostrobothnia around Oulu, then in Kokkola and the Vaasa region.

No one was complaining anymore. Everywhere, there was strong belief in the future and lots of investment under way. A powerful sense of confidence. This shows that Finland is ready. We have the right products, the right expertise and competitiveness has been restored. Once growth picks up globally and in the euro area, we will be part of it. That promises Finns a good future again.

I also understand that the security situation causes concern but in reality there is no need to be afraid in Finland. We are NATO members and have a strong national defence. We invest heavily in it and are well prepared. We train regularly with our partners. People can sleep soundly at night. ■



Thanks for a great discussion – **Jouko**.



## DAREKON 40 YEARS

On 9 May, 300 cheerful guests gathered at Helsinki's Wanha Satama to celebrate Darekon's 40th anniversary. Most of the staff from all five plants were present – from Haapavesi, Gdansk, Klaukkala, Stockholm and Ylivieska. On these pages, a taste of the festive atmosphere.



The host of the evening was mentalist Jose Ahonen, who entertained the audience with a fluent performance and many magic tricks – also in Polish.



The older generation was represented by retired plant managers Jouko Paganus (right), Eero Meriläinen and Kari Koponen.



All members of Darekon's board of directors were naturally present as well: Chairman Henri Orpo (right), Helena Kivi-Koskinen and Harry Linnarinne.



The excellent dinner included tarred herring, smoked beetroot, crispy buckwheat and chargrilled rainbow trout – among many other delicacies.



Later in the evening, Apollo Orchestra kept things lively, and the dance floor was at times almost overcrowded.



Karaoke also proved very popular. Among the staff from different plants, there were talents who could easily succeed in show business too.

# KAI ORPO'S SPEECH TO THE CELEBRANTS:

**D**ear Darekonians. Today, we are celebrating a 40 year history of growth and success. It's the first time having a party where we have Darekonians attending from every one of the company's facilities.

At the very beginning, I would like to thank the organisers of this event. The arrangements for the party started months ago and were quite an operation with all the travel arrangements. Greatest thanks to **Henna, Saila** and **Henrik**. And also **Ola** and **Engy** who helped locally. Let's give them a big round of applause.

## Why have we succeeded?

When I was preparing for today, I was wondering why have we been done so well for forty years in a challenging and constantly changing market. We have grown by 14 per cent annually which is a tough achievement. We have needed to separate ourselves from the competition for that to have been possible. It cannot be purely luck for 40 years.

I'm trying to open up what I think has caused it. I believe I am the right person to do this evaluation, since I've been the company's CEO for 35 years.

I came up with three reasons for Darekon's continuous growth, development and success. Let me give a few examples:

Today, here at the celebration, we have three retired plant directors in attendance. I would like to introduce them to you:

**Eero Meriläinen** was Haapavesi's plant director for 24 years, from 1990 to 2014. When Darekon was having a tough financial situation in the depression of the early 1990s, Eero was a plant director trusted by both owners and Darekonians.

Next; **Kari Koponen**. Our daughter company started in Gdansk, Poland in the beginning of the 1990s. I recruited Kari myself from the position of Helvar's production director in 1991. I somehow convinced or tricked him to take on the mission impossible. Kari was the head of our Polish operations and Gdansk plant director for nearly 27 years. From 1991 to 2018.

During that time sales went from zero to 11 million euros. He received six laudaturs in the Finnish matriculation examination and is a memory monster. Kari is probably going to remind us later that the correct number would be only 10,9 million euros considering the Złoty exchange rate at the time.

And third, **Jouko Paganus** who was Klaukkala's plant director from 2007 to 2012, so before **Pekka Antikainen**. Jouko got Klaukkala's facility into shape after its previous owner left it to dangle in the wind. He's also a bridge world champion and a strategic thinker.

These three are prime examples of what being a Darekonian means. What all of them have in common is attitude and integrity. This attitude is to do things well and always take the human aspect into account. Big applause to them all and everyone else who's been at Darekon for a long time.

## Continuous development and improvement

The success of our customers is another important factor. We help them as a trustworthy strategic partner. We are focused on the medtech, defence and cleantech customer segments. Our customers are doing



Continuous development and improvement keep us competitive."

well in their own respective markets and that also helps us. It's hard to say which is the cause and which is the effect. Which was first, chicken or egg? But we can definitely say that we ARE helping our customers to succeed.

We have always understood that in order to grow and succeed, we need to develop and improve. Continuous development and improvement keep us competitive.

We have acquired companies and facilities along the way and integrated them as part of Darekon. We are always learning something new and applying that to our own way of working, this is the so called 'best practice'. In 2006, we acquired ET-Electro from Savonranta, in 2010 the Klaukkala plant from Mecanova, in 2013 Apelec from Malmi, and in 2021 both SMD Produktion AB from Stockholm and Premec Oy from Ylivieska.

All of them have brought us new know-how and new customers and thus made us stronger. Even though the change has been greatest for the people joining us from the

acquired companies, every acquisition has also changed Darekon too.

Back to what makes a good contract manufacturer. So three points. Engaged Darekonians, succeeding customers and continuous improvement with acquisitions and other actions. Us Darekonians, our customers and the consistent development of operations have created the opportunity for this success story.

This journey would not have been possible without the efforts from you, your commitment and dedication. We are a flexible, consistently improving and trustworthy partner. We WANT to take care of our customers and each other.

## Together we are stronger

The future does not always look easy, but it does look bright. We will continue on our chosen path and always strive to be better with an open mind. I believe that **together we are stronger**, and we can achieve even greater things in the coming decades.

Personal information time. Despite my long career, I will not be retiring in the next few years, if the company's board, my own condition and my wife allow it. On the other hand I also promise that I will not be speaking at Darekon's 50th anniversary celebration as the company's CEO.

Big thanks again to all of you for being part of this journey and for coming here today. Let's celebrate together as we deserve and let's look confidently to the future. This celebration is for you! Thank you, dear Darekonians. ■

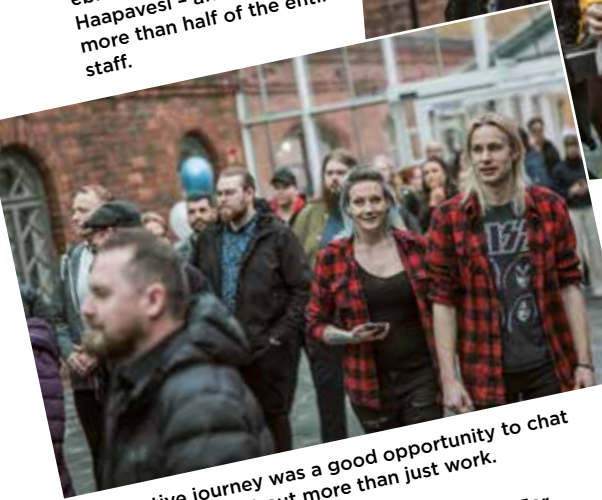


# 40th anniversary celebrations

Two full busloads of celebrants had come from Haapavesi - altogether more than half of the entire staff.



The host picked "victims" from the audience for various surprising tasks.



In the photo booth there was a chance to take group photos as mementos.

The festive journey was a good opportunity to chat with colleagues about more than just work. The Polish team were in a splendid party mood! For most it was their first time in Finland.



Even the plant director Sławek occasionally set an example for the younger ones on the dance floor.



Over 70 per cent of the entire Polish staff attended the celebration. Some flew directly from Gdansk to Helsinki, but since there weren't enough seats, some travelled via Copenhagen. Everyone arrived already early Friday morning.

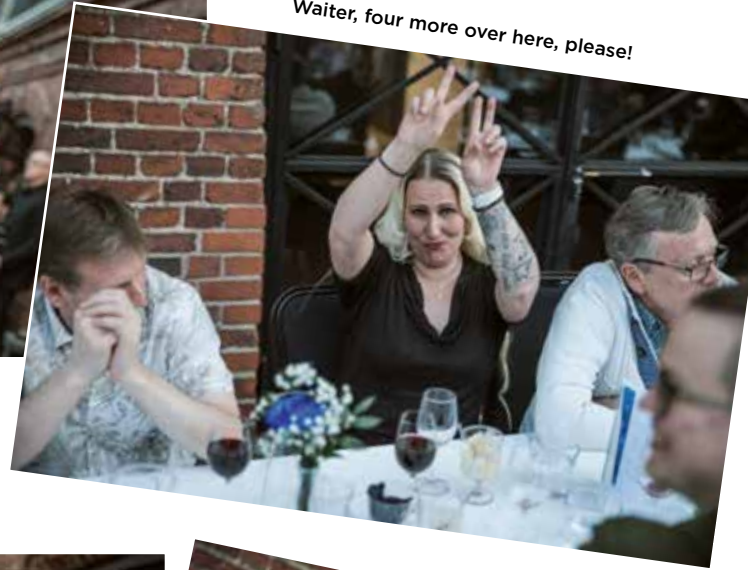


The Polish staff also had time to explore Helsinki on Saturday. Their comments on the party were very positive! It was wonderful to meet colleagues from Finland and Sweden face-to-face. Hopefully it won't be the last time.

For the Klaukkala staff, the journey to the party was the shortest.



Boogie seems almost second nature to Pepe.



Waiter, four more over here, please!



Darekon's Stockholm site has just over 30 employees, about half of whom came to Finland. For many it was their first visit to Finland, which made the experience special.



All participants considered the event a great success. The trip was wonderful and rewarding. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming. The evening also felt very well planned and well organised.



The Ylivieska staff look a little serious after their long journey, but soon the refreshments brought smiles back to life.



## ELECTRONICS, MECHANICS AND COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE



Training for electronics workers began in Haapavesi in a basement room at the town hall, immediately after Darekon was founded.



In the late 1980s Darekon actively participated in trade fairs, showcasing its versatile production.

# DAREKON'S FIRST 40 YEARS

Medtech, cleantech, aerospace & defence and advanced industrial are the key customer sectors that are served by Darekon Ltd. They are supported by three electronics manufacturing facilities – in Finland, Sweden and Poland – and two plants for mechanics in Finland. The company employs around 500 people and generates an annual turnover approaching €100m.

**D**arekon Ltd's 40-year journey is a story worth telling. Where many companies in the industry have risen and fallen, Darekon has adapted, persevered, chosen wisely and with steady growth and development has become one of the best in its field.

### An entrepreneur who did not wish to retire

It all began when **Heikki Orpo** decided he did not, after all, want to retire. At the age of 49, in 1984, he had sold his business and stepped back. Before long, however, he found himself missing the world of enterprise. The idea emerged to start manufacturing electronics and exporting them to the Soviet Union. The next step was to set up a manufacturing centre.

Heikki pursued the plan with vigour, soon attracting public interest in his wealth-creating initiative. Finland's then Minister of Finance, **Ahti Pekkala**, was from Haapavesi. He and local municipal manager **Pentti Silvola** were active in promoting the idea, and so Haapavesi was chosen as the location.

**Stefan Widomski**, a Polish-born executive, was also involved. He managed Nokia's Eastern trade and played a key role in Nokia's mobile phone success in Eastern Europe. He is remembered, for example, for the famous moment when, at Helsinki's Kalastajatorppa, he placed the world's first mobile phone – connected live

to Moscow – into the hand of **Mikhail Gorbachev**. A photograph of the occasion shows Widomski grinning broadly beside a visibly astonished Gorbachev.

### Starting in the town hall basement

When Darekon Ltd was founded in 1985, the company's first office was a single room in the basement of Haapavesi's town hall. There the telex machine chattered away in Russian from interested customers. At the same time, the first training course for electronics workers was organised, with some 25 participants. The instructor was **Eero Meriläinen**, who would go on to make a long career as director of the Haapavesi facility.

Locally the project was significant and the press debated it for weeks. Suspicion lingered at first: Heikki Orpo came from Turku and there were fears that "men from the south had come to swindle us". But attitudes soon shifted when it was seen that the southerners' intentions were genuine.

In the first stage the municipality built a 1,000m<sup>2</sup> facility, which Darekon acquired a few years later. In 1996 the municipality built a 1,000m<sup>2</sup> extension, which Darekon also purchased, followed in 1999 by a second extension of more than 1,000m<sup>2</sup>.

A third expansion came in 2016 and a fourth in 2024, alongside wide-ranging modernisation of the building's systems, including

ventilation, geothermal heating and solar power. The property has since returned to municipal ownership. Today some 190 professionals work in the 5,600m<sup>2</sup> facility.

### Drama at the turn of the decade

Heikki's eldest son, **Kai Orpo**, had graduated from the School of Economics, married, and moved to Germany in 1988. That same year Heikki fell seriously ill, and Kai was called back to Finland to take charge of Darekon. He was appointed CEO in 1990.

For Darekon 1990 was a year of crisis in many ways. The Soviet Union collapsed and the company's promising export business ended abruptly. A banking strike in February triggered Finland's deepest recession in decades, leading to a devaluation of the mark in 1991 and a free float in 1992.

In 1990 Darekon lost two-thirds of its industriously developed turnover. The company resolved to concentrate on contract manufacturing. At the time it employed 40 people, with contract manufacturing's share worth just 300,000 marks. Yet even in the depths of recession more work could be found.

The first step towards internationalisation came in 1991 with the founding of a production facility in Gdansk, Poland – a choice no doubt influenced by Stefan Widomski.

Darekon had begun working with Fiskars in 1989 to produce UPS devices, but by 1991 this was judged too costly in Finland. Darekon set up a joint venture with a local partner in Gdansk, transferring its old equipment from Finland. It later acquired full ownership.

**Kari Koponen** became director of the Polish facility at the start of 1992. He recalls his excitement at such a completely new challenge. When he began, a production manager and an administration manager had already been hired but there were no workers at all. There was, however, one customer – and an order book worth 2,000 marks. Production started in April and by summer there were already 15 employees. Koponen retired in 2018 after nearly 27 years as managing director of the Polish plant.

### Succession and new challenges

The generational shift at Darekon was formalised in 1992 when Kai and **Henri Orpo** became owners. Widomski was bought out at the same time.

Although the company had survived the devaluations, by the mid-1990s its capital

was exhausted. Kai Orpo nonetheless succeeded in negotiating a refinancing deal with Merita Bank, enabling operations to continue.

Business gradually improved, debts were repaid, but the entrepreneurs still had everything tied up in the company. A bigger leap came in 2004, when turnover nearly doubled from the previous year to almost €14m.

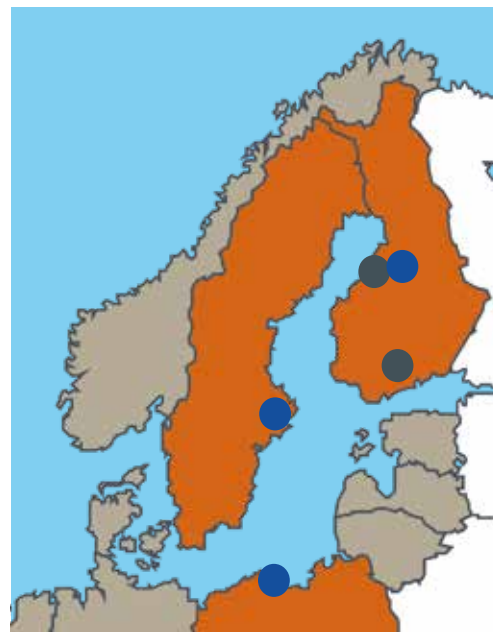


Now development can be planned and implemented in the long term.”

In 2006 Darekon made its first acquisition, buying ET-Electro of Savonranta, whose activities and clients complemented the rest of the business. In 2019 the Savonranta facility was transferred to the city of Savonlinna and in 2022 its operations were moved to Haapavesi.

### A majority stake to private equity – and back

Darekon's strong performance in the early 2000s attracted investor interest and in December 2007 an agreement was signed



Darekon today has electronics manufacturing facilities in Finland, Sweden and Poland, as well as two mechanics plants in Finland.

under which 60 per cent of the company was sold to private equity firm Sentica Partners. The deal gave the brothers their first real financial return from years of entrepreneurship.

The financial crisis of 2008 cut the contract manufacturing market roughly in half. Darekon, however, fared considerably better, with 2009 turnover falling by just 15 per cent.

In 2009 acquisitions continued as Darekon bought Mecanova's sheet metal facility in Klaukkala. This opened a completely new line of business and allowed Darekon to serve electronics customers with an even broader range of manufacturing. A further acquisition followed in 2012 with the purchase of all the shares in Apelec Oy, bringing valuable new customers.

Over time Sentica grew restless; private equity exits are typically made within three to six years. In 2015 Sentica invited bids and the Orpo brothers proposed to buy the shares back at the same price as the best offer. Financing was secured with Nordea and the deal was done.

### Growth and new thinking

In 2015 Darekon's turnover was €37.5m; last year it was €87m. Acquisitions have continued: in 2020 Darekon bought a painting business that had long been a subcontractor and was based in the Klaukkala property. The business perfectly complements Darekon's sheet metal production.

In 2021 Darekon expanded into Sweden with the acquisition of contract manufacturer IHAAB Component Systems AB and its subsidiaries. The idea had been brewing for some years, following a study of potential partners in the Baltics, Scandinavia and neighbouring regions.

Later that same year Darekon acquired Premec Oy, a Ylivieska-based sheet metal contract manufacturer. Premec was a financially solid growth company seeking new customers and markets. According to Kai Orpo this matched Darekon's strategy of growth both organically and through acquisitions. Premec was merged into Darekon in summer 2025.

For Kai Orpo 2015 was a turning point: as leader of a wholly family-owned business once again and with no thought of selling, he has been free to think differently. Development can now be planned and implemented with the long term in mind. ■

**Darekon  
40 years**



**Darekon's turnover and staff numbers since the early 2000s.**



**1985**  
Foundation and construction of the facility begin.



**1991**  
Darekon establishes a subsidiary in Gdansk, Poland.



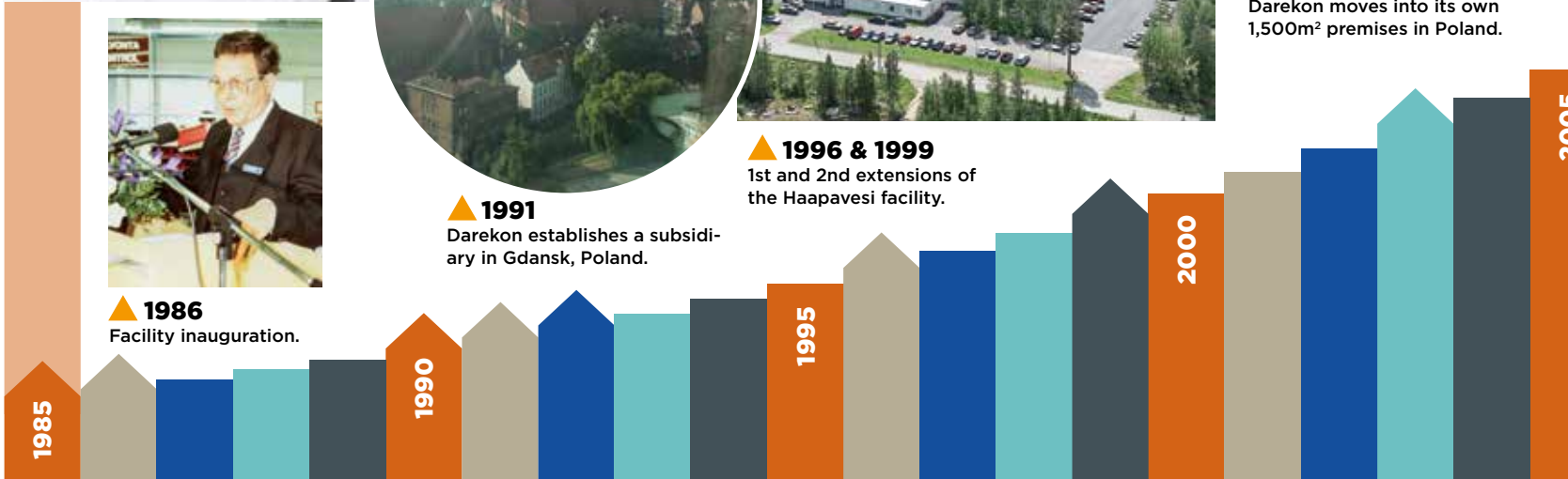
**1996 & 1999**  
1st and 2nd extensions of the Haapavesi facility.



**2003**  
Darekon moves into its own 1,500m² premises in Poland.



**1986**  
Facility inauguration.





**▲ 2009**  
Darekon acquires the sheet metal business of Mecanova in Klaukkala.



**◀ 2021**  
Darekon acquires a Swedish contract manufacturer.



**2025**  
Premec merged into Darekon.



**◀ 2015**  
Kai and Henri Orpo with their families buy back Sentica Partners' share in Darekon.

**▼ 2021**  
Darekon acquires the entire share capital of Premec Oy.



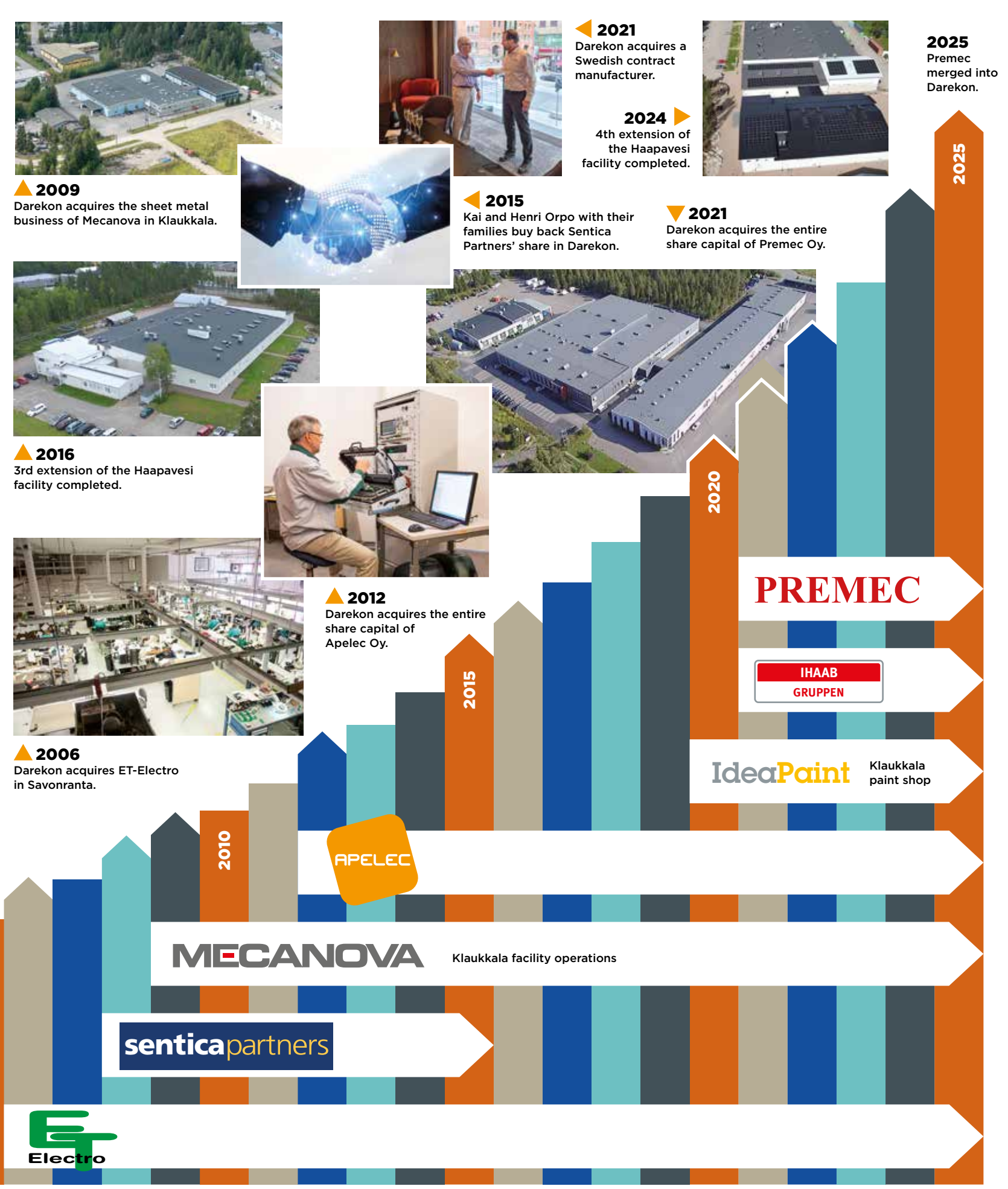
**▲ 2016**  
3rd extension of the Haapavesi facility completed.



**▲ 2012**  
Darekon acquires the entire share capital of Apelec Oy.



**▲ 2006**  
Darekon acquires ET-Electro in Savonranta.





## PROFILE: KAI ORPO, CEO OF DAREKON LTD

# KAI ORPO HAS LED DAREKON FOR 35 YEARS

The twists and turns of Darekon's journey to success is a fascinating story which includes some tumultuous years in the 1990s and 2000s. CEO Kai Orpo - or Kaitsu as he often is called - has guided the company from a fledgling electronics manufacturing facility trading with the Soviet Union into today's successful full-service electronics and mechanics contract manufacturer in the Baltic region.

**T**he story of an entrepreneur is often inseparable from the story of the company itself and this is very much the case with Kai and Darekon. However, it is worth taking a look at both individually when it comes to Darekon and Kai Orpo.

### **From Southwest Finland to the world**

Kai Orpo was born in Salo in 1962, the eldest of three brothers. His younger siblings are **Kari** (b. 1964) and **Henri** (b. 1967). Their father, **Heikki Orpo**, worked for the long-established school equipment company Osakeyhtiö Koulukalusto, but in 1972 founded his own business, Taulukeskus Oy.

The family lived at times in Salo, later in Halikko and Marttila. Kai recalls that the brothers always had everything they needed, even if money was sometimes tight. Their parents were supportive and encouraging. The family moved to Turku when Kai was in the fourth year of secondary school. He graduated from the Turku Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu Upper Secondary School in 1980.

Military service followed in the Pori Brigade in Säkylä and partly in Hamina at the Reserve Officer School. His reserve rank is First Lieutenant. In 1984, Kai began his studies at the Helsinki School of Economics, graduating at the end of 1987 with a Master's degree in Economics, majoring in International Business.

### **The eldest son steps into his father's shoes**

Kai married **Teija** in 1988 and the couple moved to Stuttgart, Germany, intending to work there for a few years. Later that same year, however, his father fell seriously ill and Kai was called back to Finland to look after Darekon's affairs. He was appointed CEO of Darekon Ltd in January 1990.

"As I went through Darekon's paperwork and familiarised myself with its operations, I could see in my father's handwriting the gradual decline of his health. He was burning the candle at both ends,"



Basketball is a beloved hobby for Kaitsu and the whole family. Here's Kaitsu with his children on the yard court, practising how to get the ball into the hoop. Not quite as easy as it looks.

Kai recalls. "In 1988 Henri was studying in Japan and when our parents visited him there father suffered a stroke during the trip. He was flown back to Helsinki in an air ambulance and recovered, but his working days were over."

### The 1990s - skill, persistence (and luck)

In 1990 Darekon employed about 40 people, with contract manufacturing accounting for just 300,000 Finnish marks of turnover. More had to be found - quickly and in large volume.

"The early 1990s could have gone very differently," Kai reflects. "Most of our financing was in foreign currency loans and the Finnish mark was devalued twice. Both times we managed to terminate the currency loans in time and avoided disaster. We had a very good adviser.

"Almost miraculously we secured work in the middle of the recession and managed to push through. By the mid-1990s, however, our equity was gone. Still we negotiated a substantial financing agreement with Merita Bank. Merita converted part of our debt into equity and over time we repaid it. But all our personal assets remained tied up in Darekon until 2008."

In December 2007 the Orpo brothers finally got to cash in as entrepreneurs, signing a deal to sell 60 per cent of Darekon to private equity firm Sentica Partners. This brought stability just in time for the 2008 financial crisis. While the contract manufacturing market collapsed by 50 per cent, Darekon limited its fall to 15 per cent. Since then growth has been rapid and in 2015 Kai and his brother Henri bought back Sentica's stake.

### A family man too

Kai and Teija have a son, **Henrik**, and two daughters, **Rosa** and **Ronja**. There has always been a dog in the

family - currently an enormous Leonberger.

As a business leader Kai naturally has many decisions to weigh. He admits to working through them extensively in his own mind, but he is also quick. Meetings with him are famously efficient, no matter how many items are on the agenda.

Entrepreneurship is a way of life made possible only with the support of one's closest people. Some decisions, Kai admits, he checks with his wife. He tends not to inform his family too early about upcoming trips or events, as plans often change - sometimes he tells them too late.

"My number one hobby is basketball," says Kai. "I play in men's over-50s and over-60s leagues. That's my thing. All our children have played basketball too and I've also served on the board of basketball club Tapiolan Honka. Other hobbies include travelling with my wife and spending summers at our holiday home in Kustavi."

### Still much to give to the company

Kai sees himself as a fair leader who chooses his words carefully. He is solution-oriented, always aiming for constructive outcomes. Some might find him dominant but the low staff turnover suggests he is easy to work with. He considers himself more slow than fast in making decisions.

As retirement age approaches it is natural for a leader to reflect on how much more they can give to their company and for how long. Kai values experience, while also wondering whether it compensates for a "slower processor". If work remains enjoyable the instinct is to continue.

"The heart of Darekon is its people. The right choices in recruitment mean everything," stresses Kai. "When good people are in the right positions, everything works. Diversity is a strength and the challenge is to get different kinds of people working together in the best possible way. That's when you get the best results."

As a family-owned company, succession planning is also on the table. In autumn Kai's son Henrik Orpo was appointed COO. He has worked for several years at Darekon in procurement and sales. Kai previously had 12 direct reports which he felt was too many. With the new structure that number has dropped to seven.

### Giving people the chance to succeed

Asked about greed, Kai replies that he is greedy for development - both his own and that of his colleagues at Darekon. He is proud when things move in the right direction and people succeed within the company.

In addition to all else, Kai emphasises the importance of excellent cooperation with Darekon's other main owner and current chairman of the board, his brother Henri. Without that, he says, none of this would have been possible. ■



Entrepreneurship is a way of life, made possible only with the support of one's closest people."

# DAREKON FUTURE FACTORY - SCALABLE MEDTECH PRODUCTION POWERED BY AI

Continuous development is a central part of Darekon's operations. As one aspect of this, the company has joined the LifeFactFuture (LFF) consortium within Bittium's Seamless and secure connectivity flagship project. The consortium offers Darekon an opportunity to explore new ways of thinking and to investigate the use of artificial intelligence (AI) as a means of serving customers even better.

The LFF consortium includes the Universities of Turku and Helsinki, the Finnish Medicines Agency Fimea, and a number of Finland's leading life science manufacturers and technology companies: Bayer, Orion, Revvity, Nokia, Vaisala, Brightly and Bittium. The goal of Darekon's Future Factory initiative is to develop medical technology manufacturing towards scalable and sustainable production.

## Collaboration with industry pioneers

For 40 years Darekon has served as a trusted partner for customers in medical technology and industrial electronics manufacturing.

The aim of the collaboration is to accelerate the adoption of digital solutions, improve the utilisation of data and make Finland the world's most attractive location for investments in data-driven life science manufacturing.

"The industry is tightly regulated and reliability and safety go hand in hand with the high quality of Darekon's production and products," says ESG manager **Meeri Virkkala**, who leads the project. "The LFF project provides a way to explore different future development paths and to look further ahead. Through the project we can discover better manufacturing methods and examine how AI and digitalisation can be used to scale production.

"The factory of the future must be able to meet customer and market demands as quickly as possible. This means taking into account sustainability requirements, version control and long component supply chains. How to scale up as fast as possible - that is the key question. This is currently a three-year project, launched last year, and there may be follow-up."

## Two AI projects underway

AI is rapidly entering many areas of production and business. Applying AI to industrial manufacturing still raises many open questions to which new approaches are being sought and developed: what are the key factors influencing productivity; where do we want to get to; what strategy should be created to achieve the vision?

The research approach is based on Proof of Concept (PoC), testing whether the ideas in the production development process truly have implementation potential. Results are measured with key performance indicators from which impacts on the economy, sustainability and company strategy are derived. Outcomes will be implemented only after the projects have been completed.

"Two PoC projects are currently underway on the use of AI," Virkkala continues. "The first focuses on applying AI to production con-

trol and predictability, in cooperation with Netum Oy. The second focuses on scaling up quality testing using machine vision, in cooperation with Top Data Science Ltd. We have already obtained promising results and development work within the project continues on the basis of these findings."

## Databases and digitalisation play a key role

According to Virkkala the use of AI requires high-quality and up-to-date databases. Darekon is already advanced in the development of its data structures and systems, giving it an advantage in adopting AI.

Virkkala notes that the end result of the project will be a vision of what the factory of the future will look like and how production can be scaled efficiently.

"AI is still rarely used in the core functions of manufacturing companies, but we are trying to make it a reality here," Virkkala says. "We want to be ready for the future." ■



## Future Factory Road Map





# KONEMIES SIGNS OFF

A long journey with Darekon is now drawing to a close. Since 2010 I have been responsible, from start to finish, for the Darekon.net customer magazine. It has been an immensely interesting and rewarding assignment. Now, however, it is time for me to bring it to an end and move on to what I feel is my well-earned retirement, writes **Jouko Lampila**.

**M**y background lies in both electronics and the graphic arts – perhaps a surprising combination. Yet the two fields were once connected through the production of films, which were required both for printed pages and for circuit boards.

## Life and electronics

In the 1970s I was manufacturing electronics; in the early 1980s I was designing circuit boards and training customers to use CAD systems. Towards the end of that decade I gradually moved into supplying and training for equipment in the graphic industry. The arrival of digital technology transformed the field dramatically – and even I sometimes struggled to anticipate the speed and depth of the change. Not everyone survived it.

One thing led to another and with the help of marketing studies at the School of Economics I began, in the mid-1990s, producing customer magazines, mostly for IT and graphic industry companies. In truth I was rather a “self-made” professional in all my undertakings, but it seemed to work well enough. Working closely with companies in the sector had at least rubbed off some genuine understanding.

## A classmate opens the door

In the early 2000s I got in touch with an old classmate, **Kari Koponen**, with whom I had done business back in my circuit board days. I had somehow learnt that he was working for an intriguing company called Darekon. My interest in Darekon stemmed above all from its field – electronics manufacturing – which resonated strongly with my own background.

Kari arranged a meeting with Darekon’s CEO, **Kai Orpo**, though at that time he was not especially keen on the idea of a customer magazine. A couple of years later, however, the time was right. We agreed on the concept and the details, and in 2010 the very first Darekon.net magazine was published.

I still remember how that first issue had to be printed twice. I had chosen what was perhaps the best-regarded printing house in Helsinki, but the blue of Darekon’s logo came out far too reddish. I went to Kai’s home with the print sheets, and with a small adjustment to the colours we got the right result.

## A fascinating journey

Darekon has been among my very longest-standing clients, perhaps the longest of all. Others have – over the years – stopped publishing customer magazines and moved on. Just over two years ago I asked Kai whether he would like me to produce two more issues. “Perhaps,” he replied. This, now, is the latter of the two.

The work has been immensely stimulating. I have had the opportunity to visit countless fine companies and events. Darekon’s customers have been particularly interesting

thanks to the wide variety of their sectors, ranging from mining and medical to instrumentation and telecommunications.

On visits to customers it has always been clear how much they value Darekon’s way of working. Their needs are taken seriously and every effort is made to meet them without compromise. Communication too has been open: nobody can do everything, and any difficulties have been shared honestly from the start. The aim has always been reliable, long-term cooperation – not the maximisation of profit.

The culmination of my last magazine – and at the same time the peak of my career – was the opportunity to interview Prime Minister **Petteri Orpo**. He gave us a full hour of his busy schedule for a personal interview in early September. A fine opportunity and a fine man! The interview is on pages 10-11 of this magazine.

## Growth on human terms

It has been a privilege to witness Darekon’s growth. Back in 2010 the company was still aiming for €30m in turnover; now it is approaching €100m. Best of all, though, has been getting to know so many of the people at Darekon, many of whom have become good friends. Wherever I visited a production plant, it has felt like coming home.

Darekon’s management culture is also, in my view, exceptional: fair, straightforward and firm – and always constructive. You sense it when visiting the facilities. People are content and careers at Darekon are often very long. I myself have taken part in farewells for employees who have been with the company for almost three decades.

As a leader Kai Orpo remains naturally engaged on a practical level, even though the company operates in a decentralised way. He is calm but forthright – and quick when necessary. There is no waffle obscuring clear decision making and usually everything is resolved in just a few words. I doubt I have ever had meetings as efficient as those with Kai.

## The Machine Man signs off

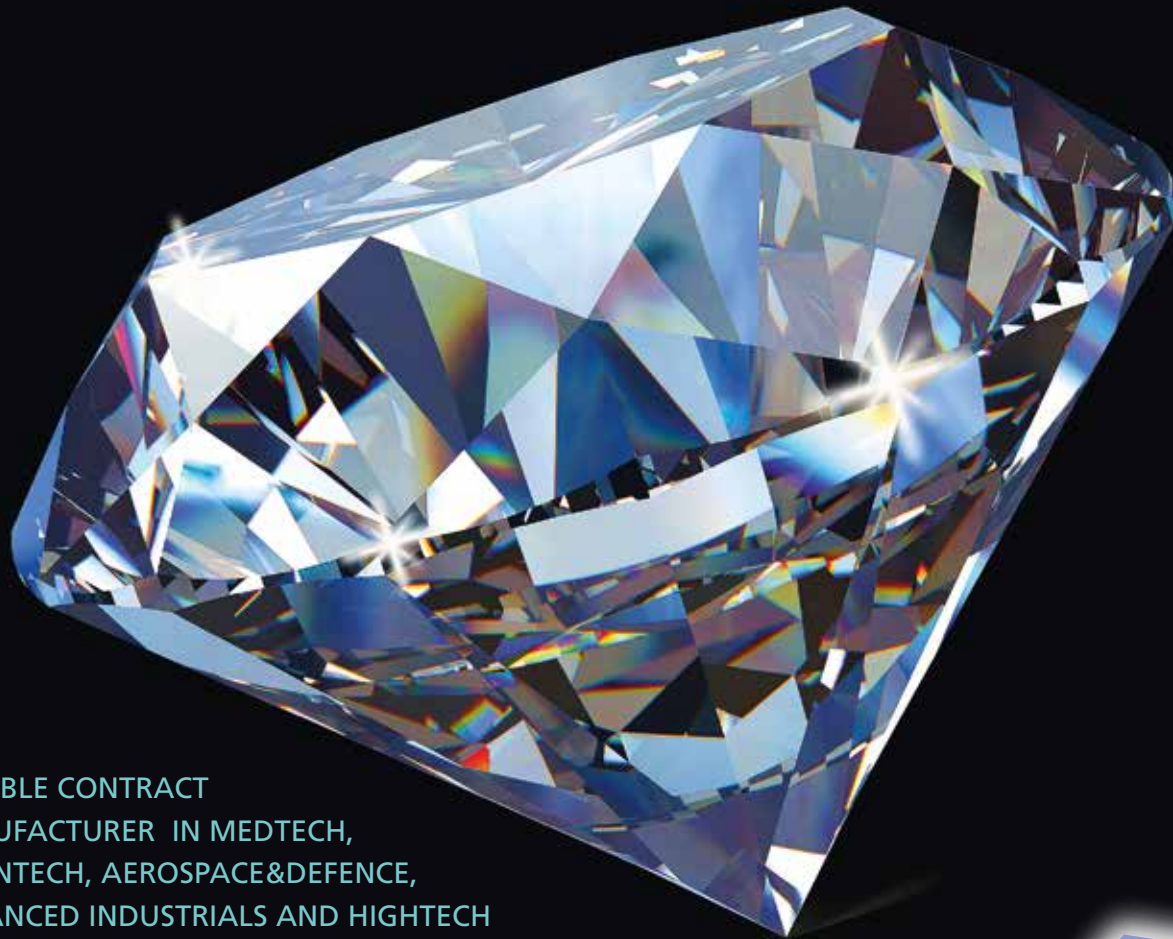
My pen name, Konemies – “The Machine Man” – first appeared in a humorous column in the 1990s, when I was often tinkering with machines. The character was drawn by my then neighbour, the Kauppalehti cartoonist **Kaarlo A.**

I wrote the first editorial for Darekon’s magazine in 2010 after which Kai himself has always written it. Almost all the other articles, however, have been mine. This, though, is my very first personal piece in the magazine.

I would like to express my warmest thanks for all these years and experiences – above all to Kai, and also to all the wonderful people with whom I have had the pleasure of working in producing the magazine and its stories. Thank-you. ■

**Jouko Lampila – The Machine Man**

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 **DAREKON**

DAREKON LTD  
Vaisalantie 2, FI-02130 Espoo  
FINLAND  
[www.darekon.com](http://www.darekon.com)

#### Contact:

**Petri Kettunen**, tel +358 45 178 7478  
[petri.kettunen@darekon.fi](mailto:petri.kettunen@darekon.fi)

**Ilmari Haho**, tel +358 40 560 5780  
[ilmari.haho@darekon.fi](mailto:ilmari.haho@darekon.fi)

**Mauri Seppälä**, tel +358 41 731 3509  
[mauri.seppala@darekon.fi](mailto:mauri.seppala@darekon.fi)

**Sami Korhonen**, tel +358 44 538 7612  
[sami.korhonen@darekon.fi](mailto:sami.korhonen@darekon.fi)

**Pasi Toivonen**, tel +358 50 406 1143  
[pasi.toivonen@darekon.fi](mailto:pasi.toivonen@darekon.fi)