17
FINLAND
Tapio Raunio

Figure 17.1 Map of Finland
Finland

Table 17.1 Finland profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU entry year</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schengen entry year</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEPs elected in 2009</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEPs under Lisbon Treaty</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total area*</td>
<td>338,435 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>5,451,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density**</td>
<td>17.9/km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of population</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political system</td>
<td>Semi-presidential Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of state</td>
<td>Tarja Halonen, Social Democratic Party (SDP) (March 2000–March 2012); Sauli Niinistö, National Coalition (KOK) (March 2012–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of government</td>
<td>Jyrki Katainen, National Coalition (KOK) (June 2011–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political majority</td>
<td>National Coalition (KOK), Social Democrats (SDP), Left Alliance (VAS), Green League (VIHR), Swedish People’s Party (SFP) and Christian Democrats (KD) Government Coalition (June 2011–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>Euro (£) since 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohead GDP in PPS</td>
<td>37,400 €</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes:
* Total area including inland waters.
** Population density: the ratio of the annual average population of a region to the land area of the region.

1 Geographical position

Finland is the northernmost EU Member State, sharing a land border with Norway for 727 kilometres, Sweden for 614 kilometres, and Russia for 1,313 kilometres; it has a coastline of 1,250 kilometres. The total land area is 338,435 square kilometres, and with a population of roughly 5.4 million, Finland is very scarcely inhabited. The capital Helsinki is also the northernmost national capital on the European continent, and the population is increasingly concentrated in the southern and western parts of the country.

2 Historical background

Having formed a part of the Swedish Empire since the thirteenth century, in 1809 Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire and, in 1860, it acquired its own currency, the markka or Finnish mark. The Constitution adopted on 1 October 1906 made Finland the first European country to establish universal suffrage. At the same time, the old four-estate assembly was replaced by the unicameral national Parliament, the Eduskunta, with the first elections held in 1907. Finland declared its independence from Russia on 6 December 1917. A short but bitter civil war between the Reds and the Whites followed in 1918 and was won by the government’s forces, led by General Mannerheim. The Constitution adopted on 17 July 1919 gave Finland a republican form of government, combined with strong powers for the President.

Between 1939 and 1944, Finland fought two conflicts against the Soviet Union: the 1939–1940 Winter War and the 1941–1944 Continuation War, and in accordance with the armistice
agreement with the USSR, was engaged in battle against the German forces in Lapland in 1944–1945. As a result of a peace settlement, Finland was forced to concede a significant amount of its territory, mainly from the Karelia region, to the Soviet Union. This also led to close economic and political ties with its eastern neighbour, consolidated in the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (FCMA) signed in 1948. In Finland, the Cold War period was characterized by cordial relations with the Soviet superpower. Whilst the direct interference of the Soviet leadership in Finnish politics has often been exaggerated, the Finnish political elite nevertheless was always forced to anticipate Moscow’s reactions, and this set firm limits to Finland’s cooperation with West European and Nordic countries. In 1961, Finland became an associate member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and, in 1973, signed a free trade agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC). Finland became a full member of EFTA in 1986 and joined the Council of Europe in 1989.

3 Geopolitical profile

There is little doubt that, especially amongst foreign observers, the ‘Western’ identity of Finland was far less clear. After all, Finland shares a long border with Russia and had, during the Cold War, very close economic and political relations with the Soviet Union. The role of Finland as a frontier or bridge between East and West became accentuated during the Cold War, where the borderline between the two political blocs went along Finland’s border with the Soviet Union. Finland adopted a position of military non-alignment, with the FCMA Treaty providing for the possibility of wartime military cooperation with the Soviet Union, in case Germany or one of its allies attacked the Soviet Union through Finland, but the country belonged to the West as far as the political and economic basis of its society was concerned. Finland was thus faced with the awkward challenge of balancing the two opposing blocs in a difficult international situation.

Another tenet that grew out of post-war political thinking in Finland was that of a small state, and, by the early 1990s, the Finns had become used to living in a world where state sovereignty and security formed the uncontested starting point for political life. In the Finnish case, state-centrism means that values connected with the state, such as sovereignty and territoriality, have traditionally been strongly emphasized. This has led to a very limited position given to alternative political communities, like a federal Europe or the development of a strong regional level, in Finnish political thinking. When participation in European integration started to be discussed in Finland, it first took place largely in these state-centric terms. Hence by the time Finland joined the EU, Finnish political identity was very much the identity of a small state situated on the fringes of Europe and looking for protection for its territory and people (Tiilikainen, 1998; Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003).

4 Overview of the political landscape

Finland is by a wide margin the oldest semi-presidential country in Europe, with the semi-presidential form of government adopted in 1919, two years after the country became independent (Arter, 1999). Under the old Constitution, the President was recognized as the supreme executive power. The peak of presidential powers was reached during the reign of President Kekkonen (1956–1981), who made full use of his powers and even, arguably, overstepped the constitutional prerogatives of the presidency. However, recent constitutional reforms, enacted piecemeal since the late 1980s and culminating in the new unified Constitution that entered into force in 2000, have quite radically altered the Finnish political system, with the
government and the Prime Minister emerging from the shadow of the President as the leaders of the political process (Nousiainen, 2001; Paloheimo, 2003).

Under the new Constitution the President is clearly subordinate to the government. Governments are now accountable to the Eduskunta, the unicameral national Parliament, and not to the President as, effectively, was the case before, and overall the President is almost completely excluded from the policy process in domestic matters. The government is responsible for EU policy, whilst foreign policy leadership is shared between the President and the government (Johansson and Raunio, 2010).

When compared with other EU countries, Finnish governments are outliers in three respects: their parliamentary support, level of fragmentation, and ideological diversity. Finland used to be characterized by short-lived and unstable cabinets living in the shadow of the President. Amongst the West European countries, only Italy had more cabinets between 1945 and 2000 than Finland. The overwhelming majority of Finnish cabinets have been cross-bloc coalitions, bringing together parties from the left and the right. Reflecting the fragmentation of the party system and the tradition of forming majority cabinets, the mean number of cabinet parties between 1945 and 2000 was as high as 3.5, the highest figure amongst West European countries (Mattila and Raunio, 2004, 269).

Recent cabinets have, as a rule, included two of the three main parties: the Social Democrats, the Centre, and the National Coalition. Since 2011, Finland has been governed by a ‘six pack’ coalition between the National Coalition, the Social Democrats, the Left Alliance, the Green League, the Swedish People’s Party, and the Christian Democrats, commanding a comfortable majority in the Eduskunta with 62 per cent of the seats. Not surprisingly, the oversized coalitions that have held power since the early 1980s have ruled without much effective opposition from the Eduskunta. The opposition has been both numerically weak and ideologically fragmented.

5 Brief account of the political parties

Measured by the number of effective parties, the Finnish party system is the most fragmented amongst the former West European countries, with an average of 5.1 effective parties between

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original name</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suomen Keskusta</td>
<td>KESK</td>
<td>Finnish Centre Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristillidemokraatit</td>
<td>KD</td>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perussuomalaiset</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>The Finns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue</td>
<td>SKP</td>
<td>Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Käyhien Asialla</td>
<td></td>
<td>For the Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vihreä liitto</td>
<td>VIHR</td>
<td>Green League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isenäisyyspuolue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Independence Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasemmistoliitto</td>
<td>VAS</td>
<td>Left Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansallinen Kokoomus</td>
<td>KOK</td>
<td>National Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suomen Sosialidemokraatinn Puolue</td>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Finnish Social Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suomen Senioripuolue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior Citizens’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suomen Työväenpuolue</td>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>Finnish Labour Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svenska Folkpartiet I Finland</td>
<td>SFP</td>
<td>Swedish People’s Party in Finland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Finland’s Ministry of Justice.
1945 and 2000 (Mattila and Raunio, 2004, 269). Since the declaration of independence in 1917, no party has come close to winning a majority of parliamentary seats, and the lack of a clearly dominant party has necessitated cooperation between the main parties. The fragmentation of the party system also facilitates consensual governance and ideological convergence between all parties aspiring to enter the government (Arter, 2009). The main cleavage has traditionally been the left–right dimension, but since the early 1990s, the rural–urban/centre–periphery divide has become the second main cleavage, partly because the EU and globalization issues have emerged on the political agenda (Paloheimo and Raunio, eds, 2008).

5.1 Party attitudes towards the European Union

The 1994 membership referendum, in which 57 per cent voted in favour of joining the EU, indicated that European integration was a problematic issue for most parties (Paloheimo, 2000). However, once the membership issue had been settled, basically all parties represented in the Eduskunta adjusted quickly to life in the European Union. Of the individual parties, the centre-right National Coalition and the Social Democrats have pursued broadly similar pro-integrationist policies since Finland joined the EU. The Centre Party was against EMU membership, but has since then displayed solid support for national EU policy.

The Left Alliance and the Green League were so divided over EU membership in 1994 that they chose not to adopt official positions on the issue. Joining the government in the spring of 1995 meant that both parties had to profile themselves almost overnight as pro-integrationist parties. The Greens have become solidly pro-EU, whilst the Left Alliance has, at least when in opposition, adopted a more Eurosceptic position that is also more in line with the views of its electorate. Parties that were against EU membership, the Christian Democrats (then the Christian League) and The Finns (then the Rural Party), have accepted membership but were against the EMU and are against deeper integration. The Christian Democrats’ European policy could perhaps best be characterized as moderate opposition to integration.

The Finns, which achieved a major breakthrough in the 2011 Eduskunta elections, represent the harder variant of Euroscepticism. The party adopted its current English name, The Finns, in August 2011. Until then the party had been known as the True Finns. According to its leader Timo Soini, the new simple name was intended to emphasize the fact that the party represents ordinary citizens, whilst the old name ‘True Finns’ had an extremely Nationalistic slant to it. The exact translation of the Finnish name of the party, Perussuomalaiset, would be ‘common Finns’ or ‘ordinary Finns’.

There was thus – at least until the 2011 national elections – a relatively broad partisan consensus about the EU in the Finnish party system. In fact, considering the divisive nature of the EU membership referendum held in 1994, the traditionally state-centric political culture, and low public support for integration, Finland would seem to possess all the key preconditions for strong party-based Euroscepticism. Indeed, as shown in the next section, the commitment to integration, which prevails amongst the parties, is not shared to the same extent by the Finnish electorate.

6 Public opinion and the European Union

The Finnish approach to integration is usually described as pragmatic and constructive, with Finnish politicians and civil servants normally portrayed as cooperative and committed to working in the EU institutions. According to the political elite, national interests can be best pursued through active and constructive participation in decision-making. Underlying this stance is a
strong conviction that a strong and efficient EU can best protect the rights and interests of smaller Member States, as intergovernmental processes tend to favour larger Member States. However, according to Eurobarometer and other public opinion surveys, Finns are more sceptical of integration than the average EU citizen. In addition to the generally low levels of public support for integration, the Finnish electorate seems to be particularly concerned about the influence of small Member States in EU governance (Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003; Tiilikainen, 2006).

There is thus a notable lack of congruence between Finnish citizens and the political parties, with most parties considerably more supportive of the EU than their electorates (Mattila and Raunio, 2005, 2006). Hence it is not surprising that, overall, the Finnish parties have kept a fairly low profile in integration matters, with the rules of the national EU coordination system, based on building broad domestic consensus, including often between the government and opposition parties, also contributing to the depoliticization of European issues (Raunio, 2005c, 2007b, 2008). Given that most parties are internally divided over the EU, it was also not surprising that the main parties showed little interest in submitting the Constitutional Treaty or the Lisbon Treaty to a referendum.

However, in the run-up to the 2011 national elections, the euro-zone crisis and the associated bailout measures triggered heated debates in the Eduskunta. Both the argumentation of the political parties in the 2011 election campaign and subsequent post-election developments suggest some potential changes to national integration policy. The decisions to participate in the bailout operations were justified by their positive effects on domestic economy and growth, and in general the defence of national interests was emphasized by all parties. Overall it appears that such an emphasis on national interests and on the role of smaller Member States has become more pronounced in Finland in recent years (Raunio, 2011). It can be expected that in this climate of opinion, the political elite in general will increasingly emphasize the need to defend national interests in Brussels. Indeed, since entering office in June 2011 the ‘six pack’ government led by the National Coalition has taken a tougher stance in EU negotiations, both in terms of demanding guarantees for its national bailout payments and in blocking, together with the Netherlands, the entry of Bulgaria and Romania into the Schengen area. Whether this signals a more long-term change in national integration policy remains to be seen, but at least in the short term the Finnish government is under considerable domestic pressure not to make too many concessions in Brussels.

7 National and EP electoral systems

The electoral system used for EP elections is essentially the same as that used for electing the Eduskunta (Raunio, 2005b). The only real difference is that in the national elections, the country is divided into one single-member district, the Åland Islands, and 12 multi-member electoral districts. According to the law on EP elections, candidates can be nominated by registered parties and constituency associations. Parties can form electoral alliances with one another and constituency associations can set up joint lists. The maximum number of candidates per party, or electoral alliance or joint list is 20, but a single constituency association can only put forward 1 candidate. In Eduskunta elections candidate selection takes place exclusively at the district level, with the national party leadership having only theoretical opportunities to influence the process. However, in EP elections it is essentially the party executive or council, the exact name of which varies between the parties, that decides who is on the final list of candidates. This does not mean that the local and district branches are totally neglected. They are consulted and asked to suggest their own candidates, but the final decision is always taken by the national party executive.
The whole country forms one single constituency, whilst voters choose between individual candidates from non-ordered party lists. Seat allocation to parties is based on the d'Hondt method. After each party, electoral alliance, and joint list has been allocated the number of seats to which it is entitled, the candidates on the lists are ranked according to the number of their preference votes. This means that within electoral alliances the distribution of seats is determined by the plurality principle, regardless of the total number of votes won by the respective parties forming the alliance.

The open list candidate-centred system impacts strongly on campaigns, with the programmes and discourses of political parties overshadowed by the campaigns of individual candidates. Under the open list electoral system the most efficient electoral strategy for the candidates is to focus on their personal qualities, international and national political experience, expertise on EU issues, or language skills. The electoral system leads to more competition within than between parties and individual candidates from the same party pursue personal campaigns, with little if any interference from the party leadership and with programmes almost completely in the background.

There has occasionally been debate about changing the electoral system. For example, before the 2004 EP elections some senior politicians argued in favour of closed lists instead of the open list system. It was suggested that the move to closed lists would improve the quality of the campaigns as the parties, rather than the individual candidates, would be forced to become the key players in contrast to the present system. There has also been discussion about dividing the country into multiple constituencies. With the whole country forming a single constituency, it is rather impossible to guarantee any degree of geographical representation. In addition, the current system favours candidates with national visibility and also makes campaigning relatively costly. However, dividing the country into several constituencies would probably also make the system less proportional.

Considering that most Finnish parties are internally divided over Europe, leaders have good cause to support the existing rules of the electoral game, as protests or dissenting opinions get channelled through individual candidates. Parties also try to make sure that these internal differences are reflected in the composition of the lists. In addition to recruiting candidates from across the country, lists thus include candidates with different views on Europe. This applies particularly to parties that are less cohesive on integration, most notably the Centre Party and the Left Alliance. Whilst this obviously causes problems for the party leaderships, it reduces tensions within the parties and probably increases their vote totals (Raunio, 2007a).

8 A glance at the EP and national elections

When comparing EP and national parliamentary elections, it is possible to notice some interesting differences concerning turnout and party competition; both have been substantially lower in EP elections.

The turnout of 40.3 per cent achieved in the 2009 EP elections was slightly below that of 41.1 per cent achieved in 2004, but 27.6 per cent less than in the 2007 national elections. The highest turnout of 60.3 per cent was achieved in the first EP elections held in October 1996, whereas the lowest turnout of 31.4 per cent was registered in the 1999 elections. However, turnout has also declined in national electoral contests. Whilst in the 1960s, on average, 85 per cent of citizens cast their votes, the figure dropped to 81 per cent in the 1970s, about 79 per cent in the 1980s, 71 per cent in the 1990s, and below 70 per cent in the first decade of the twenty-first century, reaching its lowest point at 67.9 per cent in the 2007 elections. Subsequently, the popularity of the Finns and the associated higher level of contestation and interest probably explain the rise in turnout to 70.5 per cent in the 2011 national elections.
In terms of party competition, the Finnish party system has in recent decades been remarkably stable, with the vote shares of the individual parties changing very little between Eduskunta elections. The three core parties, the Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party, and the National Coalition, have largely held on to their vote shares, winning collectively around 65–70 per cent of the vote. Also, the vote shares of the smaller parties display high levels of stability. The vote share of the Left Alliance has gradually decreased, whilst the Green League has become one of the most successful green parties in Europe. Hence the recent rise of The Finns has certainly enlivened the party system, adding an element of unpredictability to elections.
In all Finnish EP elections, the parties fielding candidates can be divided into two categories: those parties within the *Eduskunta* that have had realistic chances of winning seats, and minor parties without seats in the national Parliament. The first EP elections were held in October 1996. Several factors contributed to the high turnout. The contest was held in conjunction with municipal elections, main parties were able to attract high-profile candidates, and the Finnish *markka* was tied to the Exchange Rate Mechanism a week before the election, with impending EMU membership therefore high on the political agenda. Fourteen parties and one constituency association fielded a total of 207 candidates. The political parties also clearly put a lot of effort into the 1996 elections, both programmatically and particularly in terms of campaigning (Anckar, 1997; Martikainen and Pekonen, 1999).

In 1999 the busy electoral calendar, with *Eduskunta* elections held less than three months earlier in March and presidential elections forthcoming in January 2000, strained parties’ resources and diverted attention from the EP elections. The Centre Party leader Esko Aho used the launch of his party’s EP election campaign to announce his own presidential candidacy. The various party congresses held in May–June 1999 focussed primarily on presidential elections, with the EP contest relegated to a clear second position. Indeed, absence is overall the best word to describe the behaviour of party leaders during the campaign. Party leaders did not take part in a single televised debate, with only the leading individual candidates presenting their parties. Altogether 140 candidates were nominated by 11 parties. As in 1996, no singular issue dominated the campaign. The focus was more on looking after national interests, not on Europe. The European Commission resignation was used by most parties and individual candidates as an example of the urgent need to ‘clean up’ EU institutions and to increase transparency and openness. With the exception of the Green League, the record low turnout hit parties of the left especially hard.

In the 2004 elections, the political parties managed again to attract high-profile candidates, including two party leaders and prominent parliamentarians. Moreover, the reduction in the number of EP seats, from 16 to 14, meant that the election was going to be even tighter than before, with small parties in real danger of losing their seats. Altogether, 227 candidates were nominated by 14 parties. The campaign was definitely of a higher quality than the one in the elections held five years earlier. With no competing political events diverting attention away from the elections, the parties had much more time, money, and energy to spend on the campaign. This applied particularly to the party leaders, who now took part in television debates and toured the country in support of their candidates. Nevertheless, it is still fair to conclude that the party leaderships approached the election with a notable lack of enthusiasm.

Again no single issue dominated the campaign. In general, voters were far more concerned about the ability of the candidates to defend Finland’s national interests in the EU than about wider questions related to European integration. Under the broad umbrella of national interests, the debate focussed on familiar themes in Finnish EU discourse: defence, agriculture, regional policy, and protecting the welfare state. The result brought few surprises, with the main parties holding on to their seat and vote shares and the Eurosceptic parties failing to gain new ground (Tiilikainen and Wass, 2004; Mattila and Raunio, 2005; Raunio, 2005a).

9 The 2009 European election

9.1 Party lists and manifestos

As the 2009 election drew closer, there was little reason to expect an interesting campaign. There had been virtually no debate on the EU since the 2004 EP election and the discussions
on the Constitutional Treaty. However, there were also a number of factors that gave cause for more optimistic scenarios. The electoral calendar was empty, with the municipal elections held in the autumn of 2008 and the next Eduskunta elections scheduled for 2011. Nor were there any pressing domestic issues diverting attention from the EP elections, and this resulted in quite extensive media coverage of the campaigns. Whilst the main parties had serious difficulties in attracting good candidates, the reduction of seats allocated to Finland, from 14 to 13, meant that the smaller parties, in particular, needed to do well in order to maintain representation in the European Parliament.

One of the most significant factors was the candidacy of Timo Soini, the highly popular leader of the Eurosceptic party, The Finns. Soini’s decision to run for a seat breathed life to the campaign, as the other parties could not ignore The Finns — whose support had more than doubled in the previous Eduskunta elections, from 1.6 per cent in 2003 to 4.1 per cent in 2007 — and the rise of the party had continued in the 2008 municipal elections in which it captured 5.4 per cent of the vote. Hence, the Centre and the Social Democrats particularly needed to take The Finns seriously. The Social Democrats were afraid that Soini would get votes from urban working-class suburbs, whereas the Centre feared that Soini would be popular amongst Eurosceptic rural voters.

Altogether, 241 candidates were nominated by 13 parties and one constituency association. As in the previous elections, the minor parties without Eduskunta seats had hardly any chance of winning a seat in the EP and they were also almost completely ignored by the media. These marginal parties were: For the Poor-party (20 candidates), Suomen Työväenpuolue (Labour Party, 20), Communist Party (20), Suomen Senioripuolue (Senior Citizens’ Party, 20), and Itsenäisyyspuolue (Independence Party, 20). The parties represented in national Parliament all put forward 20 candidates. The exception was the electoral alliance between Christian Democrats and The Finns, where both parties fielded ten candidates.

It is probably fair to argue that, with the exception of the first EP elections held in 1996, the 2009 EP elections were in many ways more interesting and competitive than the previous rounds of elections. Most notably, the candidacy of Soini contributed to Europe, and particularly Euroscepticism, occupying a more central role in the campaigns than before. Eurosceptic parties also won more votes and seats than in previous elections. In fact, the elections would most likely have remained a low-key affair without the candidacy of Soini. But his candidacy also had the effect of focussing the spotlight very much on Soini, and not on actual issues. Other parties did their best to discredit Soini and particularly The Finns’ tough line on immigration, with the consequence that their own policy agendas were often ignored or downplayed. For example, the liberal Swedish People’s Party announced that it was a counterforce to The Finns. A media favourite, Soini basked in the attention and largely dominated the campaign.

Defending national interests emerged again, perhaps, as the main theme of the elections, especially as public opinion surveys showed that the citizens were again more concerned about the ability of the candidates to defend Finland’s national interests in the EU than about wider questions related to Europe. This focus on ‘national interests’ should not necessarily be interpreted as Euroscepticism or as pitting Finland against the EU. After all, it is quite natural that the electorate would be concerned about the extent to which Finland’s voice is heard at the European level, as Finland is a relatively small, geographically peripheral Member State, electing fewer than 2 per cent of all MEPs. Many candidates also based their campaigns on defending the interests of particular regions. This applied especially to candidates of the Centre Party, as this party draws most of its support from the more sparsely populated rural regions.

Otherwise, the fragmented debate focussed on a mixture of themes, with perhaps the economic and financial crisis and the environment receiving most coverage. The focus on
the environment was understandable as such questions, especially the fate of the Baltic Sea, also had a prominent role in domestic debates. Agriculture and regional policy featured less in national debates, but often dominated the campaigns in the rural areas. Interestingly, quite a lot of the debate also centred on the gap or distance between Brussels and the citizens, with party leaders and candidates speaking of the need to bring the EU closer to the citizens. Overall, the leftist parties emphasized employment and the development of a social Europe, whereas the centre-right parties put more stress on the sound management of the economy, the internal market, and competitiveness.

The name of the Centre Party’s programme, ‘Urhoutta Eurooppaan’, at least implicitly referred to former President Urho Kekkonen, the strong leader who ruled Finland for a quarter of a century from 1956 to 1981. Whilst Kekkonen’s era is the subject of quite heated national debate, most would agree that the former President was very good at defending national interests, particularly vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. In fact, the Centre openly acknowledged the need to look after national concerns, with agricultural and regional policy interests especially emphasized in the programme. The election programme stated that:

the EU takes an increasing range of decisions that impact on us and our children.
Hence it is essential that in elections held in June we elect to the European Parliament people that defend unconditionally the interests of Finland and Finns.

(Centre Party, 2002, 2)

However, the programme of the Centre Party was, nonetheless, not that Eurosceptic in tone. The language of the programme was in fact quite colourful in places, stating for example that ‘defending Finnish interests does not mean giving the finger to European cooperation’.

The programme of The Finns essentially mirrored a wholesale rejection of the EU. Soini clearly did not want immigration to become a key issue in the campaign, as this might have benefitted the mainstream parties. In fact, it was the National Coalition that became discredited over immigration policy when on 29 May, one of its candidates, Kai Pöntinen, published an advert on the front page of the leading national daily, Helsingin Sanomat, calling for a ‘stop to welfare bum immigrants’. Whilst the Chair of the National Coalition, Jyrki Katainen, was quick to denounce Pöntinen’s tactics and views, the episode clearly caused embarrassment to his party.

Soini based his campaign on The Finns providing a genuine alternative to the pro-EU policies of the government and the main parties, calling for an end to ‘one truth’ politics. As the party name implies, The Finns very much emphasize the value of ‘Finnishness’ and national ways of doing things, including the protection of the Nordic welfare state (Arter, 2010). The party argued against a federal Europe and enlargement mainly on account of it resulting in more immigration, and wanted to roll back integration, for example, by transferring competence in agricultural policy back to the Member States. According to The Finns, European-level democracy simply does not work and the Lisbon Treaty should have been subjected to a referendum. Interestingly, whilst the party strongly emphasized the defence of national interests, it simultaneously recognized the need to participate in EU decision-making in order to take power back from the EU. Hence the party does not call for Finland’s exit from the European Union, believing instead that in the long run EU will prove unworkable and will thus, inevitably, disintegrate.

Apart from The Finns, only the Christian Democrats had a predominantly Eurosceptic campaign. The party stressed the role of national interests and was particularly concerned about the influence of small Member States; it argued in general that the EU should do less, but better. In terms of policy, Christian Democrats emphasized the virtues of the Nordic welfare state whilst...
Finland

stating that EU should explicitly recognize and commit itself to European Christian values and adopt a more family-oriented approach to its actions and policies.

The Social Democrats, the main opposition party in the Eduskunta, depicted the election as a choice between a bourgeois or a market-led Europe and a ‘human’ Europe:

In the European Parliament the direction of politics is decided between the two largest party groups, the Social Democrats and the Conservatives. The main alternatives are also in Finland Social Democrats or a market-oriented right. The consequences of bourgeois politics are known here in Finland and in the majority of European countries. This is what we want to change.

(Social Democratic Party, 2009, 1)

When launching its campaign, the party strongly attacked free markets and argued that the right-wing economic policy of the EU had come to its end.

Calling for more control and regulation of the market economy, the party declared the need for a more human Europe, with employment and social rights highlighted in the party programme. Whilst the discourse of the Social Democrats was solidly pro-EU, the party also stressed the importance of protecting national public services and labour market policies. Defending the welfare state, the party programme stated that:

like the other Nordic countries, Finland has a lot to offer to the European Union. The Nordic model has provided security and well-being to citizens and has also been an economic success story. We want to make the EU also an area of well-being and economic success that is based on the needs of the people.

(Social Democratic Party, 2009, 1–2)

The Green League campaigned on the basis of the programme of the European Green Party, which in general argued that the EU needs a ‘new direction’. Otherwise Euro-party manifestos were again almost completely absent during the campaigns. They were available at the parties’ home pages, but were not used at all in the actual election campaigns by the candidates or the parties. Nor did the Finnish parties make any real use of campaign help from the other EU countries or from their EP groups.

The Greens stressed the adoption of policies that facilitate sustainable development and a more responsible or human Europe based on solidarity, stating that economic concerns should not come before the needs and rights of people. Neo-liberal policies had privileged the few at the expense of the welfare of the citizenry and the state of the environment.

The discourse of the Left Alliance reflected that of the Greens. The party stressed the need for active international and European cooperation in order to fight for an ‘alternative, better Europe’, which is not so dominated by business interests. Hence the party saw a need for a fundamental reform of the international and European economy, with more resources invested in improving the well-being of citizens and the environment. The party also stated that the EU should be developed as an association of independent Member States and defended the Nordic welfare state model. Like the Greens, the Left Alliance also favoured the ‘civilian power’ concept of EU in global politics, for example through crisis management operations, and the use of referenda in key integration matters.

As in previous rounds of elections, the National Coalition and the Social Democrats reminded the electorate that their MEPs sat in the two largest EP groups. The National Coalition was especially keen to highlight its membership in the EPP, the largest of the EP groups.
The National Coalition had a solidly pro-EU programme, with an emphasis on a ‘responsible market economy’. Whilst the party continues to be against unnecessary EU-level bureaucracy and regulation, it nevertheless argued in general for a stronger and more efficient Europe. Finally, the Swedish People’s Party predictably focussed on making sure that the voice of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland was heard in Brussels, whilst emphasizing the values of linguistic and cultural diversity.

9.2 Electoral campaign

As in the previous elections, the EP information office in Helsinki was actively involved in the 2009 campaign. Its election budget was around €290,000. The main items of expenditure were outside advertisements, including about €120,000 for posters, €80,000 for radio adverts, €40,000 for organizing and participating in various events, and €25,000 for publications. The EP in Brussels also provided publications and other public relations items and, more importantly, was responsible for organizing and centrally providing most of the internet-based election material.

The media has arguably done a fairly decent job in covering EU matters between EP elections. However, during the election campaigns most of the printed and electronic media, particularly the main television channels, have focussed on selected leading candidates, giving them a lot of free nationwide exposure. Whilst this may give the electorate more information about these individual candidates, it also contributes towards the fragmentation of the debate, as party messages remain in a secondary role.

9.3 Electoral results

The 2009 EP elections were held on Sunday, 7 June. Advance voting took place from 27 May to 2 June. Turnout was 40.3 per cent, or 38.6 per cent when those enfranchised citizens residing abroad are taken into account. The collective vote share of the four government parties, the Centre, National Coalition, Green League, and Swedish People’s Party, was 60.7 per cent.

This was, in fact, just over two percentage points more than the 58.5 per cent vote share of the four parties in the 2007 national elections. The leading government party, the Centre,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National party</th>
<th>Votes %</th>
<th>Seats (seat change)</th>
<th>Political group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Coalition</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>3 (-1)</td>
<td>EPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>3 (-1)</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>2 (-1)</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green League</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>2 (+1)</td>
<td>Greens/EFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Finns</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1 (+1)</td>
<td>EFD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish People’s Party</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Alliance</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0 (-1)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1 (+1)</td>
<td>EPP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnout</strong></td>
<td><strong>40.3</strong></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Finland’s Ministry of Justice.
saw its vote share (19.0 per cent) decline by more than 4 per cent in comparison with both the 2004 EP and the 2007 legislative elections, with the resulting loss of one of its seats. However, considering the economic downturn and the low popularity ratings of Prime Minister Vanhanen, the outcome was nonetheless quite satisfactory for the party. Reflecting internal divisions within the party over integration, the attitudes of two of the three Centre MEPs, Hannu Takkula and Riikka Manner, towards the EU are more critical than the official party line.

This continues the pattern set in previous EP elections, where one or more Centre MEPs are more Eurosceptic than the party leadership. In fact, after the elections Takkula recommended to his party that the Centre should leave the ALDE group and join the ECR, but in the end it was agreed that the Centre delegation would remain with ALDE. Takkula also considered joining the European Conservatives and Reformists on a personal basis, with the other Centre MEPs staying in ALDE. However, Takkula chose to continue in the Liberal group, at least partially because he considered some of the smaller parties in the European Conservatives and Reformists as too Euro-sceptic.

The National Coalition had performed well in previous EP elections, and whilst the party won 0.5 per cent fewer votes than in the 2004 EP elections, it emerged as the biggest party by a comfortable margin, winning 23.2 per cent of the vote. Nonetheless, the National Coalition lost one seat, with its three seats going to re-elected MEPs Ville Itälä, Eija-Riitta Korhola, and Sirpa Pietikäinen.

Turning to the junior partners in the coalition, the Green League has fared better in EP elections than in national parliamentary elections. This time the Greens won 12.4 per cent of the vote, 2 per cent more than in the 2004 elections and nearly 4 per cent above that achieved in the latest Eduskunta elections. The Greens had a very strong list, and both of their MEPs, Heidi Hautala and Satu Hassi, had previous experience in the European Parliament. The Swedish People's Party has traditionally benefitted from the higher turnout amongst Swedish-speakers, who currently comprise 5.4 per cent of the population, and this factor contributed to the party holding on to its seat with 6.1 per cent of the vote.

The main opposition party, the Social Democrats, suffered a major defeat. Capturing only 17.5 per cent of the vote, it lost one seat and nearly 4 per cent of the vote in comparison with both the 2004 EP and the 2007 national elections. The leading SDP candidate, Father Mitro, was the only ‘celebrity’ candidate elected to the EP from Finland. The Left Alliance finished as the seventh largest party, with 5.9 per cent of the vote, its worst election result since the party was founded in 1990. The party lost its only seat, and, three days after the elections, the election Party Chair Martti Korkonen announced his resignation. Hence with the partial exception of the Greens, who have refused to be classified as either a leftist or centre-right party, the elections were a major disappointment for the left. Much of the discussion at the European level has in recent years focussed on the need to make the EU more competitive, and when this discourse is combined with Finnish domestic measures aiming at making the public sector and the national economy in general more cost efficient and competitive, it is understandable that leftist voters may find it hard to identify themselves with European integration. In short, the left and particularly the Social Democrats may like to portray Europe as a possibility, but large sections of the leftist electorate view integration as a threat (Raunio, 2010).

The main winner of the election was undoubtedly The Finns, who won their first seat in the European Parliament. With 9.8 per cent of the vote, the party increased its vote share by just under 6 per cent compared with the 2007 national elections and by over 9 per cent compared with the 2004 EP elections. Soini was the unrivalled king of the vote in the elections, capturing 130,715 votes. It is also probable that The Finns’ triumph is explained more by a
combination of Soini’s popularity and the electorate voting against the mainstream parties than by Euroscepticism. However, one can also argue that the voters were protesting against the broad pro-EU consensus of the political elite, and this was indeed one of the main campaign themes of The Finns. After the elections Soini faced the choice of joining either the ECR group or the EFD, but chose the latter on account of its Eurosceptic views.

Christian Democrats have benefitted from alliances in Eduskunta elections, and this strategy paid off again, with the party winning a seat thanks to the popularity of Soini and to Christian Democratic voters concentrating votes on their leading candidate, Sari Essayah. During the campaign, Essayah made no secret of her opposition to both further integration and the Lisbon Treaty whilst indicating that if elected she would join the EPP group. At first, the National Coalition objected to Essayah’s group membership on account of her Eurosceptic views, and then prevented Essayah from sitting as a delegation on her own inside the EPP group. A compromise was found when she joined the Finnish delegation in the EPP group that also comprises three National Coalition MEPs and is led by Ville Itälä.

Six of the seven Finnish MEPs that stood for re-election won their seats. Eight of the thirteen MEPs elected in 2009 were women. This share is higher than in previous elections: in 1996, eight out of fourteen; in 1999, seven out of fourteen; and in 2004, five out of fourteen elected MEPs were women.

### Table 17.6 List of Finnish MEPs: seventh legislature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>National party</th>
<th>Political group</th>
<th>Mandate</th>
<th>Professional background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essayah, Sari</td>
<td>21/02/1967</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haglund, Carl</td>
<td>29/03/1979</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Swedish People’s Party</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassi, Satu</td>
<td>03/06/1951</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Green League</td>
<td>Greens/EFA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itälä, Ville</td>
<td>10/05/1959</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>National Coalition</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaakonsaari, Liisa</td>
<td>02/09/1945</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jätteenmäki, Anneli</td>
<td>11/02/1955</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Centre Party National Coalition</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korhola, Eija-Riitta</td>
<td>15/06/1959</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Centre Party National Coalition</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Degree in philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manner, Riikka</td>
<td>24/08/1981</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Centre Party National Coalition</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietikäinen, Sirpa</td>
<td>19/04/1959</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Centre Party National Coalition</td>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Economist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repo, Mitro</td>
<td>03/09/1958</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soini, Timo</td>
<td>30/05/1962</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>The Finns</td>
<td>EFD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Party official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takkula, Hannu</td>
<td>20/11/1963</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Centre Party</td>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9.4 Campaign finance

There were no restrictions or upper limits concerning the budgets of the parties or the individual candidates, but according to the law on election financing, elected MEPs and those appointed as their deputies must submit within two months of the confirmation of the election result a public notification of the financing of their election campaign. According to these notifications, in the 2009 elections the average campaign expenditure of elected Finnish MEPs was €71,726. The candidates are largely responsible for funding their own campaigns, with the candidates often also investing large sums of their own money in the elections.

10 Theoretical interpretation of Euro-elections

10.1 Second-Order Election theory

The Finnish case provides mixed evidence for the Second-Order Election model. Over the years, the leading governing party has normally lost votes but the success of its coalition partners has varied. For example, in the 2009 elections the main government party, the Centre, suffered a major defeat, but its main partner in the cabinet, the National Coalition, emerged as the largest party whilst its junior partners, the Green League and the Swedish People’s Party, again performed better in EP elections than in national parliamentary elections.

Moreover, the opposition parties both lost and won in the 2009 elections. The Social Democrats and the Left Alliance experienced severe defeats, whilst the Eurosceptic list of Christian Democrats and The Finns did particularly well. The Social Democrats have performed rather badly in all EP elections held so far, whilst the National Coalition has on average fared better in European than in national parliamentary elections.

10.2 Europe Salience theory

The campaigns and debates in the four EP elections held so far have focussed, to a large extent, on defending national or regional interests. However, most of this discourse cannot be labelled Eurosceptic, as the parties and individual candidates have not, at least explicitly, identified a mismatch between Finnish interests and the EU. With the exception of The Finns, the debate has therefore not been characterized by an ‘us-versus-them’ discourse. Instead, it is perhaps better to approach the debate as ‘constituency’ politics. Finland is a small, northern country, and thus its citizens have a good reason to be concerned about the influence of Finland in EU governance and whether vital national interests can realistically be defended in an enlarged European Union. The citizens and the candidates seem particularly worried about whether the EU is dominated by its larger Member States.

Overall, it appears that this emphasis on defending national interests and on the role and rights of small Member States has become more pronounced in Finland, with the government and political parties in recent years repeatedly stressing the need to pay more attention to protecting national interests in an enlarged European Union.

The dominance of ‘national focus’ also means that much of the debate in Finland has revolved around the relationship between Finland and the EU, or more precisely on the place of Finland in European integration. Hence there has been less debate about actual EU policies, but some common themes can nonetheless be identified. In addition to election-specific themes, such as the economic and financial turmoil in the 2009 elections, questions relating to the welfare state are always high on the Finnish political agenda. There is a relatively broad partisan and public
consensus behind the welfare state regime, and hence also the centre-right parties, such as the National Coalition, the Swedish People’s Party, and the Centre Party, emphasize the welfare state and the social dimension of the EU in their programmes. This socio-economic debate has been cast very much in terms of whether the Nordic welfare model can be maintained in an integrative Europe, and, as indicated above, it is plausible to argue that this debate has contributed to rising problems for the left (Raunio, 2010).

References

**Primary sources**


**Secondary sources**