

Corinne Deloy

ANALYSIS

Will outgoing President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö win the election in the first round of the Finnish Presidential election?

On 28th January next the Finns will go to ballot to appoint the President of the Republic. About 242,000 Finns living abroad will be able to vote early from 17th to 20th January 2018.

If one of the candidates wins more than 50% of the vote he/she will win the election directly; if this is not the case a second round will be organised on 11th February.

Outgoing President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö is the grand favourite in the polls. Just a few weeks before the election his lead is quite exceptional. Johanna Vuorelma, a researcher at the University of Helsinki has highlighted the unusual nature of the situation. "The Social Democratic Party (SPD), for example, has always achieved high results in the presidential elections. Today their candidate is supported by 2% of the electorate. The same goes for the Centre Party on the right (KESK)," she maintained. Many SPD executives have incidentally called for a vote in support of Sauli Niinistö.

According to a poll by Kantar TNS in December the outgoing head of State is due to win 70% of the vote on 28th January. Ecologist Pekka Haavisto (Green League, VIHR) is due to come second with 11%. The other six candidates are due to win under 4% of the vote. Moreover, according to a poll by Tietoykkönen, three quarters of the Finns are expecting the outgoing head of State to win in the first round.

Erkka Railo, a political expert at the University of Turku deems that the outgoing head of State's popularity can be explained by the tension in the international arena. In his opinion the Finns trust the foreign policy undertaken by Sauli Niinistö. "In a tense situation people seek security via a strong leader. It is a universal psychological phenomenon," he declared. Teija Tiilikainen, director of the Foreign Policy Institute (UPI) believes that Sauli Niinistö's experience in terms of foreign policy and security is an advantage. Finally, Elina Kestilä-Kekkonen, a political expert at the University of Tampere explains the popularity of the outgoing president, notably amongst the electorate on the left, by the lack of anything distinctive amongst the other candidates.

In all, 12 debates are due to take place in view of the presidential election. These debates are generally very important for the Finns in terms of defining their vote. The first of these was organised by the delegation for economic life (EVA) on 30th October.

THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

The Finnish head of State is elected by direct universal suffrage and since 1994, on the third Sunday in January (if necessary a second round is organised two weeks later) for a six-year mandate. The elected candidate takes office on the first day of the month following his election, i.e. 1st February if he is appointed on 28th January and 1st March if he is elected on 11th February. If only one person is running for the post of president there is no election and the candidate is automatically elected as head of State.

The president of the Republic of Finland can undertake no more than two successive mandates. It is also customary for him to relinquish membership of his political party for the time of his term in office. Candidates, who must

Presidential election in Finland

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be born as Finnish citizens, can be appointed by a party or by a group of voters rallying at least 20,000 people.

The head of State is responsible for the country's foreign policy and its security (together with the government) and he is the commander in chief of the armies. However, he has no power regarding the country's domestic affairs. We should note that since 2011 Finland has represented at the European Union by its Prime Minister.

The presidential office is still prestigious in Finland despite the reform of the Constitution and the restriction undertaken in 2000 of the head of State's competences.

THE CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE

8 people are officially running

- Sauli Niinistö, 69, outgoing President and former head of the Conservative Assembly (KOK) (1994-2004) and former Justice (1995-1996) and Finance Minister (1996-2003). He is invested by a voters' association and 156,000 signatures in his support, a significant number since his former party, KOK, has 34,000 members only. Sauli Niinistö stands as the president for all Finns. He is supported by his former party but also by the Christian Democrats (KD), led by Sari Essavah, which did not appoint a candidate in this election; he also enjoys the support of several MPs of Blue Future (SIN), a party led by the present European Affairs, Culture and Sports Minister, Sampo Terho, created by former members of the True Finns (PS) who left the party in June last after the election of Jussi Halla-aho as its head. Blue Future aims to be more open to cooperation with other Finnish political movements and does not want Helsinki to leave the European Union, unlike the party led by Jussi Halla-aho.

- Pekka Haavisto, 59 MP, candidate of the Green League (VIHR), former Environment and Development (1995-1999) and International Development Minister (2013-2014). He was beaten by Sauli Niinistö in the presidential election on 22nd January and 5th February 2012 winning 37.41% of the vote in the 2nd round;

- Paavo Väyrynen, 71 former MEP and former candidate in the presidential elections in 1988, 1994

and 2012 for the Centre Party, of which he was leader from 1980 to 1990. He has never left the Centre Party ("My politics still lie in the centre but the Centre is no longer a centrist party in the strict sense of the term. The liberals have all of the power in the party," he declared). In the presidential election of 2012 he came third with 17.53% of the vote. In the upcoming election he has the support of 20,000 voters. He was Foreign Minister (1977 to 1982 and 1983 to 1987).

- Matti Vanhanen, 62, former Prime Minister (2003-2010), candidate of the Centre Party (KESK);

- Tuula Haatainen, 57 MP, candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), former Education Minister (2003-2005) and Minister for Social Affairs and Healthcare (2005-2007). She won the primary election organised by her party with 48.3% of the vote. She is campaigning on inequality, the increase of which she denounces, and on the future reform of social services and healthcare, which "will open the way to the privatisation of the services";

- Laura Huhtasaari, 38, MP, candidate for the True Finns (PS);

- Merja Kyllönen, 41 MEP, candidate of the Left Alliance (VAS), former Transport Minister (2011-2014);

- Nils Torvalds, 72, MEP, candidate for the Swedish People's Party (SFP).

AND WHAT OF NATO?

As always in Finland, NATO is occupying a good deal of space in the presidential campaign. Nils Torvalds is the only candidate to support Finland's membership of the NATO. Conversely, Merja Kyllönen, Laura Huhtasaari and Paavo Väyrynen are against it.

"Right now, I do not support membership. The situation might change, and Finland will possibly need to ask for membership," declared outgoing President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö, who recalled the importance of the protection guaranteed by the European Union. Paavo Väyrynen, who likes to recall Finland's neutrality, accused the outgoing President of wanting to create a military alliance with the European Union. The head of State said that the organisation of a referendum on Helsinki's membership of NATO was not a priority. Pekka Haavisto is the only candidate to be against the organisation of a referendum on NATO.

REMINDER OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS ON 22ND JANUARY AND 5TH FEBRUARY 2012
IN FINLAND

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Participation : 69,74% (1er tour) et 65,98% (2e tour)

Candidates	Number of votes won	% of votes won (1st round)	Number of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Sauli Niinistö (Conservative Rally, KOK)	1 131 254	36.96	1 802 328	62.59
Pekka Haavisto (Green League, VIHR)	574 275	18.76	1 077 425	37.41
Paavo Väyrynen (Centre Party, KESK)	536 555	17.53		
Timo Soini (True Finns, PS)	287 571	9.40		
Paavo Lipponen (Social Democratic Party, SPD)	205 111	6.70		
Paavo Arhinmäki (Left Alliance, VAS)	167 663	5.48		
Eva Biaudet (Swedish People's Party, SFP)	82 598	2.70		
Sari Essayah (Christian Democrats, KD)	75 744	2.47		

Source: http://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/TP2012K1/s/tulos/tulos_kokomaa.html & http://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/TP2012K2/s/tulos/tulos_kokomaa.html

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