

Conservative, Sauli Niinistö, the major favourite in the Finnish Presidential Election

from **Corinne Deloy**

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Analysis
1 month before
the poll

On 22nd January next, on the third Sunday in January, as is customary, just over 4.4 million Finnish are being called to ballot to appoint the successor to Tarja Halonen, as President of the Republic. The outgoing head of State, elected for the first time on 6th February 2000, cannot stand again, since the Constitution does not allow the President of the Republic to hold office for more than two consecutive terms.

The presidential election is the most popular of votes in Finland. 300,000 people turn out for this election alone. On average turnout is around 80%, which is around 10 points over that normally recorded in the general elections. The Finnish like this election very much since it is much more personal than the general elections, in which they have to opt for a list of people and therefore more for a political party.

If no candidate wins the absolute majority on 22nd January, a second round will take place on 5th February.

According to Pekka Perttula, the editor in chief of the newspaper *Suomenmaa*, the presidential election on 22nd January and 5th February will be a turning point, as it was in January 1982. In that year Mauno Koivisto (Social Democratic Party, SPD) won, and this marked the end of the Centre Party's predominance over Finnish political life; this was the start of a 30 year cycle of social democratic presidency (Martti Ahtisaari (SPD) succeeded Mauno Koivisto on 6th February 1994 as head of state and Tarja Halonen succeed Martti Ahtisaari on 6th February 2000).

Postal voting will take place for the first round between 11th and 17th January.

The Presidential Function

The Head of the Finnish State is elected for a six year term in office. Since 1994 the election takes place by direct universal suffrage on the third Sunday of January (this applies to the first round, the second takes place two weeks later) and the candidate elect takes office on the first day of the month following his election, (this year it will be 1st February, if he is elected in the first round or on 1st March if he is appointed on 5th February). If only one person stands for the presidential post the election does not take place and that candidate is elected as Head of State. The President of the Republic cannot hold office for more than two consecutive mandates. It is also traditional for him to hand in his card for the period of his mandate, if he is a member of a political party.

The candidates who must be Finnish born, can be ap-

pointed by a party or by a group rallying a minimum of 20,000 voters.

The Head of State is in charge of foreign policy and the country's defence (working with the government) and is the head of the armed forces. He has no power over the country's domestic affairs.

On 21st October last, the Eduskunta/Riksdag, the only chamber in Parliament, modified the powers of the president of the Republic. Hence the constitution now states that Finland is represented in the European Union by its Prime Minister. Moreover any differences arising between the Head of State and the head of Government will now be settled by Parliament. These changes will enter into force on 1st March next when the head of State, if elected in the second round, will succeed Tarja Halonen and enter office. These changes were approved by 118 MPs – 40 against (including two

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from the True Finns party – PS – and two MPs of the Left Alliance –VAS) and 40 abstentions. “*We decided to reduce the President’s power although the people want a strong president,*” declared Tarja Halonen after the Parliament’s vote. Timo Soini, leader of the True Finns and Sauli Niinistö, the Conservative Assembly (KOK) candidate to the presidency, also said that the changes made to the constitution had affected the President’s powers too much.

An increase in pay and the pension of the head of state was also agreed upon. The first, which until now was set at an annual 126,000 € after a 6 year term will rise to 160,000€ per year. His pension, which is set at 75,600€ (i.e. 60% of his pay) will rise to 96,000€. Two former heads of State are still alive: Mauno Koivisto and Martti Ahtisaari. The remuneration of the Head of State (just like his retirement pension) is not taxable.

Candidates to the Presidency of the Republic

8 people are officially standing for the supreme office:

- Sauli Niinistö, 63 the Conservative Assembly (KOK) candidate; a party he chaired from 1994-2004 and which in power at present. Former Minister of Justice (1995-1996) and Finance (1996-2003) and former leader of Parliament (2007-2011), he stood in the last presidential election on 15th and 29th January 2006, which he lost in the second round with 48.20% of the vote against Tarja Halonen (51.80% of the vote);
- Paavo Väyrynen, 65, is the Centre Party’s candidate (KESK) which he chaired from 1980 to 1990. Candidate in the presidential election in 1988 and 1994 he was not re-elected as MP during the last elections on 17th April 2011;
- Paavo Lipponen, 70, the Social Democratic Party’s candidate (SPD). The party’s leader from 1993 to 2005, he was appointed Prime Minister in 1995 and governed until 2003. Leader of Parliament from 2003-2007, he then retired from political life;
- Timo Soini, 49, leader of the True Finns (PS), a party that made a real breakthrough in the last general elections on 17th April last in which it won 19% of the vote. Candidate in the last presidential election on 15th and 29th January 2006, Timo Soini won 3.40% of the vote in the first round;
- Pekka Haavisto, 53, the Green’s candidate (VIHR). Former Environment Minister (1995-1999), he then worked for the UN. In 2005 he became the EU’s representative in Sudan where he took part in the Darfur

peace negotiations. Pekka Haavisto was re-elected as MP in the last general elections on 17th April after being absent from parliament for the last 12 years;

- Sari Essayah, 44, the Christian Democratic Party’s candidate (SKL). World 10km race walking champion in 1993 and European champion in 1994; she has been MEP since 2009. She has chosen the slogan “One step ahead”;
- Paavo Arhinmäki, 35, the Left Alliance candidate (VAS), of which he has been the chair since 2009. Present Culture and Sports Minister, he is the youngest candidate ever to have stood in the presidential election;
- Eva Biaudet, 50, the Swedish People’s Party candidate (SFP); she represents the liberal wing of this party. Former Healthcare and Social Affairs Minister (1999-2000 and 2002-2003), she is the present *ombudsman* for the minorities.

The main favourite in the presidential election, Sauli Niinistö, is facing opposition on two fronts: firstly the anti-European camp that comprises the populist Timo Soini and Centrist Paavo Väyrynen, then the left opposition, which is extensive but fragmented.

Extremely popular, the Conservative candidate has attracted a major electorate, which reaches well beyond his political party. “*In party this can be explained by the fact that every Social Democratic, True Finn or Centrist voter says he is prepared to vote for Sauli Niinistö in the second round of voting and not in support of their party’s candidate,*” analyses Erkki Karvonen, a political expert from the University of Tampere. He also attributes the conservative candidate’s popularity to his personal qualities, his experience and his independence.

Paavo Väyrynen, who would like to be seen as the “*president of all Finland*”, was appointed as the Centre Party’s candidate by 1000 delegates. The centrist distinguishes himself from his party, notably with regard to Europe, even though the party led by former Prime Minister (2010-2011) Mari Kiviniemi, is traditionally pro-European, it has changed positions since the general elections on 17th April on this. The centrist leader accused the other parties, notably the Social Democratic Party, of being afraid of the True Finns before the general election and of having adopted an anti-immigrant stance. She maintained the need for true cooperation between the Centre Party and the populist movement. Mari Kiviniemi, who refused to stand in the

presidential election, repeats that the differences in opinion between the candidate and his party exist in all of the other parties, notably between Sauli Niinistö and the Conservative Assembly.

Timo Soini announced that he was standing in the presidential election on 24th September last. This decision was approved on 15th October during the True Finns party congress. Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in parliament, the populist leader is not as popular however as his party. He has set himself the goal of reaching the second round at least.

Social Democrat Paavo Lipponen won the last primary election to be organised by his party to appoint its candidate in the presidential election on 13th September. He won 67% of the vote ahead of Tuula Haatainen, deputy Mayor of Helsinki, who won 22% of the vote, and MP Ilkka Kantola, who won 11%. 2,700 members of the Social Democratic Party took part in this primary i.e. 37.5% of the total membership.

Paavo Lipponen chose to focus his electoral campaign on the following themes: European cooperation, the defence of the Welfare State and justice.

The European Crisis at the heat of the electoral campaign

The euro zone and the debt in Europe have logically become the most important themes in the presidential electoral campaign.

Sauli Niinistö is critical of the budgetary solidarity between EU Member States. *"We made the mistake in the 2000's of weakening the Stability Pact and then in 2010, when we helped Greece, whilst we should have left this up to the IMF,"* he declared. According to the conservative candidate only inflation will enable the countries in debt to settle their problem. He also maintains that banks that have been recapitalised should be nationalised in order to prevent taxpayers feeling that they have been cheated.

Paavo Väyrynen is demanding the ordered bankruptcy of Greece and believes that *"Finland should quit the euro since it is in bad company."* The centrist candidate believes that the euro zone is too big and says that Helsinki made a mistake by entering the Economic and

Monetary Union (EMU). Paavo Väyrynen may attract some former Centre Party voters, who, disappointed by their party, opted for the True Finns in the last general election on 17th April 2011.

Timo Soini believes that Greece's departure from the euro zone is inevitable and that this will have a domino effect. *"As soon as one State leaves the euro zone it will be followed by many others, like at a party when no one wants to leave but as soon as the first one does, it means that the party is over,"* he declared. The True Finns' leader says that Finland should maintain its right to self-determination and its position in the world. *"In the USSR the NKVD (the People's Committee for Internal Affairs in the Soviet Union) decided everything. A pernicious idea is growing in Europe that only the European Central Bank (ECB) can settle the euro crisis,"* says Timo Soini, who added that the euro and the European Union are not eternal. The populist leader uses neighbouring Norway as a model, a country that does not belong to the EU and which has its own currency.

Conversely Paavo Lipponen is asking for greater discipline in terms of control over the States' finances of the EU. He supports greater European integration and a strengthening of parliamentary democracy. Finally he hopes that the Finnish Parliament will take part in European financial coordination.

On 5th December the newspaper *Aamulehti*, published a poll that shows that 63% of the Finnish believe that the euro must absolutely be saved (81% of the members of the Conservative Assembly and two-thirds of the Centre Party's electorate but only 26% of True Finn members). More than four in ten (44%) say they support a monetary union that is limited to the States that *"have managed their finances well"*, one third are against this idea.

On 14th December the first TV debate in the presidential campaign took place in which eight candidates took part. The European debt crisis dominated the discussion. Timo Soini and Paavo Väyrynen said that the euro was going to disappear. Conservative Sauli Niinistö said however that he was confident, repeating that the crisis will be settled by inflation and an increase in the monetary supply. Likewise ecologist Pekka Haavisto said that the crisis will be settled thanks to the

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determination of Germany and France.

Finland's economic situation is also at the heart of the electoral campaign. After experiencing recession of 8.9% in 2009 the country recorded GDP growth of 3.6% in 2010, and this is due to lie at 2.8% this year. The budgetary deficit is below the 3% required by the EU's Stability and Growth Pact. Public debt totals around 50% of the GDP.

Finally, as is often the case, the issue of belonging to NATO is still a main topic of debate. The far left candidate Paavo Arhinmäki is standing as the anti-NATO candidate. Four other candidates are against Helsinki joining the organisation: Green candidate, Pekka Haavisto; Social Democrat Paavo Lipponen, Centrist Paavo Väyrynen and Conservative Sauli Niinistö. The latter, who regrets Finland's attitude which comprises using

NATO as a scare tactic, wants a referendum on the issue.

According to the latest poll published on 15th December by the TV channel YLE, Sauli Niinistö is due to win 40% of the vote in the first round on 22nd January. The conservative candidate enjoys an easy lead over his rivals. Paavo Väyrynen is due to come second with 9% of the vote; Timo Soini is due to win 7%; Pekka Haavisto 6%, Paavo Lipponen 5%; Eva Biaudet and Paavo Arhinmäki 3% each and Sari Essayah 2%. We should note that the people interviewed, who declared that they still had not made their choice, has increased significantly over the last few weeks and now lies at 25%.

According to all polls Sauli Niinistö is due to win the second round easily on 5th February 2012.

Sauli Niinistö is still the main favourite in the Finnish Presidential election just one week before the first round.

J-7
7 days before
the poll

On 22nd January next 4,402, 622 Finns are being called to ballot to appoint the successor to Tarja Halonen, as President of the Republic. Elected for the first time as head of the country on 6th February 2000 she cannot stand again since the Finnish Constitution prohibits the head of State from undertaking more than two executive terms in office.

Early voting started on 11th January last and will end on 17th January. Usually around 40% of the electorate vote this way. Turnout is due to be high, since the presidential election is extremely popular in Finland. If none of the candidates wins the absolute majority in the first round a second round will take place on 5th February.

8 candidates are officially standing for the supreme office in Finland:

- 63 year old Sauli Niinistö, candidate of the Conservative Assembly (KOK);
- 65 year old Paavo Väyrynen, the Centre Party candidate (KESK);
- 70 year old Paavo Lipponen, is the Social Democratic Party's candidate, (SPD);
- 49 year old Timo Soini, leader of the True Finns (PS);
- 53 year old Pekka Haavisto, is the Green candidate (VIHR);

- 44 year old Sari Essayah, the Christian Democratic Party candidate (SKL);

- 35 year old Paavo Arhinmäki, the Left Alliance candidate (VAS);

- 50 year old Eva Biaudet, is the candidate of the Swedish People's Party (SFP).

Just one week before the election Sauli Niinistö is still the main favourite. According to political analysts he is not due to win on 22nd January. The name of the candidate who will come second and

have to face the conservative on 5th February is therefore a major point in the electoral campaign. According to the polls, populist Timo Soini, centrist Paavo Väyrynen, ecologist Pekka Haavisto and social-democrat Paavo Lipponen are all likely to reach the second round. Heikki Paloheimo, professor of political science at the University of Tampere, believes that the gap between Sauli Niinistö and the other candidates should gradually diminish as 22nd January approaches.

Paavo Lipponen, who is losing ground in the polls, is extremely active in the final part of the electoral campaign. He is standing as the most "realistic" candidate in the presidential election and accuses Sauli Niinistö of not having a politically clear attitude. The Social Democrat is standing as the defender of the European Union and notably of the euro, a position that is not always easy since the Finnish are increasingly critical of Europe, and are even more eurosceptic. However according to the most recent poll on the subject, published on 27th December last, two thirds of the Finns (63%) say they want their country to stay in the single currency. "*Paavo Lipponen dares to be what he is because he has nothing to lose in the elections,*" says Goran Djupsund, professor of Political Science at the University of Abo Akademi in Vaasa.

Paavo Lipponen describes himself as the person who prevented Finland joining NATO, a subject that he wants to debate in the electoral campaign. All eight candidates are against their country joining the North Atlantic Treaty. Centrist Paavo Väyrynen and the Left Alliance candidate, Paavo Arhinmäki are resolutely against it; the six others believe that although the subject is not really topical, debate is still possible, and it might even be necessary. In the interview he gave to the *Ilta-Sanomat* newspaper, Sauli Niinistö said that he was not sure that Finland's membership of NATO would increase Finnish security and recalled that not much was known about what membership really cost.

At present the share of the Finnish population against Helsinki's entry into NATO is the highest ever recorded. It totals 68% in a poll undertaken

by TNS Gallup and published by the daily *Helsingin Sanomat* in January.

Paavo Lipponen is struggling however to distinguish himself from Sauli Niinistö. He is also having problems in rallying the Finnish left to his name. Recently the general secretary of the Left Alliance, Sirpa Puhalkka said that he was not really the left's representative. The social democrat suffers due to the popularity of the conservative candidate amongst the older voters, who usually vote more in support of the Social Democratic Party.

If Paavo Lipponen or Paavo Arhinmäki do not succeed in taking second place on 22nd January next the left will not be represented in the second round of voting, which would be an all time first in Finland's history and a catastrophic result for the social democrats who did not rise above the 20% mark in the last general elections on 17th April 2011 (19.1% of the vote).

As in the last election the attitude towards the EU has become the main issue in the presidential election – which might prove decisive according to political expert Ville Pitkänen of the University of Turku if Sauli Niinistö faces Paavo Väyrynen or Timo Soini, both eurosceptic candidates, in a second round of voting.

According to the latest poll by Taloustutkimus and published by the daily *Helsingin Sanomat* on 9th January last, Sauli Niinistö still stands easily ahead in voting intentions in the first round of voting with 37% of the vote. Pekka Haavisto is due to come second with 8.3% of the vote followed by Paavo Väyrynen 8.2%, Timo Soini 7%, Paavo Lipponen and Paavo Arhinmäki 4% each. Two candidates end the list: Eva Biaudet is credited with 2% and Sari Essayah 1%. Around three people in ten (29%) do say however that they have not made their choice. The Finns want their next president to be pragmatic and able to mediate. They also say they want their head of state to discuss human rights issues when he makes official visits to countries where these are ignored or violated.

Reminder of the presidential election results on 15th and 29th January 2006 in Finland

Turnout: 73.9% in the first round, 77.2% in the second

Candidates	No.of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No.of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Tarja Halonen (Social Democratic Party, SPD)	1 397 030	46,3	1 630 833	51,8
Sauli Niinistö (Conservative Assembly, KOK)	725 866	24,1	1 517 947	48,2
Matti Vanhanen (Centre Party, KESK)	561,990	18,6		
Heidi Hautala (Greens VIHR)	105 248	3,5		
Timo Soini (True Finns, PS)	103 492	3,4		
Bjarne Kallis (Christian Democratic Party, SKL)	61 483	2		
Henrik Lax (Swedish People's Party, SFP)	48 703	1,6		
Arti Lahti (independent)	12 989	0,4		

Source : Helsingin Sanomat

Sauli Niinistö wins the 1st round of the presidential election in Finland.

RESULTS

As forecast in all of the polls, Sauli Niinistö, the Conservative Assembly's (KOK) candidate, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's party, easily won the first round of the presidential election that took place on 22nd January in Finland. He won 37% of the vote, ahead of ecologist Pekka Haavisto (Greens, VIHR) who won 18.8% of the vote. Paavo Väyrynen (Centre Party KESK) won 17.5%, Timo Soini, leader of the True Finns (PS) 9.4%, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), former Prime Minister (1995-2003) Paavo Lipponen 6.7%, the present Culture and Sports Minister Paavo Arhinmäki (Left Alliance, VAS) 5.5%, Eva Biaudet (The Swedish People's Party, SFP) 2.7% and Sari Essayah (Christian Democratic Party, SKL) 2.5%.

Turnout totalled 72.7% i.e. 1.2 point less than that recorded in the previous presidential election on 15th and 29th January 2006. 1,364,892 people voted early between 11th and 17th January, i.e. 32% of all of those registered – a figure that was higher than that recorded in the previous presidential election. Many Finns living abroad – around 48,000 – also voted early, i.e. a 50% increase in comparison with 2006. *"The Presidential election motivates people who are not generally interested in politics,"* said Pekka Haavisto.

The two pro-European candidates therefore came out ahead and will face each other on 5th February in the 2nd round. *"Pro-European politicians and support of the euro were approved by widely by the electorate,"* declared Sauli Niinistö after the announcement of the

results. Europe, the euro zone and the debt crisis were the focus of the electoral campaign. Sauli Niinistö, like Pekka Haavisto (and Paavo Lipponen) defended the European Union and insisted on Finland's European establishment since its economy is extremely depen-

dent on its exports. "Finland has built itself a position in the world thanks to its membership of the EU and of the euro zone," repeats Sauli Niinistö. "This presidential election is a competition between supporters of a closed Finland that wants to return to our former currency, the mark, and the supporters of greater international cooperation and a more active role in the European Union as well as in the world," declared Pekka Haavisto, who recalled that a wide majority of the Finns wanted to keep the euro.

Conversely centrist Paavo Väyrynen campaigned on the return of the Finnish mark. Like Timo Soini, he said he was against Helsinki lending more money to Athens, believing that the Greek government is the only one responsible for the catastrophic situation the country finds itself in. "The Finns, who went through a very serious crisis at the start of the 1990's and who emerged from it alone, believe that the Greeks can do the same," explains Jan Sundberg, political expert of the University of Helsinki.

In Finland, the President of the Republic only has limited power. The Head of State is responsible for the foreign policy and defence (together with the government) but he has no power over domestic affairs. On 21st October last he also lost the initiative over European policy to the benefit of the government after a vote in the Eduskunta/Riksdag, the only chamber in Parliament which modified his powers. The country is now represented in the EU by its Prime Minister. Moreover any possible clashes between the Head of State and government are now decided upon by Parliament. These changes will enter into force on March 1st next, when the successor to Tarja Halonen will take office.

Political analysts believe that a victory on the part of Sauli Niinistö will relieve the pressure placed on the Finnish government for it to adopt a firmer position over the debt crisis. "The result of the first round is important. It affects political discussions relating to Europe's present political difficulties," says the political expert of the University of Helsinki, Tuomo Martikainen, who believes that the KOK candidate will win on 5th February. The Finnish government and the euro zone should agree on new rules to fund the European Stability Mechanism on 23rd January, which will run parallel

to the present euro zone rescue fund – the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) – which will enjoy an initial capital of 80 billion € and immediate liquidity of 620 billion €. Helsinki is the only capital of a euro zone country to challenge the new majority voting system of 85% (rather than unanimity), designed to overcome the opposition of the "small" countries and enable the guarantee of financial support to those which have lost the confidence of the markets. An agreement will enable the launch of the European Stability Mechanism in July next.

"I am not expecting new themes to debate during the campaign in the second round," stressed Sauli Niinistö. Conversely, Pekka Haavisto said that "this election showed that people are interested in other issues such as discrimination and inequality. These themes will also be important in the second round."

Paavo Väyrynen did not succeed in reaching the second round. The Social Democratic Party's result is a serious setback for this party that already failed to rise above the 20% mark in the most recent general elections on 17th April 2011 (19.1% of the vote). For the first time in the country's history "the left will not be represented in the second round of the presidential election. Paavo Lipponen, often believed to lie on the right of the political scale, struggled to distinguish itself from Sauli Niinistö during the entire electoral campaign."

As for the anti-Europeans, the campaign undertaken by the centrist candidate was an obstacle to Timo Soini, whose result, weak in comparison with that achieved by his party in the general elections on 17th April last, should not lead us to believe that the True Finns are on the decline, or even that the party is finished. "It is the first time that the True Finns have failed since 2006. They are turning into a party just like any other and they need to recover support," declared Ville Pernaa, director of the Centre for Parliamentary Studies of the University of Turku. Some eurosceptics chose to give their vote to Paavo Väyrynen in order to prevent Timo Soini from reaching the second round.

The Finnish presidential election is not decided by the candidates' programmes but rather their personalities. Political analyst Olavi Borg believes that Pekka Haavisto has little chance of beating Sauli Niinistö during a

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second round. "Most of the electorate finds it difficult to support a homosexual candidate," he said. "Sauli Niinistö's popularity will be even greater in the second round. Many people and notably the eldest will not vote for Pekka Haavisto" added Olavi Borg.

An opinion poll by the Taloustutkimus Institute and published by the daily Yle on 19th January last credited the Conservative Assembly's candidate with 64% of the vote and 22% for the ecologist if the second round brought the two men to run against one another.

Results of the 1st round of the presidential election on 22nd January 2011 in Finland

Turnout: 72.7%

Candidates	No. of votes won	% of votes won
Sauli Niinistö (Conservative Assembly, KOK)	1 131 127	37
Pekka Haavisto (Greens, VIHR)	573 872	18.8
Paavo Väyrynen (Centre Party, KESK)	536 731	17.5
Timo Soini (True Finns, PS)	287 405	9.4
Paavo Lipponen (Social Democratic Party, SPD)	205 020	6.7
Paavo Arhinmäki (Left Alliance, VAS)	167 359	5.5
Eva Biaudet (Swedish People's Party, SFP)	82 581	2.7
Sari Essayah (Christian Democratic Party, SKL)	75 755	2.5

Source : Finnish Justice Ministry

Sauli Niinistö easily wins the presidential election in Finland

**RESULTS
2nd turn**

As forecast in all of the polls Sauli Niinistö, the Conservative Assembly's candidate (KOK), the party of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen, easily won the second round of the presidential election on 5th February in Finland. He won 62.6% of the vote, against 37.4% for his rival Pekka Haavisto (Greens, VIHR). The latter, who won 18.8% of the vote on 22nd January last needed 1.5 million votes in order to hope to win in the second round. The choice was a difficult one since the more liberal voters, who mainly live in urban areas had already given him their support. One candidate in the first round Paavo Arhinmäki (Left Alliance, VAS) called for people to vote for him. The other five, including Paavo Lipponen (Social Democratic Party, SPD), spoke in favour of Sauli Niinistö.

Sauli Niinistö easily won in six of the country's provinces except for in the Åland Islands that lie between Finland and Sweden, where Pekka Haavisto won 60% of the vote. In Helsinki the two candidates scored almost equally: Sauli Niinistö only won 1,252 votes more than his rival out of

a total of 347,816 votes cast.

Turnout rose to 68.8%, i.e. the lowest rate ever recorded since 1950. It is down by 3.9 points in comparison with the first round on 22nd January last and by 8.4 points in comparison with the second round of the previous presidential elec-

tion on 29th January 2006. For the first time in the country's history turnout was lower in the presidential election, which is usually an extremely popular event and in which turnout is usually around 80%, than in the general election (70% of the Finns turned out to vote to renew their Parliament on 17th April 2011). According to Hanna Wass, a political expert from the University of Helsinki, the decline in turnout in the second round finds explanation in the closeness of the two candidates who were running and the lack of any real left-right opposition. 35.56% of the voters registered voted early.

"The President of the Republic has to understand that there are many different opinions and that he has to take all of them into consideration to be truly the president of the entire nation," declared Sauli Niinistö as his victory was announced. *"Finland has recovered its common sense. The Finns are no longer a frightened people, but courageous, open and tolerant. I am very happy about this,"* stressed Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen.

Sauli Niinistö's success can be explained by his credibility as former Finance Minister (1996-2003) at a time when socio-economic issues are the Finns' main concern. *"Sauli Niinistö represents real economic competence,"* indicates Tuomo Martikainen, professor of political science at the University of Helsinki, adding, *"he knows how to revive the country's economy and represents a guarantee in a time of crisis."* *"He is a pro-European moderate. In 25 years, he has acquired true renown and the confidence of his fellow countrymen"* indicated Lauri Karvonen, professor of political science at the University of Abo.

The second round of the presidential election was a battle of characters - both pro-European - and played more on the candidates' personality, rather than on their programmes. *"The major issues which normally divide candidates are absent from this presidential election,"* analysed Ville Pernaa, a political scientist from the University of Turku.

Aged 63, Sauli Niinistö comes from Salo (in the south west). A graduate of the University of Turku and a qualified lawyer he was elected MP in 1987. In 1994 he took the leadership of the Conservative Assembly (KOK) until 2001. In 1995, he was appointed Justice Minister in the government led by Paavo Lipponen (Social Democratic Party, SPD) before taking on the Finance portfolio one year later, a post he kept until 2003. He earned the confidence of his fellow countrymen by bringing the country out of a deep recession in the 1990's. *"It is one of the high points in his political career and people are grateful to him for this,"* stresses Ville Pernaa. Sauli Niinistö was the main coordinator in Finland's passage over from the mark to the euro. In the general elections on 18th March 2007 Sauli Niinistö was re-elected taking 60,498 votes, a record in a general election in Finland. He then became the leader of the Eduskunta/Riksdag (Parliament). In 2011, he did not stand in the general election saying that he wanted to prepare for the presidential. After a failed first attempt six years ago when he won 48.2% of the vote against the now outgoing President of the Republic Tarja Halonen, Sauli Niinistö has finally succeeded in rising to the supreme office. On 1st March next he will be putting an end of 30 years of social democrat rule by becoming the first conservative head of state since Juho Kusti Paasikivi (1946-1956). After the general elections on 17th April 2011, which showed Finland in a eurosceptic light, Sauli Niinistö's victory (but also Pekka Haavisto's presence in the second round) has, on the contrary, lent the country a pro-European, open image. The Finnish president has command over the country's foreign policy and its defence (together with the government) but has no competence over the country's domestic affairs. His powers were modified on 21st October last by a vote in Parliament which approved the decision to withdraw the initiative of the European policy from the Head of State to the benefit of government. This change will enter into force on March 1st next, the day on which Sauli Niinistö enters office.

Presidential Election Results of 22nd January and 5th February 2012 in Finland

Turnout: 72.7% (1st round) and 68.8% (2nd round)

Candidates	No. of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No. of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Sauli Niinistö (Conservative Assembly, KOK)	1 131 127	37	1 802 400	62.6
Pekka Haavisto (Greens, VIHR)	573 872	18.8	1 076 957	37.4
Paavo Väyrynen (Centre Party, KESK)	536 731	17.5		
Timo Soini (True Finns, PS)	287 405	9.4		
Paavo Lipponen (Social Democratic Party, SPD)	205 020	6.7		
Paavo Arhinmäki (Left Alliance, VAS)	167 359	5.5		
Eva Biaudet (Swedish People's Party, SFP)	82 581	2.7		
Sari Essayah (Democratic Christian Party, SKL)	75 755	2.5		

Source : Finnish Justice Ministry

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