

Olafur Ragnar Grimsson re-elected for a 5th mandate as Head of State in Iceland

Corinne Deloy

Results

Olafur Ragnar Grimsson was re-elected as Presidency of the Republic of Iceland on 30th June last. He won 52.78% of the vote and beat his main rival, a journalist from the state TV channel RUV, Thora Arnorsdottir, who won 33.16% of the vote, thereby failing in her bid to bring about change to this island in the north of Europe. Independent candidate Ari Trausti Gudmundsson won 8.64%, Herdis Thorgeirsdottir, chair of the European Jurists Association, 2.63%, Andrea Olafsdottir, chair of the Hagsmunasamtök heimilanna association (the Property Owners' Association), 1.8% and farmer Hannes Bjarnason 0.98%.

Nearly 2/3 of the 235,784 Icelanders turned out to vote (69%), a score up by 6.5 points in comparison with the last presidential election.

The Icelanders preferred continuity to change even though the presidential election on 30th June did herald an era of change, since previously the outgoing Head of State was necessarily re-elected if he stood for election. "Thora Arnorsdottir's result illustrates the gulf that exists between the popular classes and the intellectual elites in Icelandic society," declared Rosa Erlingsdottir, a political science professor at the University of Reykjavik.

Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, whose popularity had declined sharply in the polls in the wake of the serious economic crisis that struck the country in 2008 (Iceland just escaped bankruptcy), managed to improve his rating in the polls, notably by using his right to veto twice. On 2nd January last he refused to sign the Icesave Agreement law approved by parliament just a few days prior to that date, which planned for Reykjavik's reimbursement of a 3.8 billion euro debt to the Netherlands and the UK. The result of this was that a referendum was organised on 6th March 2010 in which the Icelanders rejected the Icesave agreement to a total of 93%. Nearly one year later on 20th February 2011, Mr Grimsson announced the organisation of another popular vote on the new Icesave Agreement that had been approved by MPs. On 9th April 58.9% of the electorate voted against the text. In his electoral campaign the President of the Republic repeated that his decision to use his right to veto and organise the referenda "enabled the unification of the Icelanders, gave power to the people and strengthened the latter's faith in democracy."

"Many people who had never voted for Olafur Ragnar Grimsson say they are ready to do so

because the President of the Republic stood up and defended Iceland against Icesave," stressed Bryndis Hlodversdottir, the dean of the University of Bifröst. "Thanks to this political manoeuvre Olafur Ragnar Grimsson has developed a reputation of being an independent, strong man who reassures the electorate in these times of uncertainty," indicated the sociologist of the University of Reykjavik, Thoroddur Bjarnason, who added that the confrontation between the outgoing Head of State and Thora Arnorsdottir was symbolic of the "implosion of a society whose economic collapse had reshaped the political landscape." "In the end we witnessed the bipolarisation of Icelandic society. On the one hand, on the left we now have extremely radical people who are demanding the introduction of increasingly direct democracy and who find the government's action inadequate in this area. On the other hand, on the right there are all of those who play down the 2008 economic crisis, qualifying it as an "upset" and who believe that the biggest problems are due to government decisions," said Thoroddur Bjarnason.

Olafur Ragnar Grimsson had already used his right to veto on 2nd June 2004 after the vote on the media law. This first presidential veto in the country's history hit the island like a thunderbolt. The law should have been submitted to referendum but the text was finally repealed on 22nd July 2004.

Alongside the position and the role of the President of the Republic, Iceland's bid to join the European Union was the second most important issue in the election on 30th June. The head of State is fiercely against it, whilst Thora Arnorsdottir supports it. Again the president of the Republic succeeded

Presidential election in Iceland

30th June 2012

in playing the nationalist card. During the entire campaign he used his experience to stand as the people's protector. "I think my experience and my knowledge will help to appease dissension, conflict and controversies that the country has to face better than any others," he declared.

Aged 69 and from Isafjordur, Olafur Ragnar Grimsson is a political science graduate from the University of Manchester in the UK, he was also the first Icelander to acquire a PhD in this discipline. Professor of Political Science at the University of Iceland, he directed the Icelandic TV/radio from 1966 to 1971. A member of the Young Progressives from 1966 to 1973, Mr Grimsson was elected MP in 1974 on a list put forward by the People's Alliance, a political party he chaired from 1987 to 1995.

Finance Minister from 1988 to 1991 in the government led by Steingrímur Hermannsson, he was elected President of the Republic for the first time on 29th June 1996 with 40.9% of the vote. He was re-elected to office in June 2000 without any vote

being organised, since no other candidate stood against him. In 2004 he faced two opponents, but was easily re-elected with 86.5% of the vote. In 2008 he was re-elected without an election taking place. On 30th June he was re-elected as head of State in an exceptional presidential election, which was unusual in that he faced five other candidates.

Olafur Ragnar Grimsson is therefore about to undertake his 5th presidential term in office in the Bessasthathir, the name of the Icelandic head of State's residence. Since its independence (17th June 1944) the country has had 5 presidents, 3 of whom (Asgeir Asgeirsson, 1952-1968, Kristjan Eldjarn, 1968-1980 and Vigdis Finnbogadottir, 1980-1996) undertook 4 terms in office. Olafur Ragnar Grimsson is the first to win his 5th mandate.

as well as the most urban and also the most qualified Icelanders. Ari Trausti Gudmundsson is due to win 10.5%, Herdis Thorgeirsdottir, 5.3% Andrea Olafsdottir, 1.7% and Hannes Bjarnson 0.7%.

Results of the Presidential Election on 30th June 2012 in Iceland

Participation : 69%

Candidates	No. of votes won	% of votes won
Olafur Ragnar Grimsson	101 155	52,78
Thora Arnorsdottir	63 997	33,16
Ari Trausti Gudmundsson	16 211	8,64
Herdis Thorgeirsdottir	5 366	2,63
Andrea Olafsdottir	4 013	1,80
Hannes Bjarnason	2 021	0,98

Source: <http://kosningasaga.wordpress.com/forsetakosningar/forsetakosningar-2012/>

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.