

European
Elections monitor

Sauli Niinistö easily wins the presidential election in Finland

from **Corinne Deloy**

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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 election 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

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

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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