

Kersti Kaljulaid elected President of the Republic of Estonia

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Kersti Kaljulaid was elected President of the Republic of Estonia on 3rd October by the 101 members of the Riigikogu, the only chamber of Parliament. The only candidate running, she won 81 votes. Her appointment to the supreme office is the conclusion of an electoral saga which almost led the country to a constitutional crisis.

Results

Everything started on 29th August last in Parliament. During the first round of voting the leader of the Riigikogu, Eiki Nestor (Social Democratic Party (SDE) came out ahead in the election with 40 votes, followed by former Education and Research Minister (2005-2007), Mailis Reps (Centre Party, K), (26 votes) and the independent candidate supported by the Pro-Patria Union-Res Publica (IRL) and the Free Party (EVA), Allar Joks (24 votes). The three candidates were therefore not even close to winning a 2/3 majority (i.e. 68 votes) necessary to be elected President of the Republic by the Riigikogu. The next day former European Commissioner for Transport (2010-2014), Administrative Affairs, Audit and Counter Fraud (2004-2010) and former Prime Minister (2002-2003), Siim Kallas (Reform Party, ER), replaced Eiki Nestor (in line with an agreement made between the Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party) and won 45 votes, Mailis Reps won 32 and Allar Joks, 21. The third and last round opposed Siim Kallas, who won 42 votes and Mailis Reps who won 26. There were 30 blank slips.

According to the voting procedures in the presidential election in Estonia, on 24th September the 334 members of the Electoral College (Valimiskogu), an organisation that brings together the 101 MPs and the members of the representative assemblies of the 213 local authorities in Estonia met to appoint the president. Apart from Siim Kallas and Mailis Reps,

who were automatically qualified to stand again in this new round of voting three other people were candidates: the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Marina Kaljurand, the leader of the Conservative Party (EKRE), Mart Helme and Allar Joks. The latter came out ahead in the vote with 83 votes beating Siim Kallas by two votes (81). Mailis Reps won 79, Marina Kaljurand 75 and Mart Helme, 16.

Siim Kallas and Allar Joks faced each other in the second round in which neither of them won the absolute majority. The Reform Party candidate and the Social Democratic Party won 138 votes and his adversary 134. 57 voting slips were blank and three were void.

"Allar Joks' surprising result during the Electoral College vote in which he was only four votes ahead of Siim Kallas is revealing: it shows how well Pro-Patria Union Res Publica can organise themselves, the discontent of the local elites regarding the Reform Party government, the opposition of the rural part of the country to the administrative reform etc.. If the Reform Party does not analyse what happened correctly it will soon be facing some real issues," stressed Tonis Saarts, a Professor in Political Science at the University of Tallinn after the vote of the Electoral College.

Hence on 25th September Estonia found itself in an unheard of position, since to date, the Electoral College had always managed to elect a head of State

Presidential election in Estonia 29th August, 24th September and 3rd October 2016

when it had had the vote, ie during every presidential election except for that on 29th August 2011 when Toomas Hendrik Ilves became the first Estonian president to have been appointed by Parliament since 1996, the year in which the present system to elect the Head of State was introduced.

The Estonian authorities therefore convened the Riigikogu on 3rd October in a bid to appoint the President of the Republic. *"We are now in a new situation in which we need new candidates,"* declared Toomas Hendrik Ilves. On 27th September the conference of leaders of the Riigikogu, comprising the leaders of the six political groups in Parliament and three members of the General Assembly decided to support the candidature of Kersti Kaljulaid as president

of the Republic. The latter indicated in a programme *Pealtnagija* on the channel ETV that she had already been offered the chance to stand at the beginning of the summer but that she had refused.

Aged 46, and from Tartu, Kersti Kaljulaid is a graduate in biology from the University of Tartu and also has an MBA, from the same establishment. She has occupied several posts in the financial sector and worked from 2004 until the beginning of 2016 at the European Court of Auditors which sits in Luxembourg.

Kersti Kaljulaid, is the first woman to fill the presidential seat in Estonia and will officially replace Toomas Hendrik Ilves on 10th October.

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