

Alar Karis, the new president of the Republic of Estonia

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RESULTS

Alar Karis was elected President of the Republic of Estonia on 31 August after the second round of voting by the 101 members of the Riigikogu, the single chamber of Parliament. He was the only candidate in the race and obtained the votes of 72 deputies, 4 more than the required 2/3 majority (68 votes). Alar Karis was supported by the two main political parties: the Centre Party (K), led by Jüri Ratas, and the Reform Party (ER) of Prime Minister Kaja Kallas.

Pro Patria (Isamaa, I) and the Social Democratic Party (SDE), which had not given any voting instructions in the first round, finally decided on 31 August to support Alar Karis.

The 19 members of the conservative People's Party (EKRE) chose not to participate in the vote. The party had wanted to present its own candidate in the person of Henn Polluaas, president of the Riigikogu, but had to give up because it could not secure the support of at least 21 MPs.

In the first round of voting on 30 August, Alar Karis received 63 votes, 5 less than necessary. 79 MEPs took part in the vote, 16 submitted blank ballots.

Alar Karis is 63 years old and from Tartu. He is the director of the National Museum in the same municipality. A graduate of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the Estonian University of Life Sciences, Alar Karis is a molecular geneticist and developmental biologist. After graduation, he became a lecturer at his alma mater. He then served as rector of the same university between 2003 and 2007 before being appointed rector of

the University of Tartu in 2007. In 2012, he was appointed Auditor General and in 2017, Director of the Estonian National Museum.

The new President of the Republic has said that he will work in the areas he knows best and that are closest to his heart, namely education, science and innovation. "Estonia must make it a priority to be an educated nation. We must set ourselves the goal of becoming the country with the most educated population, not just to be among the five most educated nations, but to be the most educated nation in the world. I think the prerequisites for that are there because if we look at our PISA results, Estonian young people are at the top of the ranking.

He has little experience of foreign policy, although this is an important part of the head of state's duties. He said he would follow the example of the outgoing president, Kersti Kaljulaid.

Finally, when asked about the method of electing the president, Alar Karis said that a debate should be held as soon as possible if the system is to be amended. "Discussions should be held now, not when we are on the eve of the next election," he said, stressing that he was not opposed to the current method of appointment, which is fully constitutional.

The Centre Party said it would table a bill to change the ballot to direct universal suffrage. For Jüri Ratas' party, the current system is not conducive to a real electoral campaign or debate on the challenges facing Estonia and what its goals should

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be. The Centre Party wants to submit its text to the Riigikogu at the beginning of the autumn session which starts mid September.

Alar Karis will officially take office and succeed Kersti Kaljulaid at Kadriorg Castle, the residence of the Head of State, on 11 October.

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