



Research Office
Legislative Council Secretariat

Fact Sheet

Overview of the Parliament of Finland

FSC16/18-19

1. Introduction

1.1 Finland is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party political system. The Parliament of Finland (Eduskunta in Finnish) is the unicameral legislature of Finland, comprising 200 Members returned from 13 electoral districts predominantly under proportional representation. The Parliament of Finland is responsible for enacting legislation, overseeing the government, approving the state budget, and considering European Union ("EU") matters. This fact sheet provides an overview of the Parliament in Finland, covering its major functions, election method, work of committees, and administration of the Parliament.

2. Overview and functions of the Parliament

2.1 The Parliament of Finland was established in 1906, when Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy under Russia. The first parliamentary election was held in the following year by universal and equal suffrage. Following the Russian Revolution, the Parliament proclaimed Finland an independent republic on 6 December 1917. Over the past few decades, the role of the Parliament has been strengthened through a series of reforms. In the 1990s, the committee system was aligned with the division of ministerial sectors, and there was rearrangement of parliamentary work with increased administrative support. In 2000, Finland's various constitutional laws including the Parliament Act were consolidated into the Constitution of Finland, thereby enhancing the Parliament's role as Finland's supreme organ of state.

2.2 The Constitution of Finland provides that the Parliament shall enact legislation and approve the state budget. In addition, it elects the Prime Minister¹ and oversees the government. The Parliament also ratifies major international agreements that are binding on Finland and influences EU affairs. The major functions of the Parliament are summarized below:

- (a) **Enacting legislation:** the Parliament can enact new legislation or amend existing legislation on the basis of a government proposal, a Member's motion or a citizen's initiative.² A proposed legislation goes through preliminary debate in plenary session, committee handling, and two readings before it is ratified by the President of Finland.³ Generally, it takes two to four months to consider a proposal, but major legislative projects can take years;
- (b) **Overseeing the government:** the Constitution safeguards the Parliament's right to receive the information it requires from the government. Members may call the government to account by submitting oral and/or written questions. In addition, an interpellation, which involves a debate in plenary session on confidence in the government regarding a particular issue, may be submitted with the backing of at least 20 Members.⁴ Besides, management of government finances is overseen by the Audit Committee;
- (c) **Approving the budget:** the Finnish government submits its budget proposal to the Parliament in September each year. Consideration of the budget begins with a preliminary debate before it is referred to the Finance Committee.⁵ Members may

¹ According to the Constitution, the Parliament elects the Prime Minister who is then appointed to his/her office by the President of Finland.

² Beginning from 1 March 2012, a Citizen's Initiative may be submitted for the Parliament's consideration provided that it has gathered at least 50 000 signatures from Finnish voters within a six month period.

³ If the President refuses to ratify, the concerned bill can be returned to the Parliament for approval or rejection. If the bill is approved by the Parliament again, it will enter into force without the need for ratification.

⁴ During the debate on interpellation, a vote of no confidence in the government may be proposed. A simple majority is required for the vote to pass.

⁵ For the purpose of considering the budget, the Finance Committee is divided into eight subcommittees with each responsible for a specific administrative sector. The Subcommittee for Tax Affairs considers the revenue side of the Budget as well as tax legislation, while the other subcommittees focus on expenditure. After committee-stage consideration, the Finance Committee issues a report for deliberation in plenary session.

also submit motions for changes which will be put to vote when the budget is considered in the plenary session; and

- (d) **Considering EU matters:** the Parliament participates in national-level preparation of decisions to be taken within EU. This includes amendments to national legislation as a result of EU directives. With the exception of foreign and security affairs,⁶ the handling of EU matters takes place in the Grand Committee whose position is politically binding on the government.

3. Election of the Parliament

3.1 The Parliament of Finland is composed of 200 Members returned from 13 electoral districts.⁷ Among these, one Member is elected from the electoral district of Åland⁸ by simple majority. The remaining 199 seats are allocated proportionally to the other 12 electoral districts according to the size of their population. The Ministry of Justice is the main authority overseeing the organization of election. In general, parliamentary elections are held once every four years on the third Sunday in April.⁹ However, the President of Finland may dissolve the Parliament based on the Prime Minister's initiative and after consulting various parliamentary groups.¹⁰

3.2 In each of the 12 electoral districts other than Åland, voters are presented with a list of candidates nominated by political parties.¹¹ During the election, voters cast their votes for an individual candidate instead of a political party. The number of seats received by each party is determined by the total number of votes gained by its candidates. The order in which the party's candidates are elected to these seats is determined by the number of individual votes they receive.

⁶ Matters pertaining to EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy are handled by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

⁷ In 2013, the Parliament voted to merge the electoral districts of North Savo and North Karelia into Savo-Karelia, and Kymi and South Savo into Southeast Finland. This resulted in the number of electoral districts decreasing from 15 to 13.

⁸ Åland is a Swedish-speaking autonomous region in Finland.

⁹ If the day of election falls on Easter or the Sunday following Easter, the election will be re-scheduled to the preceding Sunday.

¹⁰ The last dissolution of the Parliament took place in 1975.

¹¹ Candidates may also be nominated by a constituency association which may be established by a minimum of 100 eligible voters in the same electoral district.

3.3 The last parliamentary election was held in April 2019. The opposition Social Democratic Party won 40 seats (17.7% of votes) to become the largest party in the Parliament, followed by the right-wing Finns Party which won 39 seats (17.5%), the National Coalition Party which won 38 seats (17.0%) and the Centre Party winning 31 seats (13.8%). The result marked the first time in a century that no party won more than 20% in a general election.

3.4 Following the election, a centre-left coalition government led by the Social Democratic Party¹² was formed in June 2019 with Mr **Antti Rinne** appointed as Prime Minister. The Speaker of the Parliament in the current parliamentary year is Mr **Matti Vanhanen**.¹³ The Speaker's Council has also been formed by the Speaker, two Deputy Speakers and the committee chairpersons to lead the parliamentary activities and work.

3.5 The current composition of the Parliament of Finland by parliamentary group is as follows:

- (a) Social Democratic Party (40 Members);
- (b) Finns Party (39 Members);
- (c) National Coalition Party (38 Members);
- (d) Centre Party (31 Members);
- (e) The Greens (20 Members);
- (f) Left Alliance (16 Members);
- (g) Swedish People's Party (10 Members);
- (h) Christian Democrats (5 Members); and
- (i) Liike Nyt ("Movement Now") (1 Member).

¹² In addition to the Social Democratic Party, the coalition government also comprises the Centre Party, the Greens, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party.

¹³ A new Speaker along with two Deputy Speakers are elected once per year, during the first plenary session of each parliamentary session.

4. Committees

4.1 A committee is a key place where Members can influence matters. After the preliminary debate in plenary session, a government proposal is referred to the appropriate committee. The Parliament of Finland comprises the **Grand Committee** and **16 permanent Special Committees**. The Grand Committee, consisting of 25 Members and 13 alternate Members, is mainly responsible for scrutinizing EU affairs, whereas Special Committees consider government bills, legislative initiatives, government reports and other matters through expert hearings and debate. The composition of each committee corresponds to the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups. Most Special Committees have 17 Members and nine alternate Members.

4.2 Each committee deals with matters that fall within the scope of its corresponding ministry. For instance, the **Education and Culture Committee**¹⁴ deals with matters which come under the Ministry of Education and Culture, covering training, science, art, cultural activities, sports, youth work, copyright, and financial aid for students.¹⁵ After the committee stage, a committee report will be prepared with an opinion formed for consideration in plenary session which is held four times a week. Committee meetings are not open to the public. However, committee reports, statements and minutes are public documents.

5. Administration of the Parliament

5.1 The administration of the Parliament of Finland is carried out by the **Parliamentary Office**, which is overseen by the Chancellery Commission. The Chancellery Commission is a special body comprising the Speaker, two Deputy Speakers, four Members chosen by the Parliament and their alternate

¹⁴ The other 15 Special Committees are the Constitutional Law Committee; Foreign Affairs Committee; Finance Committee; Audit Committee; Administration Committee; Agriculture and Forestry Committee; Commerce Committee; Committee for the Future; Defence Committee; Employment and Equality Committee; Environment Committee; Legal Affairs Committee; Social Affairs and Health Committee; Transport and Communications Committee; and Intelligence Supervision Committee.

¹⁵ Ms Paula Risikko of the National Coalition Party is currently the Chairperson and Ms Eeva-Johanna Eloranta of the Social Democratic Party is the Vice Chairperson of the Committee.

Members. In particular, the Chancellery Commission decides on the Parliament's annual budget proposal and determines how the Parliament's facilities are allocated.

5.2 The Parliamentary Office is headed by the Secretary-General elected by the Parliament, and comprises six departments in the fields of legislative work, committee work, international affairs, communications, information and library services, and parliamentary security. The Central Office and Committee Secretariat provide secretariat support for plenary session and committees respectively. Relevant support services are also provided by the Administrative and Service Department, International Department, Information and Communication Department, and Security Department. There are currently some 450 staff members employed as civil servants under the Parliamentary Office. At present, Ms **Maija-Leena Paavola** is the Secretary-General of the Parliament.

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