

OPAL Country Reports

The Finnish Parliament and EU Affairs

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OPAL Country Report on the Finnish Parliament¹

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I. General Position of Parliament in the Constitutional Balance of the Member State: Constitutional and institutional factors	
This section looks at the role of Parliament in the political system, to help us understand the relative power position of the legislature.	
1.1	What is the type of government in the political system of your member state? (i.e. parliamentary or semi-presidential)
	Finland is a semi-presidential country, but recent constitutional reforms enacted since the late 1980s (particularly the unified constitution which entered into force in 2000) have transformed Finland from a president-led polity towards a more parliamentary system of government. The president's role is nowadays essentially limited to co-directing foreign policy together with the government.
1.2	Is it a uni- or bicameral Parliament? If bicameral, is one house dominant or are both equally strong? Please briefly explain.
	Unicameral parliament (Eduskunta)
1.3	Is the state federal, decentralized or unitary? If applicable, is it a form of asymmetrical federalism?
	Unitary state, but Åland Islands have a special status as an autonomous region
1.4	Briefly describe the electoral system, if applicable, for each chamber.
	The 200 members of the Eduskunta are elected for a four-year term. The country is divided into one single-member and 14 multi-member electoral districts, with the Åland Islands entitled to one seat. Each district is a separate subunit and there are no national adjustment seats. The d'Hondt method is used in allocating seats to parties. The voters choose among individual candidates who are placed on the party lists in alphabetical order.
1.5	What (f)actors can prevent the parliament agreeing on EU legislation and/or treaty reform? (e.g. a constitutional court, or public referenda on questions of EU integration)
	The president could until the 2012 constitutional reform veto or at least strongly influence domestic processing of Treaty reforms. After the 2012 reform, the Treaty reform process belongs almost exclusively to the domain of the government and the parliament (although the next round of Treaty revision will show how the new system works in practice). For more details, see Raunio, Tapio (2012): Semi-presidentialism and European integration: lessons from Finland for

¹ This country report provides some basic data that has been collected in the context of the research for a chapter to be published in C. Heffler, C. Neuhold, O. Rozenberg, J. Smith & W. Wessels (Eds.). (forthcoming in 2014). *The Palgrave Handbook of National Parliaments and the European Union*. London: Palgrave, Macmillan.

	constitutional design. <i>Journal of European Public Policy</i> 19:4, 567-584.
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2. General Position of Parliament in the Constitutional Balance of the Member State: Political Factors

This section is about the basic political factors which might influence parliament's strength in relation to the government.

2.1	What is the type of government after the most recent elections e.g. single party, minority, coalition, oversized coalition government?		
	The current 'six pack' government, formed after the 2011 elections, is an oversized coalition and brings together six parties: National Coalition, Social Democrats, Left Alliance, Green League, Swedish People's Party and Christian Democrats.		
2.2	When were the most recent general elections and what were the results? Could you please give a short list of the parliamentary groups, their no. of seats in parliament and ideological position?		
	Latest election:	17.4.2011	
	Name of the party	No. and percentage of seats in parliament	Ideological position (e.g. Communist, left liberal, socialist, liberal, right liberal, conservative, christian democrat, extreme right, ethnic minority or regionalist party)
	National Coalition	44 (22 %)	Conservative / centre-right
	Social Democrats	42 (21 %)	Social democratic / centre-left
	The Finns	39 (19,5 %)	Populist
	Centre	35 (17,5 %)	Agrarian / centre-right
	Left Alliance	14 (7 %)	Left
	Green League	10 (5 %)	Green
	Swedish People's Party	10 (5 %) – the representative of the Åland Islands included	Ethnic minority
	Christian Democrats	6 (3 %)	Christian
2.3	How polarized was parliamentary debate over ratification of the Lisbon Treaty? Which parliamentary party groups supported and which opposed ratification?		
	The debates over the Constitutional Treaty / Lisbon Treaty were rather moderate and subdued, with little polarization or actual opposition to the Treaties. In the Eduskunta the Lisbon Treaty was approved by a comfortable majority (151-27). Most of the Left Alliance and Christian Democrats' MPs and all MPs from The Finns voted against the Treaty.		

3. New Provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on Direct Contact with EU Institutions

The Lisbon Treaty provides national parliaments with new opportunities for direct contact with the EU institutions. This section addresses the incorporation of the new Lisbon provisions into national law and concrete procedures. Questions 6.3 to 6.5 investigate in how far these procedures have been used.

3.1.	<p>Have there been any regulations adopted by your member state to incorporate the new powers that are entrusted to the national parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon? If so, please list the regulations in their appropriate categories:</p> <p>a. Constitutional provisions</p> <p>b. Legal provisions - Statutory provisions</p> <p>c. Parliamentary Standing Orders</p> <p>d. Other (please specify)</p> <p>Is this process complete or ongoing?</p>
	c. Parliamentary standing orders (complete)
3.2.	What exactly are the rules (i.e. parliamentary bodies involved, procedure, regional parliament's involvement, cooperation in bicameral systems) for...
3.2. i	The "Political Dialogue" with the Commission
	(see 3.2. ii)
3.2. ii	The Early Warning Mechanism (EWM)
	The implementation of the EWM has not necessitated any real reforms in the Eduskunta as the subsidiarity check is integrated into the standard model of EU scrutiny. Sectoral committees can notify the Grand Committee of possible violations of the subsidiarity principle, with the EAC then investigating the matter. The submission of a reasoned opinion to the EU institutions does, however, require a plenary decision based on a report from the Grand Committee. The Grand Committee consults the government when producing its report.
3.2. iii	The "Passarelle clause"
	Initiatives falling under the "Passarelle clause" are essentially processed according to the standard model of legislative scrutiny. The bill is forwarded to the Grand Committee and/or the Foreign Affairs Committee, which reports to the plenary. The plenary decides the issue by simple majority.
3.2. iv	The action of annulment before ECJ on breach with the subsidiarity principle (What quota of MPs is needed to enforce the action of annulment?)
	The plenary decides on taking the issue to to the ECJ (by a simple majority).
3.2. v	Accession of new member states to the EU
3.3.	How actively does the parliament engage in the political dialogue and "early warning mechanism" with the Commission?
	The Eduskunta has adopted a very cautious approach to the "political dialogue" and the EWM.

	<p>The Eduskunta has also expressed its concerns that national parliaments may end up spending their scarce resources on EWM and the political dialogue instead of focusing on actual government scrutiny. Overall, the Eduskunta has emphasized that it participates in EU governance through controlling the Finnish government, not through direct links with EU institutions. The Eduskunta has also underlined that there is only one Finnish position, with the government representing Finland.</p> <p>In 2010 the Eduskunta submitted one opinion under the political dialogue. In 2011 the Eduskunta submitted a total of two opinions, with one of them falling under the EWM.</p>
3-4	Has parliament ever threatened to bring a legislative act to the ECJ because of subsidiarity concerns?
	No
3-5	<p>If applicable to your member state, how does parliament proceed on the ratification of:</p> <p>a. Treaty Establishing the European Stability Mechanism, signed 2 Feb 2012</p> <p>b. Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, signed 2 March 2012</p>
	<p>a. The Eduskunta approved TESM on 21 June 2012.</p> <p>b. Government bill on the Treaty will be introduced in the Eduskunta in September / October 2012.</p>