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FINLAND

I. Constitution, government, and administration of Finland

Background

Finland is a northern European country, neighbouring Sweden in the west, Norway in the north, Russia in the east and Estonia in the south. The area is around 337 000 square kilometres. The north-south distance is some 1 165 km and the east-west distance some 550 km as its furthest. Some 65% of the territory is covered with forest, and around 10% is swamps. Arable land covers some 8% of the total land area. There are a total of 187,888 lakes in Finland. Finland has the largest archipelago in Europe, which includes also the semi-autonomous province of Åland.

The population of Finland is some 5 236 000 (end 2004). The population density is 17 persons per square kilometre. The share of the population living in urban areas (“densely populated areas”) is some 81%. These urban areas are on an average quite sparsely built; the population density is some 750 inhabitants per land square kilometre.

Because of late urbanisation, the building stock is new: 85% of all existing buildings have been constructed since 1950. Despite sparsely-built settlements, Finns live quite confined in their dwellings: the average living space per person is 35 square metres. The average size of a household is 2.3 people. Most common residential buildings are detached houses and blocks of flats, which are almost equally represented (40% and 44%, respectively, of all dwellings in 2003). About two-thirds of the housing stock consists of owner-occupied homes. The summer cottage is an integral part of the Finnish way of life: there are some 466 000 summer cottages (2003), and 46% of the Finns over the age of 15 have a summer cottage in their use for free (e.g. owned by their parents).

The economic system in Finland is based on a market economy. The GDP is some 28 640 € per capita (2004).

I. Constitution, government, and administration of Finland

1. Constitutional System

General description and key data of the constitutional system

The Constitution of Finland affirms Finland's status as a sovereign Republic. The provision on state sovereignty must under the present conditions be seen in relation to the international obligations binding on Finland, and especially to the membership in the European Union.

The political system of Finland is republican parliamentary democracy based on the competition among political parties. According to the main principle of the Constitution of Finland, the sovereign power lies with the people represented by the Parliament. The power of decision has been divided between the Parliament, the Government and the President of the Republic. The Parliament has the position as the highest organ of government and the Government has to enjoy its confidence. The delegation of power takes place in accordance with the Western European model of parliamentarism. The regular functional separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers prevails in Finland. The legislative powers are exercised by the Parliament, which also decides on State Finances. The governmental powers are exercised by the President of the Republic and the Government and the judicial powers by independent Courts of law. The rule of law is included in the Constitution: the exercise of public power has always to be based on law.

History of the constitutional system

The historical roots of Finnish Constitution stretch back to the period of being the easternmost part of the Kingdom of Sweden (until 1809) and the subsequent period as an autonomous grand duchy under the Russian Czar (1809-1917). On December 6th, 1917 Parliament proclaimed Finland an independent republic. Basically, the key elements of parliamentary organisations have remained unchanged for the past 100 years.

Finland's dependence on the autocratically ruled Russia delayed the necessary reforms of participatory rights and citizens' freedoms. On the other hand, the construction of the state and the nation proceeded substantially during the autonomy. Thus, at the independence of the country in 1917 most of the structures needed for the self-dependent political system already existed. These comprised, for instance, local communities with self-government, state regional government, a national legislature, a state government, the agencies and organs of central administration, courts of law and political parties. Also the development of the society of citizens and sense of national and cultural identity were needed for the change.

Between 1917 and 1922 the newly independent state adopted the Constitution Act and the other necessary constitutional legislation. The established power structure had been based on the domination of the ruler and it had become an important part of political culture of Finland. However, also the competing, democratic thought spread out from Europe and reached Finland. These ideas concretised institutionally in a republican constitution and parliamentary system of government. As regards to the models of democracy, the conservatives emphasized ensuring a sovereign and strong government, with consensual democracy supporting it, but supreme executive power being wielded by a monarch or a president. For the liberals and the socialists, in contrast, the leading principle was self-government by the people, which was believed to be the only way that democracy and solid government could be truly ensured.

The search for a balance between the presidential and the parliamentary focus of authority became the central issue of constitutional practice. The Constitution of 1919 did not dissolve these contradictions, but the different views were both built into it. With certain logical

inconsistence the political system came to comprise many dualities: rigidity and flexibility, authoritarianism and pluralism, centralisation and decentralisation. The resulted new system can be described as a mixed constitution. It was mainly because of its flexibility and capability to satisfy very variable expectations of authority, that the Constitution could withstand eight decades without ever being seriously threatened. The written Constitution of Finland allowed the cycles of political life to direct and redirect the actual practices of government. During the decades they were fluctuating between parliamentarism and the powerful position of the president – between the primarily parliamentary and the primarily presidential interpretation of the system of government. Accordingly, in the constitutional practice there was need for the continuous reconciliation of competing legitimacies and the active avoidance of conflicts.

At the first years of independence parliamentary interpretation of the constitution dominated the constitutional practice. During the decades after World War II Finnish democracy could be characterised as semi-presidential. In this form of distribution of power, both The President and the Government, dependent as it is on the confidence of parliament, were truly wielding power. Especially the long term in office of Urho Kekkonen (1956-81) saw the increase of the influence of the head of the state in foreign affairs and in domestic policy alike. Personifying the foreign policy of the country to a single leader made it easier to manage Finland's sensitive relationship to the Soviet Union. The relaxation of geopolitical tensions lowered the profile of the presidency, and in other respects too the competence of the parliamentary government strengthened again during the term of the following president, Mauno Koivisto (1982-94). Gradually the idea of parliamentary government solidified. The prime minister has assumed the role of an active leader, and the parliament has modernised its internal functions and intensified its supervision of the administration.

During the first fifty years of Finnish independence there was little pressure or need for any amendments to the Constitution act. In 1970s the process of broader comprehensive reform of the constitutional legislation as a whole was launched but it became clear that comprehensive reform was not a realistic proposition at that time. The piecemeal reform measures were given an attention instead, and there have been numerous amendments to Finland's constitutional legislation since the 1980s. The provisions on the holding of consultative referenda were added and the changes in the status of president were executed. The indirect form of electing the President via an Electoral College was first replaced by a system which combined the Electoral College with direct election, and finally by a system of straightforward direct popular election.

The stability of the Finnish constitution has been based on the arrangement, where the parliamentary and the presidential focal points of authority remained essentially on different levels. Finnish system of government can be described as a diarchy, with a "grey area" between the competencies of the two main operators – the president and the prime minister. When certain division of tasks, and a difference in the level of operations existed, the whole arrangement could however be subjected to a lot of fluctuation but still remain relatively solid and conflict of the legitimacies and collisions could be avoided. The presidency as an institution enjoyed strong traditional and constitutional legitimacy, while the parliamentary structure got its legitimacy from the popular mandate.

During the 1990s the situation changed, especially the institution of Presidency underwent a transition. In 1994 the direct election of the president was carried out for the first time. This reinforced the legitimacy of the presidency based on the immediate support of the people and reduced, on the other hand, the traditional and constitutional legitimacy. The change can be assumed to have at least indirectly strengthened the President's position in relation to other organs of government, but at the same time, he entered the same competition for power as the party leaders and also he had to secure his mandate by continuous activity. In foreign policy the problem of competing legitimacies arose latest at the accession of Finland to the EU, when the arrangements were being laid down for decision making in European

affairs. Changes in constitutional legislation were in part motivated by a request to secure the position of parliament within the on-going process of European integration.

The reforms that were made especially since 1980s had adjusted the powers of Parliament, The President and the Government in order to strengthen Parliament's position as the highest organ of government and improve its scope of action. An underlying reason was the wish to prevent the reoccurrence of the semi-presidential model of government. The accumulated effect of the various partial reforms corresponds rather well to the goal of providing a balance between the powers of the legislature and the executive. However, at the same time the pressure to the more fundamental redistribution of power grew.

The reform of the constitution

The question emerged, whether the Finnish constitution could any longer be reasonable developed through piecemeal reform of the separate constitutional laws. The need for clarity and internal consistency, in particular, suggested abandoning the system of several constitutional laws and gathering all constitutional provisions into a single, integrated Constitution act. Alongside with the goal to integrate and update the constitutional legislation was also the need of strengthening the role of Parliament in the Finnish system of Government. The bases and objectives of the constitutional reform were numerous but the emphasis was given to the limited reform without intervening to the foundations of the political system of Finland.

The constitution 2000 Working Group of experts concluded that the most important questions of constitutional law to be addressed in the reform were the reduction of the scope of constitutional regulation, the development of relations between the highest organs of government, the clarification of questions of power and responsibility in international affairs and the constitutional recognition of EU-membership, retroactive supervision of the constitutionality of legislation, the use of exceptive laws and the system ensuring the legal responsibility of Government ministers.

The Constitution had divided into two main instruments, the Constitution act and the Parliament act. There was regulatory framework for governmental authority and, separately from it, there was the provisions covering legislature. Viewed internationally, the Finnish system of four constitutional laws was exceptional. The new constitutional instrument was unified in compliance with the continental model. Finland's first genuinely comprehensive constitutional reform was ready to come into effect after the Parliament approval on June 4, 1999 and the ratification by the President of the Republic on June 11. The new Constitution of Finland entered into force on 1 March 2000.

Main specifics of the constitutional system

The foundations of the Finnish Constitution remained essentially unchanged by the new law, but it increased the parliamentary features of Finnish government and especially the real authority of the Parliament. The Constitution defines the fundamental principles and constitutional rights, the most important organs of government – Parliament, The President of the Republic and the Government – , their organisational structure and the way they take their decisions. Also the basic functions of the state are specified: legislation, state finances, international relations, administration of justice, supervision of legality, administration and defence. Bringing together the relevant relating constitutional provisions under their own chapter, the structure of the new Constitution also reflects the fundamental increase in the international affairs as a result of the on-going process of European integration and of internationalization in general.

The civil rights and liberties

Finnish constitution guarantees the civil rights and liberties. The emphasis is given to the guarantees of freedom and rights of the individual and to the right of the individual to participate and influence public affairs. The fundamental values integrated in the constitution are the inviolability of human dignity, individual freedom, democratic participation and personal security. The basic rights and liberties are applied to all persons within the scope of the Finnish legal system, regardless of citizenship. They include e.g. legal equality, freedom of expression and right of access to information, freedom of religion and conscience, freedom of assembly and freedom of association and the right to privacy. Electoral and participatory rights cover every Finnish citizen and every foreigner permanently resident in Finland, who has reached eighteen years of age. Everyone have the right to basic education free of charge.

Two official languages are spoken in Finland: Finnish and Swedish. The both national languages may be used in contacts with the authorities, and cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and the Swedish-speaking populations of the country should be provided for on an equal basis. About 6 500 Sami live in the northern parts of the Finland. The Sami as well as the Roma and the other groups have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

The most important organs of the government, their organisational structure and main functions

According to the three-way division of the power, the Parliament holds the power of legislation and decides on State budget, while executive power is shared between the President of the Republic and the Government. They also have some tasks involving legislative power. Independent courts hold the power of jurisdiction. In accordance with the general principle of parliamentarism, the Government must enjoy the trust of Parliament. Normally no conflicts arise between Parliament and the Government, or the President and Parliament. A Conflict between Parliament and the Government may lead to the Government's fall. A Representative may address an oral or written question to a minister and interpellation tests the degree of confidence that the Government enjoys among the members of Parliament. Usually they do not threaten the Government and after a Parliament's discussion about the reply of the Government and the subsequent vote of confidence the Government may continue in office.

The reform of the Constitution gave emphasis to the parliamentary aspect of the Finnish political system. It strengthened the Parliament's position in relation to the Government and, on the other hand, the role of the Government has become stronger in both national administration and EU matters in relation to the role of the President.

The Parliament

The Finnish Parliament is a unicameral legislative body and a multi-party forum for fundamental national decisions consisting of 200 members, representatives of people. At its birth in 1906, the Finnish Diet (Eduskunta) was not a very typical one. It was unicameral and elected by universal suffrage, including women too. Nowadays representatives are elected by direct, proportional and secret ballot amongst the candidates nominated by parties and groups of voters. Everyone entitled to vote (excluding the President, high-ranking legal officials and members of the armed forces) may strive for the candidacy. Parliamentary elections are held in every fourth years. In recent years about 70 % of the Finns entitled to vote have used their right.

In the Finnish constitution the parliament has the status as the highest organ of the state. Its three main functions are to enact laws; to decide on the state budget; and to supervise the government and oversee the realisation of the decisions made. The Government submits annual reports to Parliament on its activities and on actions taken on the grounds of the

Parliament's decisions. Parliament approves also the treaties and other international obligations that contain provisions of a legislative nature or otherwise significant.

Compared to other countries, Finnish Members of Parliament enjoy an exceptionally wide and unrestricted freedom to speak. The Parliament takes decisions in plenary sessions, which are open to public as well as the records of the parliamentary sessions. Decisions are made by voting – in principle with free mandate, but in practice it is unusual to vote against the party line. The members of parliament have wide discretion to propose amendments and new initiatives and working in committees, preparing the matters to be decided by Parliament, is an important part of the work of Members of the Parliament. The committees, where the legislative work takes place, comprise the Grand Committee (responsible for EU matters) and 14 other committees representing various fields. The composition of the committees reflects the strength of each party in Parliament.

The Government has a major role in preparing the proposals for legislation. The complicated process of passing a law usually begins with the government placing a bill before Parliament. Parliament has an independent right to submit legislative proposals, but in practice most decisions taken in Parliament are based on Government proposals. Parliament has no official machinery for making or preparing proposals and the proposals of Government tend to be better prepared than the proposals of individual members of parliament. An act adopted by parliament is submitted to the President of the republic for confirmation. The Government prepares also the national budget and the changes made to the budget in Parliament tend to be marginal.

The Government

The Government refers to the Cabinet of Finland consisting of the Prime Minister and the ministers. It also refers to a decision making body, which consists of the Government plenary session and the ministries. Government produces material to Parliament for basis for its decisions carrying out its preparatory function. As an executive body Government is also liable for enforcement of parliamentary decisions. It shares the executive power and the responsibility for the direction of foreign policy with the President.

One of the most important changes introduced by the new Constitution took place in the formation of the Government. The focus shifted towards stronger position of Parliament and powers of the president were limited. After parliamentary elections the parliamentary groups negotiate and agree on the formation of a new government. The Parliament elects the Prime Minister and the President appoints her/him. The other ministers the President appoints on the basis of a nomination by the Prime Minister. When Government has been formed, it presents its political programme to Parliament. The political parties involved play the main role in the formation, functions and dissolution of the Government. The Government has to report continually to Parliament on what it is doing and where it is going but on the other hand, the Parliament is highly dependent on the bills government submits to it. It can be said that the Government controls the day-to-day political agenda.

The Government (the Council of Ministers) comprises the Prime Minister and at most 17 Ministers. The ministers head their ministries and the spheres of competence of the ministries. There are 13 ministries, including the prime minister's office, the most important of which having two ministers. Junior ministers or political state secretaries, common to many countries, do not feature in the Finnish system. Most ministers have a double role as a member of parliament and as a minister. It is usual, that the leaders of the parties forming the Government also act as ministers. In recent years from three to five parties have been represented in Government. In spite of their political heterogeneity, Governments have been very stable. After parliamentary elections the Government resigns.

The members of the Government work both in the ministry which they have been appointed and in the Government. Each ministry is responsible for the preparation of matters within its field of competence and for the proper functioning of administration though administrative issues in principle belong to the Government as a whole. The Government convenes for Government plenary sessions; Presidential sessions, over which the president presides; and Government evening sessions, which are informal occasions to prepare matters for discussion. There are also more limited preparatory ministerial committees. The statutory Cabinet Committees are the Cabinet Committee on foreign and security policy, the Cabinet committee on European Union Affairs, The Cabinet Finance Committee and the Cabinet Committee on Economic Policy each of which consists of the key ministers from the various party groups. The president may attend meetings of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign and Security Policy. Additionally there are ad hoc ministerial committees. The ministerial committees are very significant as specific preparation and conciliation forums for the settlement of politically loaded question – especially for the coalition governments with four or five parties.

The Prime Minister heads the work of the Government and oversees the preparation and consideration of matters that come within the mandate of the Government. Chairing the plenary sessions of the Government and statutory Cabinet Committees is a duty of the Prime Minister. He or she also monitors the implementation of the Government programme and coordinates the preparation and consideration of issues to be decided in the European Union. In the role of political leader of the Government the Prime Minister is responsible for reconciling the differing views on Government policy held by the various groups presented. The new Constitution has strengthened the position of the Prime Minister.

The President of the Republic

The President of the republic is elected directly by the people. Candidates nominated by parties and groups of voters participate in the first round of elections. A second round is arranged if no candidate receives a majority of the votes. The candidates in the run-off are the two who received most of the votes in the first round. After the election the President steps out from everyday party politics and takes the role of “neutral” head of the state. President is voted for six years and the same person can be elected for a maximum of two consecutive terms of office. Since 1982 all the presidents have come from the social democratic party. In 2000 Tarja Halonen became Finland’s first female president.

The President exercises supreme executive power in conjunction with the Government. The president has traditionally had considerable power in the area of foreign policy, which he or she directs together with the Government. The presidential acts are based on preparations by and cooperation with the Government. Under the constitutional reform of 2000, the President’s powers in other political areas were limited. The status of the President is now less based on constitutional authority and more on personal authority. President has an important role as a support of the Government, a moderator in conflicts and a mirror of the popular opinion. The power to appoint senior civil servants has still potential of political significance. The President enjoys extensive powers of appointment: he or she appoints the Prime Minister elected by Parliament and the ministers proposed by the Prime Minister. Interaction between the President and the Parliament is limited to certain state ceremonies. The President has the right, upon the reasoned proposal of the Prime Minister, having consulted the parliamentary groups, and while Parliament is in session, order the holding of premature parliamentary election. This has happened seven times since 1917.

The President may decide whether bills should be placed before Parliament and approves the acts passed by Parliament as well as the State budget. The president may go against the majority opinion of the Government or refuse to sign a law. Usually the visible conflict with Government does not occur. The President decides on the issuance of the draft bill in the Presidential sessions of the Government. If the President does not approve the draft bill,

he or she can return it for redrafting. On the second reading the President has to issue the bill on the basis of the cabinet's new draft. Parliament determines the final content of all acts, it can amend or reject Government bills. An Act adopted by Parliament is submitted to the President of the Republic for confirmation, who must decide on ratification within three months of receiving the act. If the President does not confirm the Act it is returned to Parliament. Parliament reconsiders the act and can readopt it without material alterations with a majority of votes cast. The act will then enter into force without ratification. Unfinished process is carried over to the next parliamentary session unless parliamentary elections intervene. On average once a year president has refused to sign a law.

Courts of law and supervision of legality

The judicial administration provides legal security, which is a fundamental right of the people. Judicial power lies with independent courts of law. They decide on compliance with law in individual cases. The independency of the courts of law means that they are bound only by the law, that is in force and no external body can intervene in their decision-making. Like in other Nordic countries the courts are divided into general courts and administrative courts considering administrative issues.

The district courts deal with criminal and civil cases. Their decisions can normally be appealed in a court of appeal. The decisions of the courts of appeal, then, can be appealed in the Supreme court, provided that the Supreme Court grants leave to appeal. The decisions of the administrative courts can be appealed in the Supreme Administrative court. In addition there are certain special courts.

The primary control of constitutionality of legislation is the advance evaluation done by the Constitutional Law Committee during the progress of the bill through the Parliament. This internationally quite exceptional control consists of the Committee issuing statements on the constitutionality of the bills and other matters submitted to it. Also their relation to the international human rights treaties is controlled.

The main instruments for the supervision of legality are high officers of the law; the Chancellor of Justice of the Government, appointed by President, and the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Their briefs are to a great degree congruent. Practically the Chancellor of Justice is specially charged with the supervision of the legality of the official actions of the Government and the President of the Republic.

Fundamental principles of the political and the administrative system

Tiihonen (2003, 5) names four key features framing the legal and administrative culture of Finland. As first he highlights the strong role of the state and the legitimacy and acceptance it enjoys among the citizens. The government owns substantial economic assets and the public expects high standards of social, environmental and consumer protection, and is ready to finance the broad social welfare system. State still remains the major provider of products and services and continues to regulate important economic sectors though some important structural reforms have occurred. They were given an impetus by an economic crisis at the end of the 1980s and the accession to the European Union in 1995.

Secondly, governance and regulatory practices are characterised by consensus building, informality, collegiality, gradualism and often corporatist attitudes. Widespread participation in decision making, a search for consensus among coalition parties, informal procedures, institutionalised power sharing amongst government, employees and enterprises and a preference for making changes gradually are distinguishing features of Finnish political system. The roots of the consensual pathos can be tracked back to the many crises through which the nation has passed and that must have been met with joint forces. Corporatist attitudes still prevail in policy and rule-making but according to Tiihonen, the change is

underway. For more than 25 years government, employers associations and the labour unions have co-operated to shape economic policy but it is seen as necessary to adapt the system in order to cope with rapid changes in the external environment, e.g. European integration and wider globalisation. Thirdly Tiihonen points out the importance of the rule of law in Finland's history and culture explaining a strong legalism as an enduring feature of Finnish governing system to this day. Fourth, Finland favours a decentralised executive, where regulatory powers are devolved to ministers, official bodies and municipalities. Finnish ministries are highly autonomous, while the centre of government (i.e. the cabinet and cabinet secretariat) is relatively weak.

Division and interlinkage of the political and the administrative system

As in other parliamentary systems the three-way division of powers generally determines the divisions and interlinkages of the political and the administrative system of Finland. Still hardly anywhere in the world the exercise of power has been divided perfectly according to the ideal. In Finland, for instance, Parliament holds the legislative powers but also the Government, an executive body in principle, can be delegated legislative authority.

In principle it could be supposed, that state administration only carries out tasks it has been assigned by the political authorities. In practice the relationship between the administrative and the political system is more complicated than simple and formal relation of subordination assuming the neutrality of the administration. In addition to their basic functions, the representatives of administration take extensively part in the preparation of the political decisions. In political system of Finland the role of parliament has strengthened especially in consequence of the constitutional changes. On the other hand, the managerial reforms of public administration from the end of the 1980s onward and in some respect also Finland's membership in European Union have increased power of officials at the expense of political, also the Parliament's, exercise of power.

The municipalities have a dual function being basic regional administrative units of the country and, additionally, basic units of the self-government of the citizens. The municipal system provides an important arena for political participation and it is important part of Finnish democracy. On the other hand the municipalities play a central role in society through organising most of the welfare services. In general it can be stated that the responsibility for providing services has devolved from the centre to municipal governments while regulation making power has tended to move back to the centre. Municipalities, with limited regulatory power, can make only decisions that are consistent with laws passed by Parliament. Their powers relate largely to public service delivery and physical planning.

2. Political System

General description, history, and key data of the political system

The principle of democracy is in Finland basically realized indirectly through the elections and participation of elected representatives on different levels of government. Finland was the first country in Europe that allowed universal and equal suffrage (in 1906) and Finnish women were the first in the world to obtain full political rights. A total of 19 women were elected in the first parliamentary elections. Currently, 38% of members of the Finnish Parliament are women. Today the Parliament, the President of the Republic, the councils of the municipalities (448), and Members of the European Parliament (16) are elected through general elections. The President is elected every six years and Local councils, as well as the Parliament, every four years. European elections are held every five years. To complement the representative government there is a possibility to organise a consultative referendum.

Finland has a multiparty system currently with eight parties in Parliament. The Finnish political party system has been relatively stable during its history of approximately hundred years. The broad outlines, essential structure and basic party lineages have remained

essentially unchanged throughout the years since independence. The party divisions have during the decades been based on the ideal of nationality, the language, the socialist versus non-socialist divide, representation of the rural population, and the two way division of the political left. In Finland there have been few ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic controversies whereas the class-divide, based on socio-economic status, have been sharp and split the society into factions. In 1918 the class-divide escalated into civil war, after which the classes remained separated in terms of work, economics and culture. Since the 1960s the Finnish social structures have nevertheless undergone changes and the class-based models of political behaviour have become less and less pronounced. The strong position of the agrarian party prevented the class tensions becoming a decisive factor in the political life of the country. The traditional divide between left and right has especially during the 1990s been supplemented by a new dimension of centre-versus-periphery. The Finnish politics is nowadays characterised by pragmatism and the political community of Finland can be seen highly consensual. The situation may nevertheless limit the degree of freedom of parties to articulate their ideologies and programmes and implement them.

The members of the parliament are elected from each electoral district in proportion to the population. On average one representative is elected for every 26 000 people. The maximum number of candidates that each party or constituency association can put up in each electoral district is the number of representatives that are chosen from the district in question.

The four parties (the Agrarian Party/the Finnish Centre Party, The social democratic party, the National Coalition Party and the Democratic Union of the Finnish People/the Left Alliance,) that became the dominant political grouping in the first elections after the Second World War in 1945, remain still the largest parties though the order of them has varied. In Finland's multiparty system the three biggest parties each have approximately 20-25% of the popular support and half a dozen smaller parties compete for the remaining part. Party pluralism in Finnish Parliament is ensured by the electoral method, with proportional representation and large electoral districts. Proportional representation makes it possible also for minor factions to be heard on the political arena. The peculiar electoral method, not based on party lists, gives the representatives also an individual popular mandate. One feature of the multiparty situation is that no single party is likely to gain an absolute majority in parliamentary elections. Thus the country invariably has a coalition government enjoying confidence of the Parliament. The leader of the largest parliamentary party usually serves as Prime Minister.

Mattila and Raunio (2002) have compared the main features of Government formation and Party systems in Nordic Countries in 1945-2000. As regards to effective parties in parliament, the Finnish parliament is the most fragmented. The Finnish party-system has also been the most polarised. In Finland the President has frequently intervened in government formation. The presidents Urho Kekkonen (1956-1981) and Mauno Koivisto (1982-94) used frequently wide-ranging constitutional and political powers to influence government formation. The new Constitution (2000) practically excludes the president from the process. In other Nordic Countries (excluding Iceland) the government formation has been based on blocks. In Finland, instead, cross-block coalitions are the norm. Since the Finland's independency the Centre Party (formely the Agrarian party) has been in a median position bridging the gap between left and right and this ensured its representation in almost all of Finnish post-war governments. Since the late '80s the crucial question in the formation of governments has been the shifting relations between the three largest parties — the SDP, the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party. Since 1995 Finnish governments have been so-called "rainbow" coalitions uniting five parties across the political spectrum. Government coalitions in be large and their composition politically unconventional. The representatives of the parties who are Government ministers are traditionally loyal to the Government's line and the opposition parties do not normally form strong coalitions.

Municipal democracy

Finland is divided into 431 municipalities. The administration of municipalities shall, according to the Finnish Constitution, be based on the self-government of their residents. In addition to legislation, extensive local self-government is based on a long tradition; it was established already on the period of autonomy. The municipalities' joint co-operative organ is the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, which represents the common interests of municipalities and sees to the establishment of their objectives

The activities of Municipalities are guided by political decision making and their operations must comply with the principle of democracy. The highest municipal decision-making body, the Council, is elected by the residents of each municipality in every four years. It has the general decision making authority in local affairs and it appoints members of the municipal board that carries out the preparatory and executive tasks. The number of councillors depends on the population of the municipality. According to the Local Government Act for instance the municipalities with the population of 2001 - 4000 should have 21 councillors when the municipalities with more than 400 000 residents should have 85 councillors. Candidates for councillors must have the municipality in question as their municipality of residence and they have to be entitled to vote in municipal elections in some municipality. Parties entered in the party register and constituency associations established by people entitled to vote can nominate their candidates. In Åland municipal elections are also held every four year but at different time than in the rest of Finland. The voting turnout in municipal elections has declined markedly in Finland in the last few decades; municipal elections of the year 2000 saw the lowest in voting turnout ever (55.9%).

Further information on the political system (e.g. interlinkages between levels, organs, etc.)

kirjoittamatta – not yet written

Levels and specific aspects of the political system:

level \ aspect	organ(s)	authority/ function	tasks
national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliament Government President of the Republic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legislative power, decision on state budget , supervision of the Government and oversight of the realisation of the decisions Executive and preparatory function Executive power , powers of appointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision making in Plenary sessions, preparatory legislative work in committees Realization of policies and parliamentary decisions; Implementation of the Government programme; Preparation of legislation and national budget; foreign policy Foreign policy and international relations; Legislative matters; ordering

			premature parliamentary election, Commander-in-chief of the Defence Forces; pardons (e.g.)
regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> joint co-operative organ of municipalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To represent the common interests of municipalities and to see to the establishment of their objectives
sub-regional/ local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councils of municipalities Municipal board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local municipal self-government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public service delivery, land use planning, decision making on local policies Preparatory and executive tasks

3. Administrative System

General description, history, and key data of the administrative system

In Finland public administration essentially rests on the relations and cooperation between the state and the municipalities, which largely function autonomously. The administrative system functions in the executive and preparatory tasks and it can also be seen as cohesive power in the society and in the political organisation. The most important task of public administration is the provision of welfare services for citizens such as education, health care and social services. The State administration consists of three administrative levels that form the State organisation. The ministries and the government agencies operate at the level of *central government*. State's *regional administration* includes for example Provincial State offices, Regional environment centres and Occupational Health and Safety inspectorates. State's *local administration*, including State local districts, Employment offices, Tax offices, Customs offices and Legal aid offices constitute the third level of the State administration.

Local government is based on self-government of individual municipalities, guaranteed by the Constitution. Local self-government is part of public administration as well as independent courts and the State's business activities. The province of the Åland Islands is also guaranteed autonomy and it has its own political and administrative organs responsible for decision-making. The Parliament of Åland exercises legislative power within the framework permitted by its autonomous position. Otherwise the laws enacted by Finland's Parliament apply. In their native region the Sami have cultural and linguistic autonomy. In addition the churches, religious communities and the universities have self-government. These forms of self-government vary in relation to their status and execution.

When Finland became independent in 1917, after the period of autonomy, it already had over one hundred years of experience in having its own administration and long-standing contacts with Nordic administrative culture. Since the 1960s the public administration has expanded rapidly due to the increased tasks of the welfare state. Until the 1980s ministries and central agencies shared the responsibility of the public tasks. In regional administration, public tasks were the responsibility of Provincial State Offices, with the regional authorities representing various fields. In the early 1990s the system of central agencies was abolished, the number of Provincial State Offices reduced and several agencies were replaced by State companies and State enterprises. The reform was partly due to the difficult economic recession. The role

of several agencies declined and ministries gained a stronger position. The EU membership has also transformed the role of the ministries.

State administration

The central state administration employs around 125 000 persons in total. 5000 of them are employed in ministries, 24 000 in other central administration agencies and institutions and 55 000 in state's regional and local administration.

The executive work of the Government is in practice carried out in ministries, each of which prepares matters falling within its relevant administrative sector. They function as administrative and political experts and direct and supervise agencies and institutions operating within their sectors of administration. Ministers operating at ministries are in no way subordinated to the collegial decision-making of officials. Nevertheless the state officials have great importance in the functioning of the ministries. Ministries cooperate with the regional and local administration.

Each ministry has several district authorities within its sector of administration.

A Permanent Secretary is the most senior official in a ministry. The Permanent Secretary directs and monitors the operation of the ministry, serving as the closest adviser to the minister, directing preparatory work, monitoring the implementation of the Government programme and managing cooperation between ministries. In the Ministry for foreign affairs and Ministry of Finance, State Secretaries serve as the Permanent Secretaries of the ministry. Ministers also have political special advisers.

In addition to the Government and the Ministries, the central administration of the state consists of State's bureaus, agencies, institutions and other bodies and the State's business activities. State bureaus and agencies have still remarkable function in the capacity of Finnish central government. Their position bases nowadays to a great deal to their expertise. Part of them are still responsible for the administrative tasks, in addition they carry out tasks such as guidance, supervision, information or reporting. An important group of public bodies are also State research institutes. Agencies and public bodies function under the administrative sector of each ministry.

The State administration participates in regional and local administration in cooperation with regional and local officials. State's regional administration has traditionally been incoherent and weak level of decision making in the administrative system on Finland. Regional authorities function within the administrative sectors of ministries and enable ministries to carry out their responsibilities at a regional and local level. The regional authorities can be characterised as expert organisations. The most common include State Provincial Offices, which act as the joint regional authority for seven ministries, Employment and Economic development Centres, Regional Environment centres, Occupational Health and Safety Inspectorates, Road districts under the Finnish Road Administration and Traffic management centres. Provincial administration as a general authority of regional administration derives from the period of being part of the Kingdom of Sweden. In the early 1990s the most of the provinces were abolished and replaced by five greater provinces. The task of developing the regions was transferred to Regional councils.

For the purposes of states local administration Finland is divided into 90 State Local Districts that are responsible for general and special administrative tasks, including personnel and financial management and communications for the local district. The functions of the Police and Local register offices (among others) are managed and carried out in local districts. In addition to State local districts, the local administration is the responsibility of Employment offices, Local tax offices, the customs and Legal aid offices. In recent decades the tasks of the State have been transferred to Municipalities and the importance of local administration has narrowed.

Indirect State administration functions under the supervision of the Government and ministries and comprises organisations which are not authorities but which carry out public tasks or, in some cases, execute public powers. These organisations supplement and support the authorities in managing the tasks of welfare society and their importance increased in the 1990s when the functions of the state were corporatised and privatised. Strengthening the role of indirect state administration aims at increasing the independence and flexibility of the operations of organisations.

Local self-government in municipalities

The self-governing character of the Finnish local government system has been progressively strengthened and strong local autonomy has become one special characteristic of the government of Finland. Its role has still increased when the municipalities were given the function of carrying out the tasks of welfare state. Municipalities form the most extensive and significant form of self-government in Finland. Finnish local government differs in some respect from the model typical in continental Europe. Finnish municipalities are big in European standards and they do not have elected mayor.

Municipalities are responsible for organising the majority of public services provided to citizens. The specific committees direct the provision of public services in municipality. The committee of land-use planning is one of the most common. The committees are increasingly becoming purchasers rather than producers of their services. The most important services provided by municipalities are education, children's day care, social welfare, health care and maintenance of technical infrastructure. In many fields municipalities often cooperate to provide services.

A number of joint municipal authorities and 19 Regional Councils exercise local self-government at regional level. Two or more municipalities can establish a joint municipal authority for taking care of responsibilities or services of a municipality in conjunction with other municipalities. Regional Councils are responsible for regional development and land use planning. They cooperate with 15 Employment and Economic development Centres, which, for their part, on the regional level represent the ministries responsible for the development of the industry and commerce. Local authorities practice sub-regional cooperation in order to ensure a dynamic economic standing and the production of basic services. Regional portals provide information on events, business activities and tourist attractions in all of the region's municipalities.

Further information on the administrative system (e.g. interlinkages between levels, institutions, etc.)

The roles of municipalities and the state and the division of responsibilities vary in different sectors of administration. In some sectors of administration, the State is responsible for both supervising operations and putting them into practice while in others (e.g. education, health care). Municipalities have responsibility at the operational level. The Local Government Act forms the basis for local government in Finland. Also the financial interlinkages adjust the relationship between municipalities and the state. Municipalities have broad powers in matters pertaining to their own administrative structures, such as institutions and their duties. Finnish local authorities have right to levy taxes the power to make financial decisions. Local authorities finance their annual expenditure out of taxes, central government transfers, various charges and sales revenues. Central government grants local authorities financial assistance in exchange for a wide range of statutory services. This balances financial inequalities between local authorities and ensures equal access to services throughout the country. The reforms in 1990s increased operational and economic independence of municipalities and decreased the number of staff coming under the State budget from 215,000 in 1988 to the current figure of 125,000.

Levels and specific aspects of the administrative system:

level \ aspect	institution(s)	authority/ function	tasks
national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry officials officials of the Parliament? Central administration bureaus, institutions, agencies and other public bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> administrative support to elected representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> preparatory work of the government, directing and supervising institutions agencies and institutions within relating sector of administration administrative tasks, information management and registration, development, research...etc.
regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional authorities/officials including (e.g.): State Provincial Offices, Employment and Economic Development Centres, Regional Environment Centres, Occupational Health and Safety Inspectorates..... and district authorities of ministries Regional councils Joint municipal authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enable ministries to carry out their responsibilities at regional and local level; authority based on expertise exercise local self-government at regional level taking care of responsibilities or services of a municipalities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tasks such as: research, guidance, supervision, information, reporting regional development and land-use planning
sub-regional/ local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State's <i>local administration</i>, including State local districts, Employment offices, Tax offices, Customs offices and Legal aid offices Municipalities, local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State's local administration Local self-government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> general and special administrative tasks, including personnel and financial management and communications for the local district Provision of public services in municipalities