

Finnish Political Situation

Finland is one of the largest countries in Europe (337,000 km²) with one of the smallest populations (4.9 million). It shares the latitude of Canada's Northwest Territories, but not the severe climate. It has been ruled successively from the West as part of the Kingdom of Sweden until 1809, and from the East as a Russian grand duchy, until declaring independence on December 6, 1917.

Finland is now one of Europe's most prosperous countries, pursuing close economic links with both West and East, and maintaining an almost aggressively neutral foreign policy.

Under the Finnish constitution, power is divided between the President of the Republic and a parliament of 200 members. The president is responsible for foreign policy, is Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, appoints the cabinet, and may initiate or block legislation. The President is elected for a period of six years by an indirect electoral process. There have been only three presidents since 1946; the present one, Mauno Koivisto, was re-elected in February 1988 for a second six-year term.

Finland's complex proportional representation system encourages a multitude of political parties and the formation of coalition governments. Since April 1987, Prime Minister Harri Holkeri, a conservative, has led a coalition of the National Coalition Party (conservatives), the Social Democratic Party, the Swedish People's Party and the Finnish Rural Party. Mr. Holkeri is the first conservative Prime Minister since 1946.

The next parliamentary elections take place in March 1991.