

ENGLISH

PARLIAMENT *of* FINLAND 2015



The spring 2015 general election took place on Sunday 19 April, causing the 2014 parliamentary session to continue long into the next calendar year. The last parliamentary session of the electoral term was only concluded on 15 April.

The day-to-day life of Parliament was turned upside down at the turn of the electoral term when the renovation of Parliament House got underway in its full extent. After the spring session concluded, Parliament House was emptied of all movables and the granite giant became a construction site. Parliament's plenary sessions will be held in the Sibelius Academy building in the adjacent city block during the renovation. Its concert hall has been converted into a plenary session hall and the entire building has been leased for use by Parliament until the renovation finishes in 2017.

After spending the four previous years in opposition, the Centre Party became the largest parliamentary group by winning 49 seats in the last election. The previous election's big winner, the Finns Party, lost one seat, but nevertheless returned 38 MPs to become the second-largest grouping. The National Coalition Party, which held the Prime Minister's seat during the previous electoral term, lost some support, but still returned 37 MPs. The Social Democratic Party lost a few seats and returned 34 MPs. The Greens returned 15 MPs, overtaking the Left Alliance, which now holds 12 seats. The Swedish People's Party returned 9 MPs, and their parliamentary group was also joined by the MP elected in the Åland Islands. The Christian Democrats got 5 seats.

The sitting Parliament has 117 male and 83 female MPs. The average age of an MP was 47.3 at the start of the electoral term. 14 MPs under the age of 30, four more than in the 2011 general election, were elected.

The election result was confirmed on Wednesday 22 April and the credentials of the elected MPs were inspected on Monday 27 April 2015. On the next day, Juha Sipilä (Centre Party) was elected as Speaker, Timo Soini (Finns Party) as First Deputy Speaker and Ben Zyskowitz (National Coalition Party) as Second Deputy Speaker. Parliament's elder speaker, i.e. the oldest MP Pertti Salolainen (National Coalition Party), chaired the plenary session during the election of the speakers.

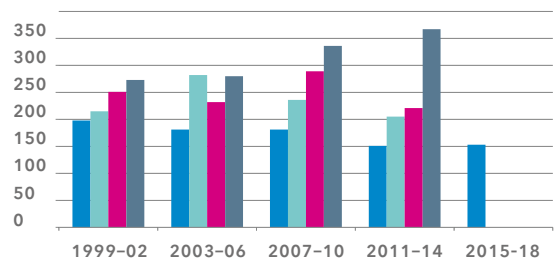
On 28 April, the same day as the election of the speakers, Prime Minister Alexander Stubb (National Coalition Party) submitted his cabinet's resignation to the President of the Republic and the parliamentary groups appointed Juha Sipilä to lead negotiations to form a new government. Sipilä gave the parliamentary groups a list of questions to examine their position regarding the key issues of the electoral term.

Parliament's opening ceremony was held at Finlandia Hall on 29 April because of the ongoing renovation of Parliament House.

The negotiations to form a government coalition between the Centre Party, the Finns Party and the National Coalition Party lasted a month. Parliament elected Juha Sipilä to serve as Prime Minister on 28 May and the President of the Republic appointed Finland's 74th government on 29 May 2015. The members of the Government are:

GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS 1999–2015

- The first annual session of the electoral period
- The second annual session of the electoral period
- The third annual session of the electoral period
- The fourth annual session of the electoral period



Cover: Plenary sessions will be held in the Sibelius Academy building during the renovation of Parliament House in 2015–2017.

- Prime Minister Juha Sipilä (Centre Party)
- Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs Timo Soini (Finns Party)
- Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Lenita Toivakka (National Coalition Party)
- Minister of Justice and Employment Jari Lindström (Finns Party)
- Minister of the Interior Petteri Orpo (National Coalition Party)
- Minister of Defence Jussi Niinistö (Finns Party)
- Minister of Finance Alexander Stubb (National Coalition Party)
- Minister of Local Government and Public Reforms Anu Vehviläinen (Centre Party)
- Minister of Education and Culture Sanni Grahn-Laasonen (National Coalition Party)
- Minister of Agriculture and the Environment Kimmo Tiilikainen (Centre Party)
- Minister of Transport and Communications Anne Berner (Centre Party)
- Minister of Economic Affairs Olli Rehn (Centre Party)
- Minister of Social Affairs and Health Hanna Mäntylä (Finns Party)
- Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services Juha Rehula (Centre Party)

The parliamentary groups settled the allocation of ministerial portfolios and other key tasks after the partners of the government coalition were confirmed. A new trio of speakers was appointed as part of this deal on 29 May, with Maria Lohela (Finns Party) named as Speaker, Mauri Pekkarinen (Centre Party) as First Deputy Speaker and Paula Risikko (National Coalition Party) as Second Deputy Speaker.

The composition of Parliament changed during the government negotiations when Paavo Väyrynen (Centre Party) asked to be relieved of his MP duties to continue as a Member of the European Parliament. He was replaced at Parliament by Mikko Kärnä (Centre Party). In addition, MP Pirkko Ruohonen-Lerner (Finns Party) took the seat of MEP Sampo Terho (Finns Party) at the European Parliament after he was elected to the Parliament of Finland. Ruohonen-Lerner was replaced by Leena Meri (Finns Party).

When Kärnä and Meri, the replacements of Väyrynen and Ruohonen-Lerner, are counted, 59 entirely new MPs were elected to Parliament in the 2015 elections. In addition, 15 candidates who had served as MPs prior to 2011, returned to Parliament.

Parliament approved the Programme for Government at a plenary session on 4 June 2015 and convened for the final plenary session of the spring sitting on 30 June.

Economic descent and refugee crisis required action

Fiscal deficit and a poor economic outlook cast a shadow over the work of Parliament after the commencement of the autumn sitting on 8 September. Parliament has passed several laws, which aim to cut State and municipal expenditure, since then. Among other things, Parliament decided to shorten the job alternation leave, limit the subjective right to day care, impose tuition fees for foreign students and gradually raise the lowest retirement age



Väinö Aaltonen's sculptures were removed from the Plenary Hall because of the renovation of the Parliament House.

to 65. The retirement reform applies to people born in 1955 or later.

Income tax was lowered slightly, but the lower threshold of the so-called solidarity tax paid by high-income people was also lowered for two years at the same time. Anyone whose taxable annual income exceeds €72,300 pays taxes at a higher rate. The solidarity tax applies to some 130,000 people and it generates an estimated €34 million a year. Parliament also raised the highest tax rate on capital income by one percentage point to 34%.

Official regulation was dismantled and lightened by, among other things, allowing retailers and hairdressers to remain open at any time. In addition, the Land Use and Building Act was amended to no longer require the Ministry of the Environment's confirmation for regional land use plans and joint municipal master plans.

The refugee crisis gathered pace in autumn 2015 and this was reflected in political debate at Parliament and elsewhere. More than 30,000 asylum seekers arrived in Finland during the year and Parliament passed two supplementary budget appropriations to fund their reception and process their applications.

Parliament rejected a proposal to reduce electoral constituencies that would have cut the number of constituencies to 9–12. The legislation had been approved during the previous electoral term, but had been left in abeyance as required by the Constitution.

Opposition groups tabled five interpellations during the 2015 parliamentary session. Five citizens' initiatives were also submitted to Parliament; consideration of two of them were concluded during the 2015 session. Both of them were rejected. Consideration of the other initiatives will continue during the 2016 parliamentary session.

OSCE parliamentarians convened in Helsinki

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) was held on 5–9 July 2015 at Helsinki's Finlandia Hall, the venue for the signing of the Helsinki Final Accords at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe forty years earlier.

MPs from more than fifty participating OSCE states attended the assembly. The assembly was



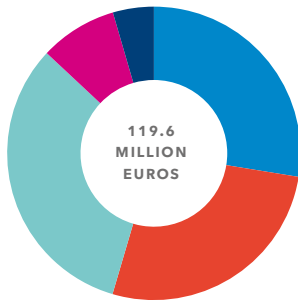
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overshadowed by EU sanctions against Russia. Some members of the Russian OSCE delegation could not attend because of their inclusion in the EU sanctions list, which prevented the granting of a Finnish visa. In protest, Russia only took part in one standing committee meeting in Helsinki.

MP Ilkka Kanerva (National Coalition Party) was unanimously elected to serve for a second term as President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. A concluding document titled *Recalling the Spirit of Helsinki*, in which the Parliamentary Assembly expresses its stance on several topical questions regarding security policy, the economy, environment and human rights, was also approved.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is one of nine multilateral organisations to which Finland sends a Parliament-appointed delegation. The other eight are:

- Finnish Delegation to the Nordic Council
- Finnish Delegation to the Council of Europe
- Finnish Delegation to the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region



PARLIAMENT'S EXPENSES 2015 (MILLION EUROS)

● MPs, their assistants and parliamentary groups	33.0
● Staff expenses	32.2
● Renovation and estate expenses	38.9
● Information management expenses	10.2
● Other expenses	5.3

Parliament's expenses 2015: total 119.6 million euros

- Finnish Delegation to the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference
- Finnish Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Finnish Delegation to the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP)
- Finnish Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
- Finnish Delegation to the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly

The Parliament of Finland has a total of 103 seats in these organisations. In addition to participating in multilateral organisations, parliaments engage in bilateral exchange visits.

The price of democracy: €21.80 per citizen

Parliament's expenses totalled €119.6 million last year. This comes to €21.80 per citizen. The figure the year before was €21.50.

From 1 March 2015, MPs are paid a monthly salary of €6,380, with the figure rising to €6,858 after 12 years of service. MP pay is taxable income. In addition, they receive tax-free reimbursement of expenses ranging from €987 to €1,809. The amount of this reimbursement is determined by the MP's domicile and whether her or she keeps a second residence in the Helsinki region.

The Parliamentary Office's operational expenditure includes personnel, real estate and information

management costs, among other things. Parliament's total costs also include MPs', their assistants' and political groups' costs. Figures do not include VAT or the costs of organs operating in affiliation with Parliament (the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the National Audit Office and the Finnish Institute of International Affairs).

The Parliamentary Office had 555 full-time employees at the end of 2015, 127 of whom were personal assistants to MPs. A further 66 personal assistants to MPs are employed by the parliamentary groups. The number of officials employed by the Parliamentary Office reduced by about twenty from the previous year.

The Office Commission, which is headed by the Speaker and composed of MPs, directs, supervises and develops Parliament's administration and financial management. It appoints Parliament's highest officials and resolves significant matters regarding Parliament's administration and financial management.

Parliament's long-serving Secretary-General Seppo Tiitinen retired at the end of 2015. On 11 December, a plenary session elected Master of Laws with court training Maija-Leena Paavola as his successor. At the time of her election, Paavola served as Parliament's Director of Legislation. She assumed the office of Secretary-General on 1 January 2016.

TYPE OF THE MATTER / YEAR

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Government proposals	151	205	221	367	153
Government statements	2	3	2	1	2
Government reports	2	6	7	10	1
Prime Minister's announcements	2	1	4	7	4
Legislative motions	60	91	80	116	52
Petitionary motions	30	51	60	57	28
Budgetary motions	551	602	576	538	362
Citizens' initiative			3	3	5
Supplementary budgetary motions	1	99	80	199	6
Interpellations	2	8	4	8	5
Written questions	499	1,057	1,232	1,245	432
Union matters	84	82	92	48	27

**THE COMMITTEES HELD THE FOLLOWING NUMBER OF MEETINGS
AND DRAFTED THE FOLLOWING NUMBER OF REPORTS AND STATEMENTS IN THE 2015 SESSION**

	MEETINGS	REPORTS	STATEMENTS
Grand Committee	42	-	6
Constitutional Law Committee	45	9	15
Foreign Affairs Committee	47	4	2
Finance Committee	36	17	1
Subcommittees of the Finance Committee*	137		
Audit Committee	38	7	5
Administration Committee	50	15	25
Legal Affairs Committee	43	7	11
Transport and Communications Committee	44	14	4
Agriculture and Forestry Committee	45	12	12
Defence Committee	38	1	4
Education and Culture Committee	49	14	4
Social Affairs and Health Committee	48	20	6
Commerce Committee	56	17	20
Committee for the Future	25	-	2
Employment and Equality Committee	40	3	4
Environment Committee	39	3	11
Total (including subcommittees)	822	143	132

*The Finance Committee generally prepares matters in eight subcommittees. These held the following number of meetings: Administration and Security Subcommittee 18, Tax Subcommittee 25, Education and Science Subcommittee 16, Agriculture Subcommittee 14, Communications Subcommittee 15, Employment and the Economy Subcommittee 20, Municipal and Health Affairs Subcommittee 16, Housing and Environment Subcommittee 13.

SPEAKER

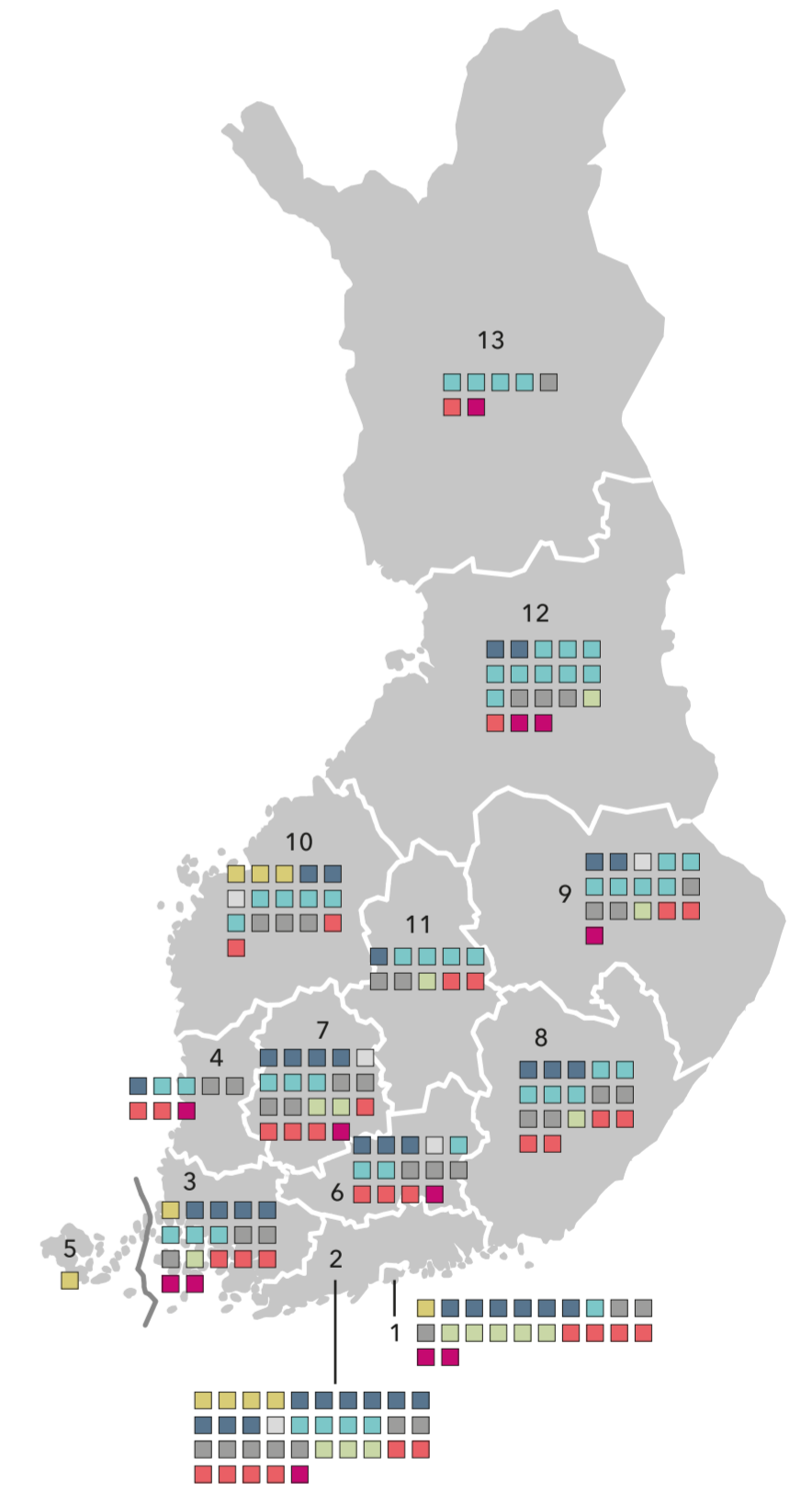


MARIA LOHELA



PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS

- Swedish Parliamentary Group, 10 MPs
- National Coalition Party Parliamentary Group, 37 MPs
- Christian Democratic Parliamentary Group, 5 MPs
- Centre Party Parliamentary Group, 49 MPs
- Finns Party Parliamentary Group, 38 MPs (37 + speaker)
- Green Parliamentary Group, 15 MPs
- Social Democratic Parliamentary Group, 34 MPs
- Left Alliance Parliamentary Group, 12 MPs



ELECTORAL DISTRICTS AND NUMBER OF MPs CHOSEN FROM EACH DISTRICT

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Helsinki, 22 MPs | 8 Southeast Finland, 17 MPs |
| 2 Uusimaa, 35 MPs | 9 Savo-Karelia, 16 MPs |
| 3 Varsinais-Suomi, 17 MPs | 10 Vaasa, 16 MPs |
| 4 Satakunta, 8 MPs | 11 Central Finland, 10 MPs |
| 5 Åland, 1 MP | 12 Oulu, 18 MPs |
| 6 Häme, 14 MPs | 13 Lapland, 7 MPs |
| 7 Pirkanmaa, 19 MPs | |