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The Big Leap to the West:  
The Impact of EU on the Finnish  
Political System

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# **The Big Leap to the West: The Impact of EU on the Finnish Political System**

## **1. Introduction**

When analysing Finland's integration policy, one is struck by the speed with which the political leadership turned its gaze from the East to the West. Within less than a decade Finland changed his status from a non-aligned country with close political relations with the Soviet Union to a full member of both the European Union (EU) and the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). It was not enough that Finland just joined the EU: the last three Finnish governments, starting from the centre-right coalition cabinet which took office in 1991, have decided that Finland's place is in the inner core of the union. While rhetorically claiming to be interested in developing the EU as an intergovernmental project, the practical steps taken have shown that the recent governments have been willing to support and also put forward initiatives that strengthen the supranational nature of the Union. Finland has not at any instance seriously questioned the general development of integration: in this sense it has become a harmless participant in the inner core of the Union.

Several observers have praised Finland's commitment to integration. Finns have received credit from their European colleagues for their pragmatic and co-operative approach. For example, according to *The Economist*:

Since joining the EU in 1995, and despite coming from its most distant edge, they [the Finns] have displayed an almost uncanny mastery of its workings. Many point to them as the very model of how a "small country"

(vast in land mass, but with only 5.2 m people) should operate within the EU's institutions: not preachy like the Swedes, not difficult like the Danes, not over-ambitious like the Austrians, merely modest and purposeful, matching a sense of principle with a sense of proportion.<sup>1</sup>

Another example was given by the European Voice, which in its leader, titled "Finnish presidency ends on triumphant note", argued among other things that 'the Finnish presidency has proved once again that small countries are often the most adept at managing the EU's business' and that 'the Finns have shown that a presidency which begins on an un auspicious note can end with plaudits from all sides'.<sup>2</sup>

The Finnish determined approach stands in contrast to the hesitant EU-policies of both Denmark and Sweden. What explains this pragmatism and commitment to integration? Does the public share the commitment shown by the political elite? We argue that Finnish integration policy is very much driven by the need to secure her place among the Western European countries and to influence EU decisions in order to protect national interests. Support for the deepening of integration or for federalism is weak among the public and the parties, with integration primarily seen as an efficient way of furthering national economic and security objectives.

The chapter is divided into six sections. In the next part we present the reasons that led Finland to apply for European Community (EC) membership. The third part focuses on the 1994 referendum and explores its main issues and cleavages. In the fourth section we analyse the impact of membership on party politics and administration. Europeanisation of the Finnish polity and public opinion are examined in section five. In the concluding section we discuss briefly the main aspects of Finnish integration policy, with emphasis on the future development of the Union.

1 Charlemagne, 'Sauli Niinistö, on Europe's edge', *The Economist* 350 (13.3.1999) : 8110, 41.

2 "Finnish presidency ends on triumphant note", *The European Voice* 5:46, 13.

## ***2. Application and membership negotiations***

Finland's foreign relations from the end of the Second World War until the early 1990s resembled a balancing act between maintaining close relations with the Soviet Union, which accounted for approximately one-quarter of Finnish foreign trade, and of having access to Western markets through commercial arrangements, mainly the European Free Trade Association (Efta). The rapid and unexpected fall of the Soviet empire changed the picture almost overnight. EC membership was hardly discussed in public before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The political leadership remained quiet about the EC, and none of the parties advocated membership in the late 1980s. However, the Finnish industry had expressed its preferences about the future by investing heavily in Western Europe from the mid-1980s onwards. From 1985 to 1990, Finnish direct net investment to EC countries grew six-fold, from 2.18 to 12.47 billion FIM (from approximately 0.4 to 2.1 billion euros). During the same period corresponding investment flows to West European countries other than the Nordic countries grew eight-fold, from 0.86 to 6.52 billion FIM (from 0.14 to 1.1 billion euros) (Väyrynen 1993: 35).

The political elite reacted quickly to the changes in Kremlin. Finland applied for membership in the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1990. Three of the established parties, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the National Coalition (KOK) and the Swedish People's Party (RKP) — holding roughly half of the seats in the parliament — came out in favour of EC membership during 1990/1991. Following the Swedish application to join the EC in July 1991, the debate about the pros and cons of European integration began in earnest. Finland applied for EU membership in March 1992. It would be misleading to claim that the Finnish political elite really bothered to explain to the citizens why the government was so eager to make the moves westward. The main decisions and subsequent negotiation strategies were carefully prepared away from the public eye. One should not, on the other hand, overestimate the planning capabilities of the political elite: integration issues were not among the top priorities of the civil servants at any level and the politicians were, at least until when the

decision to apply for EU membership was taken, by and large rather uninformed about even the most fundamental aspects of European integration. However, the public was aware of the significance of the forthcoming decision. For example, according to a survey carried out in May-June 1993, 81 per cent of the respondents identified the membership question as Finland's most important and consequential decision in decades (EVA 1993).

The political climate in which the integration debate took place was also different in terms of the domestic situation. During the post-war period foreign policy decision-making had been firmly in the hands of the President and a narrow circle of the political elite, especially during the reign of Mr Urho Kekkonen (1956-1981), with the public appearing to endorse the policy of non-alignment. However, President Mauno Koivisto (1982-1994) wanted to strengthen parliamentarism and made it clear that while he was in favour of EU membership, the actual debate and decision was to be conducted by the public and the parties. Koivisto did not want security issues to dominate the public debate: he presupposed that the majority of the voters would in any case choose their stand on membership with mostly security policy considerations in mind (Koivisto 1994, 1995). In December 1993 the national parliament, Eduskunta, passed an amendment to the Constitution Act (HM § 33a, 15.12.1993/1116) that entitled "Parliament to take part in the national preparation of matters to be decided in international bodies as legislated in the Parliament Act". According to the same amendment "the government is empowered, notwithstanding the provisions of section 33, to make decisions concerning national preparation of issues arising within international organs and, to the extent that such a decision is not subject to parliamentary approval nor requires regulation by decree, also to decide on other related measures". These changes combined with chapter 4a of the Parliament Act (VJ 4a, 1551/94), which extended the government's powers to the national preparation of matters relating to EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), significantly altered the formulation of Finnish foreign policy. Thus EU membership acted as a catalyst for a change from a President-led foreign policy to a more partisan-based decision-making in

foreign relations (see Arter 1995, Jakobson 1998, Törnudd 1996, Väyrynen 1993).

Membership negotiations with the Commission started in February 1993 and were completed in March 1994, lasting altogether only 13 months. It is a paradoxical phenomenon that one of the most far-reaching decisions concerning the destiny of the country was made under the leadership of the government led by the Centre Party (KESK), whose core supporters were to be the main losers of joining the Union. The willingness of the Centre Party leadership to act in a way that *prima facie* seemed to be contrary to the very core interests of its constituents, indicates the key importance of elite-level negotiations and especially of agreements between parties forming coalition cabinets in Finnish politics. The centre-right government consisted of the Centre Party, the National Coalition, and the Swedish People's Party. The Christian Union (SKL) left the government in 1994 due to the pro-integrationist stance of the cabinet. Of the three main parties only the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was in opposition, and its leadership was strongly in favour of integration.

In a clever move by the foreign policy leadership, Mr Heikki Haavisto (KESK), the long-serving head of The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK), was appointed as the Foreign Minister to appease the farming interests within the Centre party. Indeed, by far the most difficult task in the membership negotiations was making Finnish agriculture compatible with the requirements of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). While agriculture employed at that point only 7 per cent of the workforce, and accounted for less than 3 per cent of the GDP, the sector itself and countryside in general have a strong sentimental value for the Finns (Jakobson 1998: 108). Urbanisation of the Finnish society started only after the Second World War, later than in her western neighbours. Finnish agriculture suffers from several problems, some of which are not found elsewhere in the Union. The short growing season, especially in the northern parts of the country, the high production costs, and the small size of the farms posed the biggest problems. While the government accepted the inevitability of downsizing the agricultural sector, it sought a transitional period that would have allowed the farmers to adjust

better to the CAP. While Finland failed to receive the transition period as it would have been against the *acquis communautaire*, the Commission did agree to substantial aid, first by giving the sector two billion FIM to adjust to the CAP, and by accepting 85 per cent of arable and pasture land under the less favourable area (LFA) subsidy scheme. The Finnish government was also permitted to pay additional national subsidies, especially to the less-populated regions falling under the so-called zone 6 support, mainly in the form of Nordic farming support (*pohjoinen tuki*), covering 56 per cent of agricultural land (Arter 1995: 375). The main primary producers' interest group, MTK, was not satisfied with this compromise and as a result spoke against membership before the 1994 referendum.

The other policy sectors did not receive similar attention from the politicians or from the parties. Defence and foreign policy were important questions, but while they featured prominently in the domestic debate, they did not seem to cause problems in the negotiations, as Finland had agreed to all aspects of CFSP. Unlike Denmark or Sweden, Finland had explicitly stated that it would accept the Maastricht Treaty without any reservations or opt-out clauses. Both the government led by the Centre Party and President Koivisto made this clear. In December 1993 Foreign Minister Heikki Haavisto stated that Finland was ready to agree to the CFSP, including its defence objectives (Arter 1995). To summarize, it is fair to claim that Finland was not a difficult negotiating partner. The government was not ready to jeopardize the positive outcome of the negotiations by being too ambitious or by tabling any specific demands (excluding agriculture) that could have been opposed by the member states or the Commission.

### ***3. The October 1994 referendum***

A consultative referendum on EU membership was held on October 16, 1994. Even though the differences in the material and intellectual resources of the different camps were enormous, neither side could be sure of victory as the date approached. According to opinion polls carried out in the spring (45 per cent) and in the autumn (46 per cent) of 1994 only less than half of



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the respondents were in favour of joining the Union. However, in the referendum a narrow majority of 56.9 per cent voted in favour and 43.1 per cent against membership. Turnout was 74 per cent. Several factors contributed to the result.

The supporters of membership stressed that only by joining the Union would Finland be able to influence decisions that in any case affected her. Perhaps more importantly, this would place Finland firmly in the context where she historically and culturally belongs — among Western European countries. Those in favour of membership went also to great lengths to assure the voters that the country's independence was not for sale. The opponents claimed exactly the opposite: membership would drastically reduce Finland's independence, especially as the Finnish government had agreed to adhere to all Maastricht objectives, including EMU and CFSP. The supporters of membership had three significant advantages. Firstly, a clear majority of the political leadership was openly in favour of joining the EU. This included the three main parties (SDP, the Centre and the National Coalition), the government, the parliamentary majority, and both the former President Koivisto and the new President Martti Ahtisaari. The opponents had no prominent leaders who could persuade people with the same effect. Secondly, almost the whole business and administrative elite was enthusiastically in favour of membership. And thirdly, the national media, and also most provincial newspapers, supported membership (Mörä 1999). Indeed, in hindsight the opponents gained a very impressive share of the votes, given that the political and economic establishment was almost unanimously in favour of joining the Union.

**Table 1**

The percentage of voters in favour of EU membership in the 1994 referendum.

<b>GROUPS</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<i><b>Gender</b></i>		
Men	61	39
Women	54	46
<i><b>Age</b></i>		
15-24 years	54	46
25-49 years	58	42
50- years	56	44
<i><b>Education</b></i>		
Primary school	46	54
Comprehensive or vocational school	55	45
A-levels/higher school examination	66	34
University degree	72	28
<i><b>Profession</b></i>		
Farmer	6	94
Blue-collar workers	53	47
White-collar workers	65	35
Management, entrepreneurs	73	27
<i><b>Party affiliation</b></i>		
Left Alliance	24	76
Social Democratic Party	75	25
Centre Party	36	64
National Coalition	89	11
Swedish People's Party	85	15
Green League	55	45
<i><b>Region</b></i>		
South	62	38
Central	55	45
North	42	58
<i><b>All</b></i>	57	43

Sources: Paloheimo (1995: 117). Party figures from Sänkiaho (1994).

Table 1 shows the voting behaviour of various citizen groups in the 1994 referendum. Higher educational qualifications, living in urban areas (south), and being a white-collar worker or an entrepreneur correlated positively with support for membership. In terms of gender the difference was not that large, with men only slightly more in favour of joining the Union. Opponents came mainly from the rural areas and were less well educated. Only 6 per cent of the farmers voted “Yes”.

The issue cut across traditional party cleavages. The two most pro-membership parties were the National Coalition and the Swedish People’s Party, with 89 and 85 per cent of the party supporters respectively voting in favour of membership. The leadership of the Social Democratic Party was behind membership, and 75 per cent of party voters took a similar stand in the referendum. The Centre Party was divided over the issue. While the party congress had adopted — following a resignation threat from the chairman and PM Esko Aho — a pro-membership line in June 1994, only 36 per cent of the party supporters favoured membership in the referendum. The Left Alliance (VAS) and the Green League (VIHR) did not adopt formal positions prior to the referendum. 24 per cent of the Left Alliance supporters and 55 per cent of the Greens voted “Yes”. The only anti-membership Eduskunta parties were the marginal Christian Union and the Rural Party (SMP), whose leadership and voters were almost unanimously against membership (Paloheimo 1995, Pesonen ed. 1994, Sänkiaho 1995).

The Eduskunta approved membership on November 18, 1994. In the final vote a majority of two-thirds was required. 152 voted in favour, 45 against, 1 abstained, and 1 was absent (the Speaker does not vote). The National Coalition, SDP, the Swedish People’s Party, and the Greens voted in favour of membership, while the Christian League and the Finnish Rural Party were against. Both the Centre Party and the Left Alliance were divided on the matter.<sup>3</sup>

3 Finland’s party system is characterised by polarised pluralism and a high degree of fragmentation. As measured by the effective number of parties, Eduskunta is one of the most fragmented parliaments in Europe. The left-right dimension is the dominant political cleavage. During the 1990s the national-international cleavage, intertwined with the centre-periphery one, increased in significance. There is no extreme right-

#### **4. Party politics and public administration**

The three latest member states joined the EU at a time when the Union was undergoing far-reaching changes. Preparations for the EMU were well under way and meant tight budgetary discipline and curtailing public sector expenditure. The next Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) was to begin in March 1996. Finland was also to take on the responsibilities of Council Presidency for the latter half of 1999. Thus there was little time for adjustment. In this section we shall analyse how the Finnish political system — the parliament, government, parties, and the bureaucracy — have adapted to the new situation.

According to the so-called intergovernmentalist school of integration theorising, which stresses the primacy of member state governments, the national executives have used the European institutions in a two-level game to strengthen their autonomy vis-à-vis other national actors, primarily the representative bodies. The dominant position of national governments in both domestic and European politics, combined with the constant interaction and policy co-ordination between the two levels, reduces the influence of parliaments at all stages of the decision-making process. According to Moravcsik (1993) EU institutions shift the balance of domestic initiative and influence through providing governmental policy initiatives greater political legitimacy and through granting governments greater domestic agenda-setting power. Notwithstanding such behaviour from national governments, comparative case studies seem to confirm that

wing party in Finland. The moderate right consists of the National Coalition, the Swedish People's Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Union. The left consists of the mainstream Social Democratic Party and the Left Alliance. The rural and peripheral areas are the strongholds of the Centre Party, the Christian Union and the True Finns, the successor of the Rural Party. The National Coalition, the Social Democratic Party, the Green League and the Left Alliance draw their support mainly from the urbanised southern parts of the country. The Green League is one of the strongest environmental parties in Europe, and in 1995 became the first green party to gain a cabinet seat in Europe. Recent governments have been oversized coalitions and normally bring together parties across the political spectrum. The only exception was the bourgeois government of 1991-95. Governments are as a rule formed around two of the three main parties: the Centre, National Coalition and the SDP.

the systemic features of the decisional process favour the executive branch and insulate the representative institutions (see Bergman and Damgaard eds. 2000, Rometsch and Wessels eds. 1996).

However, in Finland integration has strengthened parliamentarism in two ways: through facilitating the move from a semi-presidential system towards a more government-led polity, and by improving the legislature's overall scrutiny of the executive, domestic legislation included (Raunio and Wiberg 2000). National EU policy has been dictated by the government, with the Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen (SDP) in a very central role. Both Lipponen governments (1995-1999 and 1999) have been strongly committed to steering Finland into the inner core of the Union. The President has mainly intervened when foreign policy matters are on the EU agenda. While the Eduskunta cannot be categorized as a strong policy-influencing legislature, it has subjected the government to tight scrutiny in EU matters. In fact, of the fifteen member state legislatures, the Eduskunta is probably the most effective in controlling its government in EU decision-making (Raunio 1999a). All standing committees are involved in the handling of EU issues. The two main committees responsible for European questions are the Grand Committee (Suuri valiokunta) and the Foreign Affairs Committee, the former handling first (EC) and third pillar (Justice and Home Affairs [JHA]) issues and the latter second pillar (CFSP) matters. The Grand Committee scrutinises the behaviour of Finnish representatives in the European Council, gives voting instructions to cabinet ministers attending the Council meetings, and participates in national policy formulation on matters to be decided at the European level.

The strength of the Finnish parliamentary system for controlling the government in European matters is in the proactive and early involvement of specialised standing committees, which greatly increases the ability of the Eduskunta to influence government behaviour. The parliament is rather well equipped to monitor what the cabinet does in relation to the EU due to the fact that parliamentary committees have a constitutionally regulated unlimited access to information from the government. However, the Grand Committee focuses its scrutiny mainly on selected issues depending on the interests of the MPs. The overwhelming majority of EU legislation is

passed by the chamber without any real political controversy.<sup>4</sup> Overall the parliament has been more critical of integration than the two rainbow governments led by PM Paavo Lipponen.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, European questions often cross-cut the government-opposition dimension, with the Eduskunta as an institution putting pressure on the government. Also MPs from the governing parties subject the ministers to close scrutiny, not just frustrated opposition backbenchers. The Grand Committee has also insisted that all relevant information is distributed to both the government and opposition MPs on equal terms (Raunio and Wiberg 1997, 2000, Wiberg and Raunio 1996).

Why was the national parliament been accorded a much stronger role in Finland than in Sweden? First, there was a strongly felt need among the political elite to anchor integration nationally. Given the outcome of the referendum, this was perhaps a political necessity that could not be overlooked. The government and the parliament wanted to ensure that the direction of national integration policy and the more detailed negotiating positions of the government enjoyed support among the representatives of the people (Jääskinen 2000). The parliamentary channel was perceived as the most legitimate instrument for achieving that goal. Second, this arrangement also served the interests of the more Eurosceptical MPs.

Turning to the executive branch, within the government a new portfolio of a Minister of European Affairs was created following the March 1995 general elections. The minister was responsible for co-ordinating government's EU policy, but the experiment did not work as planned as individual ministries dominated decision-making within their jurisdictions. There is therefore no Minister of European Affairs in the government appointed following the elections held in March 1999. A more important

4 This was nicely illustrated when PM Lipponen in September 2000 expressed his worry about the lack of interest in EU issues in Finland, both among the public and at the elite level, the Eduskunta included. For example, Lipponen wondered why MPs seldom bring up European matters during question-time. See 'Lipponen: Eurooppa menee eteenpäin', STT 29.9.2000.

5 The first five-party government led by Lipponen (1995-99) controlled 72 per cent (144 / 200 MPs) of Eduskunta seats, while the second Lipponen government controls 70 per cent (140 / 200 MPs) of the seats.

forum for policy co-ordination is the Cabinet European Union Committee, also established in 1995. Government work is co-ordinated through its four statutory ministerial committees (*ministerivaliokunta*), the other three being the Cabinet Foreign and Security Policy Committee, Cabinet Finance Committee, and the Cabinet Economic Policy Committee. All committees are chaired by the Prime Minister, and they prepare decisions which are then given the final seal of approval by the plenary session of the whole cabinet.

The Foreign Ministry was initially given the overall responsibility for handling European matters. The Ministry was in charge of co-ordinating ministerial EU policies and was the home of the EU Secretariat. However, this arrangement met a lot of criticism, especially from the individual ministries. Moving the responsibility for European issues from the Foreign Office to the Prime Minister's Office was argued to enhance the capacity of the whole state bureaucracy and the parliament to process EU issues. More importantly, this was seen to tie EU politics more closely to its proper context of domestic policy-making. The EU Secretariat was therefore transferred to the Prime Minister's Office in the summer of 2000. The Prime Minister's Office had meanwhile already carved out a prominent role for itself, in particular in relation to the EU Summits. The Prime Minister usually represents Finland in the European Council. However, the President can also be present, especially when foreign policy matters are on the agenda.<sup>6</sup>

Governmental EU decision-making is heavily sectionalised. Each ministry enjoys much freedom of action in the preparation of issues and in actual decision-making. This fragmentation of authority and lack of inter-

6 The Eduskunta's Committee for Constitutional Law decided prior to membership that the Prime Minister should represent Finland in the EU summits. However, President Ahtisaari refused to accept this interpretation. In May 1995 the Prime Minister announced a statement, formulated jointly with the President's office, according to which the PM will always attend the summits and President will attend them whenever she/he chooses. The current president, Mrs Tarja Halonen (SDP), announced upon taking office in March 2000 that she would take part in the summits. The dispute is important from the point of view of parliamentarism as the President is not accountable to the Eduskunta.

ministerial co-ordination has manifested itself particularly in the allocation of structural funds. The departmentalisation mirrors the situation found in Brussels. The work of the Council of the European Union is also very sectionalised, and thus each policy domain (agriculture, environment, transport, social affairs etc.) has gradually built its own networks with not much interaction with other policy sectors.

Formally, the main inter-ministerial co-ordinating body is the Committee for EU Matters located at the Foreign Office. It has 17 members: high-level officials from the ministries (kansliapäälliköt), the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of the President, the Bank of Finland, the Office of the Attorney General and Åland. The Committee has 38 sections (in 2000) that operate under the appropriate ministries. The sections are consultative and their function is to co-ordinate EU matters within the respective ministries. Sections include also representatives from relevant interest groups. Officials present matters to sections for discussion and inform them of issues under preparation. When agreement is reached, the section procedure provides a sufficient basis for determining Finland's final position. Otherwise the matter is presented to the Committee for EU Matters and/or the Cabinet European Union Committee. The Cabinet EU Committee, chaired by the PM and with all government parties represented, has become an important forum for formulating national policy in salient integration matters (Mattila 2000).

The government is represented in the EU through Finland's permanent representation, which has performed a crucial role during the first years of membership. The permanent representation not only participates in the work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper), but has also been an important source of information to Finnish civil servants, ministers and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). The permanent representative to the EU operates under instructions from the government (Murto 1996, Raunio and Wiberg 2000).

Persuasion and government credibility are the two key dimensions when analysing party adaptation to membership (Raunio 1999b). Persuasion in the sense that party leaders have needed to convince their followers to



accept their parties' pro-EU/EMU policies. Government credibility means that any party wishing to join the cabinet must be seen as a reliable partner. This in turn implies acceptance of both Union membership and the EMU.<sup>7</sup> The best example of this mechanism at work is the behaviour of the Centre Party, which has been in opposition since 1995. While the Centre was against Finland's membership in the third stage of the EMU from 1999, following the Eduskunta vote in April 1998 it indicated that it would respect the will of the parliamentary majority and would not demand Finland's exit from the EMU. In similar fashion the leaders of the Green League and the Left Alliance have come out in favour of EMU after initial rejections. Such behaviour is explained by the leaderships' concern not to exclude their parties from future government negotiations.

European integration has arguably increased the status and independent decision-making role of party chairmen (who often are members of the cabinet) in all member states. Finland is no exception. Party leaders have been central figures in policy formulation on European issues. This is perhaps most pronounced in SDP, where the Prime Minister and party chairman Paavo Lipponen was throughout the 1990s determined to lead Finland into the inner circle of the Union. He was also one of the first members of the political elite to publicly support Finnish EC/EU membership in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finnish parties and especially party leaders often emphasise in their political rhetorics that the EU remains an association of independent states, and like to downplay the overall significance and legislative powers of the Union. Apart from CAP no party has really put forward any concrete proposals to reduce the powers of the EU. All Eduskunta parties support Finland's EU membership. Those

7 Adjustment to EMU membership, and especially the target of meeting the required Maastricht convergence criteria, meant significant cuts in public sector spending. That these cuts were implemented without any serious political controversy shows (a) the broad overall consensus among the political, administrative, and economic elite in favour of the changes, and (b) the determined political leadership shown by the government. The risks involved in EMU were well acknowledged by the relevant actors, but once the decision to meet the convergence criteria was taken, the overwhelming majority of the political elite accepted the chosen direction without much protest.

parties that were against EU membership at the time of the 1994 referendum — True Finns and the Christian Union — focus now on resisting moves to deepen integration.

On the other hand, no Finnish party has come out in favour of establishing a federal European state. All governing parties support EMU and the cautious strengthening of the EU's legislative powers. The National Coalition and the Swedish People's Party are also ready to make limited concessions to develop EU's foreign and defence policy. The Green League has altered its position quite radically since the referendum, and argues that EMU needs to be counterbalanced by European-level social, environmental and taxation policies. The SDP and the Left Alliance emphasize European-level action to achieve traditional leftist goals such as safeguarding workers' rights and fighting unemployment. The remaining parties are more or less in favour of the status quo, with the main opposition party the Centre among them.

Integration issues remain fairly peripheral in partisan debates in Finland. One of the reasons explaining this is that almost all parties have internal conflicts over Europe, with especially the Centre and the Left Alliance divided over integration. This was evident in the 1996 and 1999 Euroelections. While parties issued rather detailed election manifestos or European programmes, individual candidates were free to conduct their own campaigns. There was hardly any pressure from the party leadership to force the candidates to follow the agreed party line, with the leading candidates of the Centre Party and the Left Alliance adopting a very EU critical line.<sup>8</sup> By allowing individual party members — also at the elite level — to deviate from the agreed party positions, parties try to prevent internal fragmentation and the loss of voters to competing parties (Pesonen ed. 2000). Focusing on European matters is very likely not a vote winning

8 Such intra-party competition is facilitated by the Finnish electoral system. Also in national parliamentary elections the decentralized candidate selection system, together with open lists, leads to a situation in which parliamentary party groups almost as a rule include troublesome MPs. On the other hand, the rules of the electoral game facilitate intra-party protest based around individual persons and thereby reduce or lessen the possibility of establishing organized factions.

ticket in any Finnish elections: the electorate is rather ignorant and uninterested in integration. Discussing integration issues during electoral campaigns would probably only disturb and irritate the voters.

Regarding state administration, the changes introduced by the membership were already mainly carried out in connection with the EEA agreement which came into effect from the start of 1994. Finland had to implement all relevant single market legislation, and this led to an enormous increase in annually enacted new laws. In 1995 the Eduskunta passed an all-time high of 777 laws. During 1996 and 1997 the trend reversed, however, indicating that the peak in the mid-1990s resulted from the obligation to implement EC legislation.

*Figure 1*

Annually enacted laws in Finland, 1945-1998.



Source: Sädöskokoelma, 1945-1998.

While EU membership has necessitated the establishment of new organisational structures, the overall organisation of the state bureaucracy has remained intact. European matters have increased the workload of most

bureaucrats, especially in those ministries most involved in EU affairs, such as Agriculture and Forestry, Finance, Trade and Industry, and Foreign Affairs ministries. The overall number of ministerial staff has escalated as a result of membership, in particular in the above-mentioned ministries. Also the Council Presidency in the latter half of 1999 increased the workload and number of civil servants. National representatives to the Commission and Council working groups are assigned on the basis of their policy responsibilities. Participation in EU policy-making has required a lot of staff training, with particular emphasis on linguistic skills.<sup>9</sup> As shown by the Commission's statistics, implementation of Community legislation is taken seriously by the public authorities (Commission 1995-). The EURODOC-system is used actively in order to monitor the current implementation situation. The exception is the autonomous province of Åland, where implementation is hampered by the lack of resources.

## ***5. Public opinion on membership and integration***

Integration is and has since the early 1990s been a highly salient issue in Finnish politics, causing much heated debates in the media and in the parties. However, it must be emphasized that, unlike in Sweden, the debate is focused on the benefits, drawbacks, and future of integration, not on the actual membership itself. Also in contrast with Sweden, the whole political elite and the mass media accepts membership and no party or nationally important politician demands that Finland should leave the Union. Nevertheless, for the overwhelming majority of the population, European integration does not mean much: the issues are considered too complicated, too technical, and too far removed from the everyday activities of ordinary people.

9 There has been an enormous education campaign to teach the bureaucrats to operate in the new EU environment. Approximately 800-900 civil servants were given special training as part of preparing for the Council Presidency of July-December 1999. We are grateful to Professor Markku Temmes (University of Helsinki) for information on the impact of membership on Finnish administration.

Turning to the Finnish public opinion, when asked how the respondents currently feel about the Finnish EU membership, the responses are shown in Table 2. Due to measurement errors (the results are based on mail questionnaires with response rates around 50 per cent), and taking the relevant confidence intervals into consideration, it is fair to claim that the attitudes have been stable: no significant changes have occurred over time. The three respondent groups have been approximately of equal size, with those in favour of membership slightly more numerous.

*Table 2*

Finnish public opinion on membership in the EU, 1996-1998.

	Positive	Neutral	Don't know	Negative
Fall 1996	38	33	2	26
Fall 1997	38	32	2	29
Fall 1998	43	30	1	25

Source: EVA (1998, Figure 2, p. 11).

The Finnish public opinion has since 1994 been covered also by Eurobarometers, conducted by personal interviews twice a year by the Commission. Whether the respondents perceive membership to be a good thing for their country has been measured by using the following question: 'Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY'S) membership of the European Union is: A good thing/A bad thing/Neither good nor bad/Don't know' (Table 3). Let us compare the Finnish responses with the averages for the whole Union during Finnish membership. Fewer Finns than their fellow EU citizens seem to evaluate their own country's membership as a good thing. The share of those who find their country's membership a bad thing is greater in Finland than across the whole Union.

*Table 3*

European and Finnish public opinion on whether own country's membership is a good or bad thing.

Eurobarometer (fieldwork)	EU15	Finland
	Good thing/Bad thing	Good thing/Bad thing
EB 42 (December 1994)	57/13	46/17
EB 43 (April-May 1995)	56/14	47/18
EB 44 (October-December 1995)	53/15	45/21
EB 45 (February-May 1996)	48/15	37/24
EB 46 (October-November 1996)	48/17	39/23
EB 47 (February-June 1997)	46/15	37/23
EB 48 (October-November 1997)	49/14	39/25
EB 49 (April-May 1998)	51/12	36/25
EB 50 (October-November 1998)	54/12	45/21
EB 51 (March-April 1999)	49/12	45/19
EB 52 (October-November 1999)	51/13	44/20
EB 53 (April-May 2000)	49/14	40/22

Source: Eurobarometers.

*Table 4*

European and Finnish public opinion on whether one's own country has benefited from membership.

Eurobarometer	EU 15	Finland
	Benefited / Not benefited	Benefited / Not benefited
EB 42	48/32	66/20
EB 43	46/36	36/41
EB 44	44/35	39/42
EB 45	45/34	34/49
EB 46	42/37	37/45
EB 47	41/36	37/44
EB 48	44/35	36/49
EB 49	46/32	33/52
EB 50	49/31	39/44
EB 51	44/29	43/40
EB 52	46/31	40/41
EB 53	47/32	42/44

Source: Eurobarometers.

Europeans have also been asked to evaluate whether their own country has benefited or not from EU membership by using the following question: "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union: Benefited/Not benefited/Don't know" (Table 4). Fewer Finns than EU citizens on average think that their own country has benefited from membership, bar the time when Finland was not yet a member of the Union. The share of Finns who think that their own country has not benefited from membership has been higher than the EU average, again with the exception of the survey carried out in December 1994. There is no good explanation why the Finns took such a dramatically more sceptic attitude immediately after membership became a reality. The

opinion climate has been rather stable for the whole research period with respect to the both last questions.

In conclusion, European affairs are distant among the electorate. The situation in Finland is thus no different from the other member states: citizens are fairly weakly attached to the Union, and their level of knowledge of the EU, and particularly its decision-making structure, remains low. One could say that there are only Eurosceptics in Finland. National opinion surveys testify that Finns are particularly concerned about the influence of small member countries in the Union (Raunio 2000). However, one can also argue that the preferences and rhetorics of politicians and parties, and the way national integration policy is formulated at the elite level, have an impact on how the electorate relates to integration. The formulation of Finnish EU policy is co-ordinated at the highest political level, in the Cabinet EU Committee and in the Grand Committee of the Eduskunta, with the opposition parties also involved in decision-making. This consensus-building between parties may well have beneficial consequences in terms of influencing decisions at the European level, but it also fairly effectively reduces conflict between parties and removes EU issues from party competition.

## ***6. A Europeanised polity?***

Instead of talking about the Europeanisation of the Finnish polity, it is better to speak of pragmatic adaptation. We define Europeanisation as “an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech 1994: 69). With the referendum outcome clear, the Finnish political system — parties, parliament, government, and the bureaucracy — started adjusting to the challenges brought by membership. In the case of ministerial civil servants the adaptation had already to a great extent begun during the EEA phase. The Finnish approach, at least on the elite level, has thus been pragmatic, with the emphasis on defending national economic and political interests in the EU. Opposition to integration, both at the elite level and



among the public, is considerably weaker in Finland than in Denmark or Sweden. This pragmatic approach is at least partly a legacy of the Cold War era, when Finnish foreign policy leadership needed to make the best of less than ideal circumstances.

Membership has added a new significant cleavage to the Finnish political system. The traditional left-right dimension has been complemented, if not superseded, by the rural-urban cleavage which is intertwined with the centre-periphery divide. Among the public the membership issue remains controversial six years after the referendum, with public opinion surveys showing that Finns are more hesitant than the average EU citizens about integration. The anxiety is understandable, especially in the rural and northern regions. In 1994 the number of Finnish farms was 121 000, in 1996 it had dropped to 92 000, and it is expected to level at 65 000 (Jakobson 1998: 109). However, against this widespread unease, the political and business elite, lead by the two Lipponen rainbow governments, has been determined to take Finland into the inner core of the Union. The gap was well illustrated by the decision on whether to join the EMU, the membership of which was approved by the Eduskunta in April 1998 with 135 MPs for, 61 against, one abstaining, and two absent. At the same time public opinion surveys reported that only around 40 per cent of the citizens were in favour of EMU.

But how far is Finland ready to go? Considering the utmost importance of integration issues, the almost constant lack of any serious public discussion of the future of Finnish integration policy is disturbing. The Finnish political elite has not encouraged any debates about alternative scenarios regarding Europe. Without any rival plans, there can be no real debate, and without debate there is no informed public opinion or sufficient command of substantive issues. Significantly, there is no plan B: the current government has not even really considered any alternative scenarios, such as what kind of policy to adopt in case of a serious backlash for the EU, or what is Finland's position regarding the division of powers between the Union and its member states.

The government has constantly underlined the importance of being present at the table where decisions concerning Finland are taken. This argument was used extensively both during the referendum campaign and also in relation to entering the EMU. This logic indicates the basic substance of Finnish EU policy. However, the government has not, at least not publicly, made it clear how much the current Finnish government is willing to pay in order to achieve its policy objectives. Moreover, apart from the general argument that national interests can be best protected through active and constructive participation in decision-making, the government has not really explained what benefits Finland derives from being in the inner core of the Union.<sup>10</sup> At the same time the political elite is willing to make only fairly limited concessions in the direction of supranational decision-making. Finland is a unitary state and federalism as an ideology has not been a part of the Finnish political vocabulary. Thus the nation-state logic dominates both political rhetorics and the programmes and policies of the government and the parties. While the government and the president are willing to extend the use of majority voting in the Council of Ministers, including in CFSP matters, they also want the Council to remain the main decision making body. Thus the government and the major parties are more or less in favour of the current institutional status quo.

The government has argued that the EU should adopt a policy towards its Northern regions in similar fashion to the Mediterranean countries. The initiative put forward by PM Paavo Lipponen in 1997 — the Northern Dimension — focuses primarily on improving EU-Russian relations and co-operation in the Baltic and Barents sea regions through a variety of technical and financial assistance schemes. However, at the time of writing (November 2000) it is too early to say anything more detailed about the scope and range of the actual measures to be implemented.<sup>11</sup>

10 See Matti Vanhanen, “Onko Euroopan unionin ydintä ylipäätään olemassa?”, Helsingin Sanomat 3.11.2000. For a more thorough discussion on these points, see the concluding chapter in Raunio and Wiberg eds. (2000).

11 The Vienna European Council, 11-12 December 1998, accepted an interim report submitted by the Commission on a Northern Dimension for the Policies of the Union. The Commission report was largely based on the Finnish initiative tabled in the Luxembourg European Council in December 1997. Co-operation in the

## The Impact of EU on the Finnish Political System

Before membership one of the most repeated claims was that Finland can best protect her interests by participating in European integration. This political proposition is not wholly without foundation: the economic indicators, with the partial exception of unemployment, testify that the country has benefited from integration. Inflation and interest rates have been maintained at low levels, and economic growth has been extraordinarily rapid (Widgrén 2000). It appears that there have been no serious instances in which Finnish positions have been overruled in EU decision-making. For example, in the Agenda 2000 negotiations Finland achieved successfully her core agricultural and regional policy goals. However, after six years of membership, it is still too early to make any definitive evaluations of the benefits and drawbacks of membership.

following policy areas have been prioritised: energy, raw materials, environment and nuclear safety, border controls, trade, transport and communication, health and social policy, and research and education. The Foreign Minister Conference on the Northern Dimension in Helsinki in November 1999 discussed the concept, and further progress was made at the Helsinki European Council held 10-11 December, 1999. The Presidency conclusions of the Summit stated: 'The European Council welcomes the conclusions of the Foreign Ministers' Conference on the Northern Dimension held 11 and 12 November 1999 in Helsinki and the intention of the future Swedish Presidency to organise a high-level follow-up. The European Council invites the Commission to prepare, in cooperation with the Council and in consultation with the partner countries, an Action Plan for the Northern Dimension in the external and cross-border policies of the European Union with a view to presenting it for endorsement at the Feira European Council in June 2000.'

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