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The parliamentary election in Finland April 19, 2015

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The 2015 parliamentary election in Finland resulted in a big victory of KESK (the Finnish Centre) and a smaller one of VIHR (the Greens) as well as of SFP (the Swedish People's Party). The parties on the left side of the left-right continuum, SDP (Social Democratic Party) and VAS (the Left Alliance) were losers as was KOK (National Coalition Party), the Prime Minister party after the 2011 election.

1. Background

Jyrki Katainen's 6-party government ('six-pack') that took office after the 2011 parliamentary election underwent major changes over the parliamentary term that ended in April, 2015. It originally consisted of all but two parties represented in *Eduskunta* (the parliament of Finland). In addition to Katainen's own KOK, SDP, VIHR, VAS, SFP and KD (the Christian Democratic Party) became government parties, while the by far biggest election winner in terms of seats won, PS (the Finns Party), and the biggest loser in terms of seats lost, KESK, were left in the opposition. The

exceptionally long coalition formation period (six weeks) already hinted at difficulties in finding adequate common ground for governing the country. After all, in the traditional left-right continuum the parties representing polar ends – VAS at the left end and KOK at the right one – were present in the government. On the other hand, the ones located roughly in the middle of the continuum, KESK and PS, were in the opposition. And so it was that at the end of the parliamentary term only four parties remained in the government once VAS and VIHR had made their sortie as a result of major disagreements on government policy. There was also significant turnover in the composition of the collegium of ministers. Even Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen left to become a member of the European Commission. He was replaced by the new KOK leader, Alexander Stubb. The VAS Minister of Transport, Merja Kyllönen, ran successfully for European Parliament and left her post in the government in 2014. The SDP leader, Jutta Urpilainen, was deposed of her office in the party conference. Her successor in the party leadership, Antti Rinne, took over the office of the Minister of Finance, formerly held by Urpilainen.

The work of the government had been riddled with difficulties from the beginning. Arguably some of these were a result of the very ambitious government program. In particular, the aim to fundamentally redesign the Finnish social and healthcare ('sote') system turned out to be too much for this government to handle. The differences in views regarding the cuts in public sector spending and the arrangements for securing energy supply, were the main reasons for the VAS and VIHR exodus, respectively. In the summer of 2014 a long time VIHR parliamentarian Osmo Soiniavaara published an article where he suggested that the then present government might well be the worst Finland has ever had (Soiniavaara, 2014). Similar opinion was expressed by the recently retired long-time civil servant and most senior official in the Ministry of Finance, Sailas (2015). Overall, the April 2015 parliamentary election took place against the strange backdrop of a debate on whether the Katainen–Stubb government had been the worst or next to worst government in the nearly 100-year history of Finland. Unexpectedly enough, even Prime Minister Stubb admitted in a

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radio broadcast that he thought his government had largely failed (Kaleva, 2015). The criteria of government failure were not spelled out in the broadcast, but they no doubt had to do with the general observation that none of the main goals set out in the 2011 government manifesto had been achieved. Moreover, two central actors – the SDP leader and Minister of Finance Jutta Urpilainen and the KOK's Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen – were replaced about a year before the end of the mandate period and two parties – VAS and Greens – left the government.

2. Electoral system

One of the oldest parliaments elected by universal suffrage, *Eduskunta* is a unicameral institution consisting of 200 members. These are apportioned by the Ministry of Justice to 12 districts on the basis of the population of Finnish nationals residing in each district six months prior to the election according to the official population data base. The rule used by the Ministry is the largest remainder's (a.k.a. Hamilton's) formula. The number of districts is smaller than in the 2011 election as a result of two district mergers: the former North Savo and North Karelia districts now constitute the Savo- Karelia district and the former districts of Kymi and South Savo now form the district of South East Finland. In the apportionment, when compared with the 2011 election, the districts of Satakunta, South East Finland and Vaasa lost one seat each, while Helsinki, Pirkanmaa and Savo-Karelia gained one seat each. The 13th district, Åland, is entitled to one MP regardless of the size of its population (Election Act, 1998, § 6). The number of MP's returned from the 12 mainland districts range from 7 (Lapland) to 35 (Uusimaa). The threshold of representation, thus, varies from 2.78% to 12.5% of the votes cast in a district. Due to the district mergers the range of variation thus shrank somewhat from the preceding election (Nurmi and Nurmi, 2012).

Once the votes are cast, the result in each district is determined on the basis of d'Hondt's formula. Electoral alliances are allowed. Since each district forms a separate electoral entity, the alliances between parties may vary from one district to another. In the computation of the results, each alliance is treated as a party in its district. The voters vote for individual candidates. These are listed under the party or alliance lists. The votes given to the candidates of each list determine, in accordance with d'Hondt's formula, the number of seats allocated to each party or alliance in the district. The order of vote sums of individual candidates, in turn, determines the order of priority of the candidates in each list (Election Act, 1998, § 89).

Rather few electoral alliances were formed in the 2015 election: KOK joined SFP in Varsinais-Suomi; KD joined PS in Lapland and KA (For the Poor Party) in Helsinki; the Finnish Communist Party (SKP) and the Communist Labor Party (KTP) joined in four districts. No candidates from the KA, SKP or KTP were elected.

3. The campaign

All parties ran a relatively cautious campaign. The economic realities at the end of 2014 were not encouraging: there was no growth in the economy, the unemployment figures were rising above 9%, the EU sanctions against Russia and Russia's counter-sanctions were hitting the Finnish export sector hard, especially the food and dairy product industry, the ratio of public debt to GDP was approaching the critical 60% level, the public health care expenditure was rising and so on (Statistics Finland, 2014; Statistics Finland, 2015; Helsingin Sanomat, 2015; Pinomaa, 2015; WHO, 2014). In this climate, public sector cuts became the main theme in electoral campaigning. There seemed to be a nearly

Table 1
The distribution of support for the parties in Finnish parliamentary election 2015.

Party	Finland	Change (2011–2015)	Helsinki	Uusimaa	Varsinais-Suomi	Satakunta	Åland	Häme	Pirkanmaa	South-East Finland	Savo-Karelia	Vaasa	Central Finland	Oulu	Lapland	Electorate (absolute size)
KOK	18.2	-2.2	26.0	24.0	21.0	15.0	–	21.5	19.7	15.9	11.5	11.9	13.1	10.9	10.1	540212
SDP	16.5	-2.6	15.5	16.6	15.5	22.6	–	22.1	19.5	22.2	16.0	11.8	19.0	9.0	10.8	490102
PS	17.7	-1.4	11.3	18.0	19.3	25.0	–	19.5	17.8	21.1	19.7	15.9	19.3	16.2	16.5	524054
KESK	21.1	5.3	7.2	11.5	16.2	20.6	–	17.8	16.6	25.2	32.5	27.4	26.9	42.7	42.9	626218
VAS	7.1	-1.0	9.8	4.4	10.3	9.6	–	6.0	7.8	3.0	5.9	2.9	6.7	11.8	13.7	211702
VIHR	8.5	1.3	18.8	10.0	8.7	2.7	–	5.1	10.3	6.4	6.7	2.5	9.0	6.2	2.6	253102
SFP	4.9	0.6	6.8	10.2	5.0	0.3	–	–	–	0.3	–	20.7	–	0.6	0.5	144802
KD	3.5	-0.5	1.8	2.6	2.4	2.9	–	6.1	4.9	4.5	6.3	5.7	4.4	1.1	1.1	105134
STP	–	0.0	0.1	–	0.1	–	–	–	–	–	0.1	–	–	–	–	984
IPU	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	–	0.4	0.8	0.7	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.4	13638
KA	–	0.0	0.1	0.1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	623
PIR	0.8	0.3	1.4	1.1	0.8	0.3	–	0.8	1.1	0.4	0.6	0.4	0.8	0.6	0.8	25086
M11	0.3	0.0	0.1	0.7	0.1	0.3	–	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2	7442
SKP	0.3	-0.1	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.1	–	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.3	7529
KTP	–	0.0	–	0.1	–	0.1	–	0.1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1100
Other	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	–	100.0	–	0.9	0.1	–	0.1	–	–	–	16731
Invalid votes	0.5	-0.1	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.5	2.5	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.6	15397

Source: <http://www.vaalit.fi>.

universal agreement about the inevitability of cuts. At the same time, the goal of maintaining the welfare state (or welfare society, in the preferred formulation of the KOK politicians) was stressed by all parties.

The views on how to solve the problems in the Finnish economy revealed some differences between party manifestos: KOK emphasized labor market flexibility and insisted on lowering work-related taxes to increase employment and the competitiveness of the Finnish production of goods and services. SDP put emphasis on measures to support the export industry and maintaining the consumption capacity of the citizens. KESK – due to its status as an opposition party – was highly critical of the government's attempts to tackle the economic problems and was much helped by the government's failure to come up with feasible solutions to the two major public sector problems: the municipal reform and the redesign of the social and healthcare system of Finland. Both reforms came to nothing. The KESK manifesto stressed environmentally friendly bio-economy as well as cutting down on unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy. PS had declined to join the government in 2011 mainly because of the Greek bailout negotiations that it strongly opposed. In 2015, EU policy remained high on the PS campaign agenda, but was somewhat overshadowed by another issue: the conflict in Ukraine. PS became a strong advocate of the strengthening of the Finnish defense capability (including the recently abandoned landmines). On defense, the proverbial strange bed fellowship developed between PS and one of its main adversaries, SFP. The leader of the latter, Carl Haglund, held the post of the Minister of Defense in the Katainen–Stubb government. He presided over a reform in the Finnish defense forces and made no secret of his willingness to see Finland as a member of NATO. VIHR, true to its cause, opposed the building license for a new Rosatom affiliated nuclear facility by stressing the ensuing energy dependence on Russia. VAS, in contrast to most other parties, stood for increased public investment on infrastructure and for government sponsored minimum income for all citizens in order to strengthen the domestic consumption and to thereby alleviate the unemployment. KD's emphasis was on family values, entrepreneurial spirit and in adequate national defense. All parties objected cuts in spending on schools and higher education (Elonen, 2015).

Strangely enough, the developments in Ukraine didn't lift the NATO membership issue on the campaign agenda, at least not in the manifestos. KOK took an unambiguously favorable stand on the membership, KESK, somewhat surprisingly, was cautiously positive, while the other parties either refrained from taking a stand (PS, SFP, KD) or were opposed (SDP, VAS) (Elonen, 2015). The popular opinion remained critical of the NATO membership (Helsingin Sanomat, 2015).

4. The election results

The turnout among voters resident in Finland was 70.1, down 0.4 percent units from the 2011 election. The highest turnout was in the district of Helsinki (75.1%) and lowest in Åland (57.9%). As in 2011, the districts of Helsinki, Pirkanmaa, Uusimaa, Vaasa and Varsinais-Suomi exceeded the national average in turnout. The percentage of invalid votes was 0.5.

The distribution of support for the parties in the 13 electoral districts is shown in Table 1. Before commenting on the table in detail we should point out that STP (the Finnish Labor Party), IPU (the Independence Party), KA, PIR (the Pirate Party), M11 (the Change 2011 Party), SKP and KTP were left without MP's in the 2015 election. Parties that do not send any MP's in two consecutive elections, are removed from the official party registry. Accordingly, STP, IPU, KA, PIR and M11 are no longer registered. SKP and KTP were re-registered after the 2011 election (<http://vaalit.fi>). The clear winner of the election was KESK with a sizable 5.3% increase in national support. Although it thereby became the only party with a national support of more than 20%, it still fell short of regaining the vote share it had in the 2007 election (23.1%). The PS leader Soini, the architect of the 2011 'jytty' (loosely translated: surge in support), apparently looked upon the result of his party as a victory, although PS in fact lost a seat. A closer look at the data, however, reveals that in ranking terms Mr. Soini did better than in 2011: PS is now the biggest party in one district (Satakunta), and the first or second largest party in more than half of the mainland districts (see Fig. 1 and Table 3). In 2011 it was the second largest in 4 districts, but nowhere the largest. KOK's support had been declining in opinion polls for about year before the election. Hence, a loss of some kind was to be expected. After all, KOK as the party of the Prime Minister had to bear the main responsibility for the overall decline of the Finnish economy. The greatest loser, however, was SDP and the political left in general. SDP's former leader Urpilainen and her successor Rinne carried the burden of the Minister of Finance and were thus held mainly responsible for the state of the public finances in the country. Surveys suggested that SDP was losing voters mainly to PS, but also its governing partner KOK adopted a work and employment friendly phraseology that may have lured some voters away from the union reliant and traditional SDP. From the top position with a national electoral support of 28.3% in 1995, SDP has over twenty years declined to the fourth rank with a support of merely 16.5%. This decline has not been compensated by the fortunes of the other parliamentary party of the left, VAS. On the contrary, in 1995 VAS's support was 11.2% and twenty years later just 7.1%. The universal Western European pattern of declining support for the parties on the left has, thus, made its appearance in Finland as well. VIHR, on the other hand,

Table 2

The distribution of seats to parties in Finnish parliamentary election 2015.

Party	Finland	Change (2011–2015)	Helsinki	Uusimaa	Varsinais-Suomi	Satakunta	Åland	Häme	Pirkanmaa	South-East Finland	Savo-Karelia	Vaasa	Central Finland	Oulu	Lapland
KOK	37	-7	6	9	4	1	–	3	4	3	2	2	1	2	–
SDP	34	-8	4	6	3	2	–	3	4	4	2	2	2	1	1
PS	38	-1	3	7	3	2	–	3	4	4	3	3	2	3	1
KESK	49	14	1	4	3	2	–	3	3	5	6	5	4	9	4
VAS	12	-2	2	1	2	1	–	1	1	–	1	–	–	2	1
VIHR	15	5	5	3	1	–	–	–	2	1	1	–	1	1	–
SFP	9	0	1	4	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	–	–	–
KD	5	-1	–	1	–	–	–	1	1	–	1	1	–	–	–
Other	1	0	–	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Totals	200	0	22	35	17	8	1	14	19	17	16	16	10	18	7

Source://www.stat.fi.

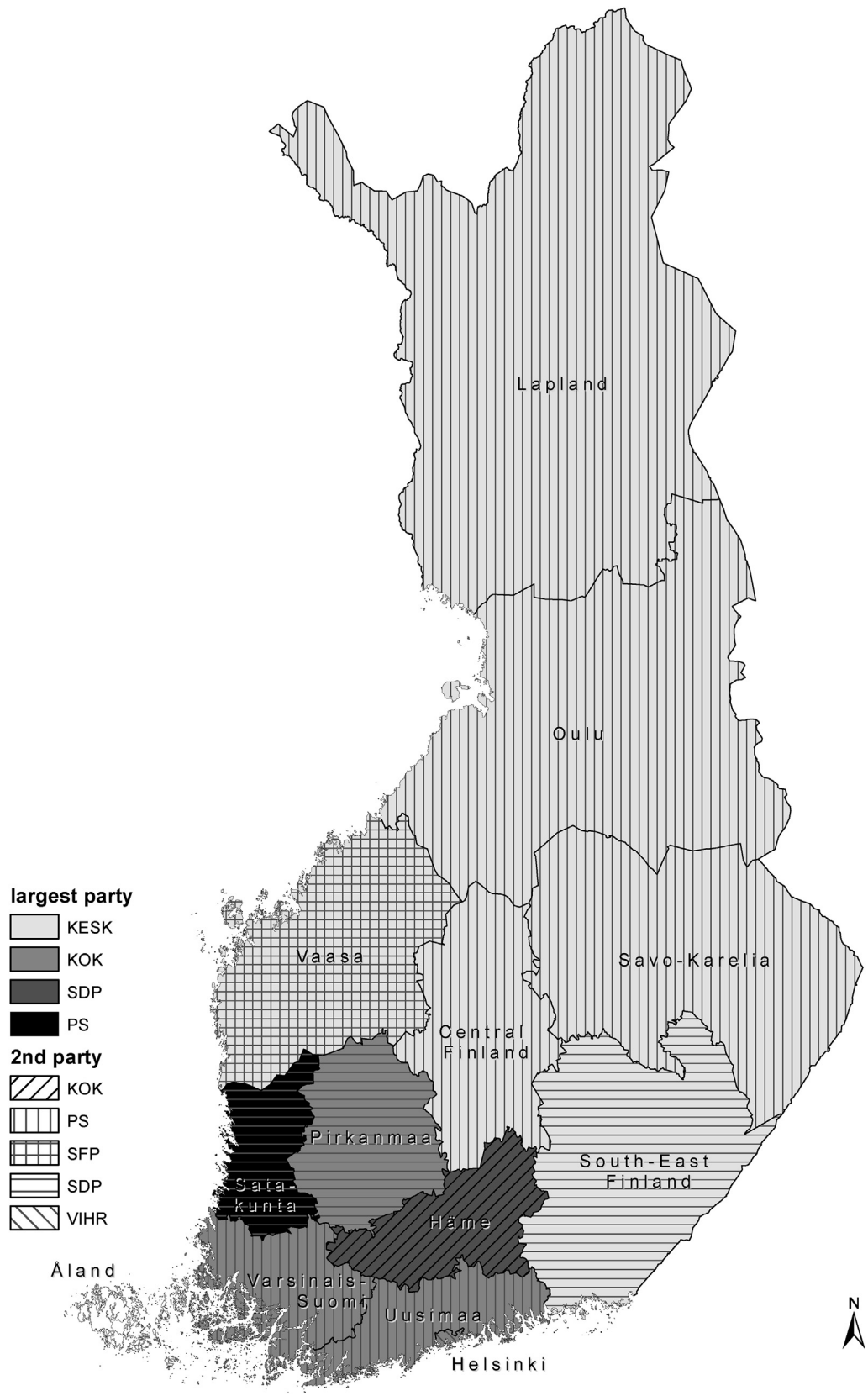


Fig. 1. The biggest and the second biggest party in the Finnish parliamentary election 2015.
 Source: <http://vaalit.fi>.

Table 3

The turnout and the two biggest parties by district.

District	Turnout	Difference to the mean turnout	Biggest party	2nd Biggest party
Helsinki	75.1	5	KOK	VIHR
Uusimaa	72.4	2.3	KOK	PS
Varsinais-Suomi	71	0.9	KOK	PS
Satakunta	68.4	−1.7	PS	SDP
Åland	57.9	−12.2	—	—
Häme	68.2	−1.9	SDP	KOK
Pirkanmaa	70.5	0.4	KOK	SDP
South-East Finland	66	−4.1	KESK	SDP
Savo-Karelia	65.5	−4.6	KESK	PS
Vaasa	72	1.9	KESK	SFP
Central Finland	69.7	−0.4	KESK	PS
Oulu	68.1	−2	KESK	PS
Lapland	69.1	−1	KESK	PS

Source: <http://vaalit.fi/>.

managed to regain the support it enjoyed before the catastrophic 2011 election where it lost one-third of its seats in the parliament. In percentage terms, VIHR became the second-largest winner in this election.

The country-wide vote margins do not play a direct role in the distribution of parliamentary seats to parties since each district constitutes a separate election for those mandates that are apportioned to it. As a consequence, it is not necessarily the case that, of two parties, the party with a larger number of votes in the whole country will always get a larger number of seats in the parliament. Apart from the number of votes, also their distribution over districts affects the seat distribution. This at first blush somewhat peculiar possibility materialized in this election between KOK and PS. The former received more votes, but fewer seats than the latter. Table 2 gives the distribution of seats to the parties after the 2015 election. On the basis of the results of the 2011 and 2015 elections Finland seems to have moved to a new constellation of parties. More specifically, the traditional big-three (SDP, KESK, KOK) setting has been replaced by a big-four one (SDP, PS, KESK, KOK). There are now two medium-sized parties, VIHR and VAS, along with two small ones, SFP and KD. The entry of PS into the class of big parties seems to have taken place at the cost of the political left, especially of SDP. The smallest parliamentary parties seem to enjoy a relatively stable support. When compared with the 2011 election, the Finnish parliament is pretty much on the same level of fragmentation: the effective number of parties is now 5.83 (5.78 in 2011). Its inverse, the Herfindal–Hirschman concentration index, has now the value 0.171 (0.173 in 2011). Although somewhat higher than in 2011, the vote share of the largest party is still less than a quarter and so is its share of seats (Nurmi and Nurmi, 2012).

Of the 200 MP's elected in 2015, 73 were not members of the preceding parliament. The turnover in *Eduskunta* was thus smaller than in the 2011 election where 84 seats changed occupancy. Largest was the turnover in VIHR where two thirds of the MP's are new (Turun Sanomat, 2015). Of those 73 MP's who did not keep their seats in 2015, 40 ran but didn't get elected, while 33 chose not to run. The 73 were, however, not all replaced by novices: 14 former MP's made – after spending one or more parliamentary terms outside – their re-entry to *Eduskunta*. The newly elected *Eduskunta* has 83 female and 117 male MP's. The youngest MP is 24 (Ilmari Nurminen, SDP, of Pirkanmaa) and the oldest 74 (Pertti Salolainen, KOK, of Helsinki) years of age (Suomen Kuvalehti 19, 2015). There are now 14 MP's under the age of 30, up from 10 in 2011. The MP with the longest parliamentary experience is the KOK's Ilkka Kanerva of Varsinais-Suomi with 40 years of continuous membership (Turun Sanomat, 2015).

5. The triple-S government

The election result made it plain that the KESK leader Juha Sipilä, a successful ICT businessman with a background in engineering, would lead the government coalition negotiations. As the leader of the parliamentary opposition his businesslike, constructive (if occasionally a bit high-handed) and consensus-oriented approach made a marked contrast to the PS leader Soini's outspoken, pull-no-punches criticism of the Katainen–Stubb government. As the leading government negotiator, Sipilä seemed in full control of the process, setting deadlines, defining targets and outlining the division of labor between various working groups apparently much inspired by to him familiar practices in engineering and business administration. Pretty soon after the election he announced that his target date for the nomination of the new government is at the end of May (KeskiSuomalainen, 2015). And so it happened that on May 29 President Sauli Niinistö nominated the new government headed by Sipilä. On June 4, 2015 the new parliament expressed its confidence to the government's strategic program.

Sipilä had let it be known that his favorite coalition would consist of the big four (Yle Uutiset, 2015), but this was not to be since rather early in the process SDP pulled out as they were reluctant to face yet another beating as a result of the inevitable cuts in public spending. So, Sipilä was left with a governing coalition including his own KESK accompanied by KOK and PS. Together they commanded a comfortable majority of 124 MP's in *Eduskunta*. This coalition made history by excluding SFP for the first time in more than three decades.

Sipilä launched the public spending cuts with the number of ministers: while Katainen had started with 19 of them, Sipilä's coalition settled for 14. At the same time, the number of political secretaries of state was reduced from 10 to 3. Yet, no ministries were merged or abolished. So, some creativity was called for in deciding the division of labor between the newly nominated ministers. Perhaps most interesting is the position of Minister of Labor and Justice, two areas formerly deemed pretty far apart.

In the Sipilä government, KESK received 6 ministerial portfolios, while KOK and PS had to settle for 4 each. Naturally, KESK and its leader Sipilä received the Prime Minister post. PS's and Soini's choice was, somewhat surprisingly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not the Ministry of Finance. The latter post was thus left to KOK and its leader Stubb. The new government was given the nickname 'triple-S' since the leaders' family names all happen to start with an S. Out of the 14 ministerial posts, only 5 are initially held by women, but after two years the balance is planned to change from 5 to 9 to 6–8 when the KESK Family and Welfare Minister Juha Rehula will hand his duties over to Annika Saarikko.

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Moldova's parliamentary elections of November 2014



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1. Background

The parliamentary elections of December 2014 in the Republic of Moldova (hereafter Moldova) were the eighth elections since independence from the USSR, held 20 years after the first competitive parliamentary elections (1994) and conducted 5 years after the 'Twitter Revolution' (2009) that brought down Vladimir Voronin's Communist (PCRM) government. Given Moldova's ethnic mix, its geographical location and complex history as well as the continuing 'frozen conflict' in the de facto state of Transnistria (where Moldovan elections are not conducted), the media have framed Moldova's elections through the prism of ethnic politics and as pivotal in indicating Moldova's future geopolitical orientation.

The 2014 elections were interesting for several reasons. Firstly, while the pro-European parties (Liberal Democrats/PLDM, Democrats/PDM and Liberals/PL) managed to form a coalition after 2009, their 2014 vote share fell significantly (Table 1). PCRM also suffered significant losses, while a new party, the Socialists (PSRM), gained from the structural weaknesses of both PCRM and the pro-European parties. However, these results need to be analysed not through a simple division between ethnic Russian

speakers looking to Russia, and Moldovan/Romanian speakers looking to the West and the EU (e.g. Herszenhorn, 2014). Rather, we must recognize that voters' choices are not driven only by ethnic politics, geopolitical or transitional attitudes but also by the incapacity and unwillingness of Moldova's political elite to reform political institutions and political culture. Secondly, regional divides need to be contextualised within Moldova's electoral system, where, as a single constituency, it is the share of absolute votes (not regionally proportional votes) that need to be analysed; any regional divides are outweighed by demographics.

2. Rules

Moldova is a unicameral parliamentary republic consisting of 101 MPs. Elections use proportional representation on closed lists in a single state-wide constituency every four years. Turnout must reach one third of registered voters for a valid election.

The electoral system should incentivise parties to work together, and it should work against independents and smaller parties; however, this has not yet occurred. Rather, Moldova's threshold of 6% for parties is one of the highest in the world. While electoral thresholds were lowered during 2009–2010 (Cantir, 2011), since 2013, they have been raised back to 6% for parties, 9% for electoral blocs of two parties and 11% for electoral blocs of three or more parties. These thresholds may have been raised to prevent PSRM from entering parliament, but instead they kept out the Communist Reform Party (PCR).

A second important element is the redistribution of seats. In 2010 (8.6% of votes cast, 147,715 votes) and in 2014 (a 16.4% of votes cast in 2014, 303,042 votes) a significant number of votes were redistributed away from losing parties, i.e. those who fell below the electoral threshold, to winning parties; more this number of redistributed votes doubled between 2010 and 2014.

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