

The Future of Europe Debate in Finland: Cautiously in the Core

Kristi Raik, Researcher, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

General Position

Finnish positions in the Future of Europe debate reflect the overall aim of Finnish EU policy to belong to the Union's 'core'. Although being a new, small and peripheral member state, Finland has been fairly successful in its aspirations to take an active and constructive role in the EU. Its generally pro-integrationist line has been to some extent limited by worries about national sovereignty. The broader public tends to be more sceptical towards deepening integration and strengthening supranational institutions than the positions of the government. There are also differences between the views of political leaders - Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen being more pro-integrationist than Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja and President Tarja Halonen.

Institutional Reform

When it comes to institutional reform, the Finnish positions have been close to the proposals of the Commission and the Benelux countries. As a small country, Finland has been particularly concerned about the position of small states in EU decision making and has underlined the principle of equal treatment of Member States.

A strong Commission that promotes common interests of the Union, safeguards common rules and norms, and protects against the domination of big Member States is one of the cornerstones of the Finnish approach. *The Community method* is seen as the best way to enhance efficiency and openness of EU decision making.

Finland would *increase majority voting* in the Council as well as *co-decision* with the European parliament, and introduce a *double majority* of populations and Member States. The role of national parliaments should also be strengthened, but continue to be formulated primarily on a national level. Finland supports the proposal to strengthen the involvement of national parliaments as guards of subsidiarity through an 'early warning system'.

The idea of a *permanent Council President is rejected* by Finland, since it could undermine the leverage of small Member States and weaken the Commission. Finland has also criticised the proposal for lack of clarity over the accountability of the President and fears that it might weaken openness of decision making. Defending the interests of small states and the principle of Member States' equality, Finland wishes to maintain the *rotating presidency*. Continuity and coherence of the current system could be improved by multi-annual work programmes and tighter cooperation between successive presidencies.

Finland is sceptical towards the establishment of any new institutions, including the Congress. The proposals concerning both the Council President and the Congress have been criticised as solutions that would increase bureaucracy and widen the gap between

the citizens and EU institutions instead of simplifying and clarifying the decision making structures and bringing the Union closer to the citizens.

External Action

In the field of external action, Finland supports Communitarisation of the CFSP, but would at the same time maintain a relatively strong intergovernmental aspect. The role of the Commission in CFSP should be strengthened and majority voting increased. Finland would also strengthen the position of High Representative and link that institution closely to the Commission.

The Finnish positions on security and defence issues are conditioned by the policy of non-alignment. Finland stresses the importance of crisis management and soft security in the EU's external action and says no to common defence. However, one can expect major changes in this respect over the next years, as the option of NATO membership is now being seriously considered. A decision to join Nato would obviously lead to a reassessment of Finland's position on European defence.

Public Views

Public interest in and awareness about the Future of Europe of debate was until recently very low, but now that the weight of the Convention appears to have increased and more national governments have appointed foreign ministers as their representatives, the Finnish debate has become a little more active.

Several politicians and commentators have voiced a concern that Finland is not paying enough attention to the Convention. There have also been some calls for replacing the representative of Finnish government, Dr. Teija Tiilikainen with the foreign minister – not because of dissatisfaction with her work, but in order to raise the profile and authority of Finnish representation. The latter idea has, however, been rejected by Prime Minister Lipponen.