

Executive Summary

The defeat of Finland at the 2012 elections to the UN Security Council came as a surprise to most delegates and observers. Finland, which was competing with Australia and Luxembourg, had long been considered a favorite.

This report—based on confidential interviews by the International Peace Institute (IPI)—is an attempt to analyze what differentiated the three candidates and to identify some lessons learned from their respective campaigns.

I. Analysis of the campaign

1. Campaign themes

All three candidates developed similar campaign themes that emphasized their respective contributions to the work of the United Nations. Finland was placed in an unusual configuration: it had to compete on the one hand with a country the size of a continent, and on the other with one of Europe's smallest states.

Sensitivities within the UN about the representation of European Union countries on the Security Council played in favor of Australia's candidacy, and unexpectedly led Finland and Luxembourg to compete with one another.

2. Strategies

Finland focused its strategy on UN issues. The cornerstone of Australia's strategy was to complement its discourse on UN policies with an emphasis on its *bilateral* and *regional* relationships with member states. It led an exceptionally active campaign both in New York and in capitals. Luxembourg prioritized cultivating ambassadors in New York while keeping close, constant contact at the ministerial level.

Luxembourg enlisted support from small states, from Francophone and Portuguese-speaking countries, and from EU members. Australia was endorsed by the Forum of the Pacific and by CARICOM, had access to the members of the Commonwealth, and received solid support in Asia and Africa, and also from some European countries.

Finland could not rely—as Australia and Luxembourg did—on cultural and historic ties to build its constituency. It was supported by the Nordics, the Baltic states, and CARICOM, but received insufficient support from the least developed countries, in particular in Africa, and did not receive full backing from EU members.

3. Resources

Australia mobilized important resources for its campaign with a budget of USD 25 million over 5 years, covering all its costs—including expenses for additional staff in

Canberra and New York, seminars, and travel costs of special envoys. Finland and Luxembourg spent much less, although available information relating to their campaign budgets (2 million Euros for Finland in 2010-2012 and 1 million Euros for Luxembourg in 2011-2012) does not include expenses for additional staff.

4. Tactics

Australia had announced its candidacy in 2008 and started its campaign almost immediately. It repeatedly checked pledges of support at all levels, and stepped up its efforts in the last two years of the campaign.

Luxembourg had declared its candidacy in 2001. It started its actual campaign in 2008 and progressively managed to establish strong credibility.

Finland had declared its candidacy in 2002 but its campaign only started in 2009. Once launched, the Finnish campaign was at first very effective. The question remains whether Finland competed less actively in the last phase of the campaign, at a moment when its competitors intensified their outreach.

Australia probably received between 150 and 160 pledges of support before the election. Luxembourg seems to have had slightly less than 160 pledges and Finland around 145.

5. Ideologies and Attitudes

Policies matter in UN electoral campaigns, but the competitive edge comes from bilateral relations or joint interests.

Australia was aware that its political proximity to the United States and its own positions on the Middle East could be considered as weaknesses and it worked to limit possible damage to its candidacy. Luxembourg is traditionally seen as favoring consensual views and did not have issues of concern.

Finland enjoyed a generally positive image as a Nordic country, but, too focused on UN issues, its campaign did not communicate enough about Finland's own achievements and identity.

6. Ethics

All three candidates seem to have refrained from committing to defend specific positions at the Council that would not be consistent with their traditional policies.

Finland's long track record as an important donor was an asset, but probably to a lesser degree than for its competitors. Almost half of Finland's ODA is delivered through multilateral channels and, hence, less "visible" than that of Australia or Luxembourg.

II. Lessons learned

1. For Finland

Finland should remain engaged in the work of the United Nations and on the international scene. It should use the lessons learned from the campaign to build on its strengths and adapt, where needed, its diplomatic tools.

1.1. Stay engaged in the work of the UN

Last year's elections have not tarnished the good image of the country at the UN.

Finland should continue what it currently does, which includes its contributions to UN funds and programs (with some adaptation), but also its initiatives like its work on mediation and conflict prevention. It could do even more and should review ways to revive its participation in peace operations and to bring support to efforts to address crises, in particular in Africa.

1.2. Sharpen its international profile and communicate more effectively

Finland could seize the current opportunity to reflect on its international profile, on what makes this profile different or similar to the ones of its closest partners, and on ways to communicate more effectively about what it stands for and what it does.

Finland could consider a more selective funding strategy and concentrate its efforts on a smaller number of multilateral institutions working in areas which match its most important priorities. This would help build a more concrete narrative on Finland's development aid.

For the Foreign Ministry, a more effective communication strategy would also require a reflection on ways to better include communication techniques in the training and professional development of diplomats.

1.3. Diversify its bilateral partnerships

Finland's substantial diplomatic network is a strong asset. But the campaign has revealed a few blind spots—in particular in Francophone Africa—and a certain deficit of communication with Arab countries. Finland could explore how to fill in these gaps.

Finland's ODA is a major asset and could perhaps be more clearly connected to its foreign policy. Finland should continue to prioritize the most effective use of its resources from a development perspective. By redeploying only a margin of its ODA to bilateral cooperation, Finland could reach out to a wider range of countries than it currently does.

2. For the Nordic countries

Finland's defeat came at the same time as Sweden's failure to be elected to the UN Human Rights Council and four years after Iceland's unsuccessful bid for a Security Council seat. Although each election had its own logic, many in New York consider these recent failures as "a wake-up call for the Nordics."

Large segments of the UN membership acknowledge the particular profile of the Nordics as a "moral pillar" of the UN. But, for elections, they also tend to consider a Nordic candidate as one competitor among others, and very often not too different politically from the other Western candidates.

Nordic states could reflect together on how a renewed commitment to the work of the UN and a more effective communication strategy could help them remain true to their values and at the same time engage more effectively with the other countries.

3. For the EU

Competition between EU members for elections at the Security Council—or other major UN elections—plays against the interest of EU members themselves. It also shows a lack of unity and solidarity within the Union and belies the European aspiration to a common foreign policy.

A clear understanding among EU members that they need to work together to avoid electoral competition would strengthen the credibility of the EU foreign policy and would help enhance its contribution to the work of the UN.

4. For the UN membership

Countries tend to devote a larger amount of resources and mobilize at a higher political level to promote their candidacies at elections. Some delegates believe that such competition is inherently a healthy process. Others are more uncomfortable with big campaigns and all the effort which is put into them.

On a voluntary basis, candidates willing to promote transparency at elections could:

- Be transparent about their campaign budget, and
- Reaffirm the rules and principles of their development cooperation.

There is a need for a dialogue on the financing of development cooperation. Each set of donors seems to follow its own rules: South-South cooperation for the new donors, OECD-DAC for the traditional ones, with little overlap between the two. Member states could reflect on how to create some common ground between these different models.