

Former Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen

Eulogy at the memorial ceremony for President Mauno Koivisto

House of the Estates 25 May 2017

***Embargo at ca 5.30 pm***

Honourable Mrs Tellervo Koivisto, Relatives of Mauno Koivisto,

President of the Republic of Finland,

Prime Minister,

Fellow Mourners,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

We have escorted President Mauno Koivisto to his final resting place. The Finnish people have shown great respect towards him, in a manner reminiscent of the same esteem received by President Urho Kekkonen.

Urho Kekkonen piloted Finland through the most difficult stages of the Cold War, acquiring for our country the room to manoeuvre, to participate in cooperation with Western countries. He acted prudently but firmly when Finland's interests so required. So, too, did Mauno Koivisto: when the time came to position Finland in the post-Cold War world, he made historic decisions without hesitation.

What were the experiences and things that paved Mauno Koivisto's way towards the presidency?

The first was a good home, which taught respect for work and living modestly. From this home he obtained a profound, personal Christian faith. Then came war, fighting in the front line, surviving that extreme challenge.

Contemplation, intellectual curiosity characterised Mauno Koivisto from his youth. Opportunities to study and to visit foreign countries were certainly liberating experiences for him, which he really enjoyed. By the time he graduated as a Doctor of

Philosophy in 1957, Mauno Koivisto had become an intellectual who was most comfortable among the so-called “O-group” of economists.

But let's not forget his marriage with Tellervo Kankaanranta, without whom Mauno Koivisto may perhaps have taken a different path. We younger couples have received from the Koivistos a much-needed model of how to get along together.

Work in the Port of Turku and ideological interests brought Mauno Koivisto to the labour movement, the trade union movement and social democracy. In war, he had fought against an external threat, after the war there was a need to fight an internal threat that really threatened our democracy. When strong measures were being taken, one could not be on the receiving end.

In the 1960s, Mauno Koivisto threw himself into ideological debate with the radicals of the time, turning away from Romantic Leftism, which could have led to anarchy. Law and order, stable conditions, were of fundamental importance to him. He rejected extremes but he did not pretend to be "reasonable man", who positions himself between extremes without expressing a view.

Mauno Koivisto began to take an increasing interest in foreign policy – his early studies of the Russian language being an example of this. He understood Urho Kekkonen's actions, and had a significant influence when the Social Democratic Party began to support Kekkonen's foreign policy and seek under Rafael Paasio's leadership effective party relations with the Soviet Union.

Urho Kekkonen's non-alignment policy maxim was: "We are not judges, but doctors". Mauno Koivisto was able to crystallise his foreign policy outlook in an equally succinct way.

I was present when, in summer 1980, Prime Minister Koivisto received in Helsinki a delegation of Swedish journalists, who were led by Leif Leifland, the then State Secretary of Sweden's Ministry for Foreign Affairs. To a question from a certain journalist visitor as to what, in the Prime Minister's opinion, was the most important difference between Finnish and Swedish foreign policies, Mauno Koivisto answered: "Finland seeks friends from near at hand and enemies from far afield, while Sweden does the opposite."

The Swedish visitors understood both the issue and the humour. Mauno Koivisto was interested in the Swedish language, and he was close to the Swedish-speaking Finnish community. His relations with the leadership of Sweden were good, in many cases, very warm.

I obtained first-hand experience of this in autumn 1980, on a fishing trip by prime ministers Mauno Koivisto and Thorbjörn Fälldin to Sweden's northernmost mountain. The prime ministers' friendship was unaffected by the fact that all of the fish were caught by Fälldin.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During Mauno Koivisto's political career, Finland experienced two major upheavals: in internal policy and in foreign policy.

During his second government, Koivisto was engaged in a new struggle for survival. Whether he would even be Prime Minister, not to mention President, was shrouded in doubt. In that period of a few years, when it sometimes seemed that nothing would work out, the Prime Minister was at various stages always able to sum up the situation:

"When the mill turns, out comes flour";

"Crisis in Government, not Government crisis";

"The Government has somehow stumbled along, and all the big issues have been resolved";

"Yes, that's about it", could be a suitable message to the present Government.

The Turku way of speaking only improved his credibility. If I, as Prime Minister, had tried to use Savonian sayings, I can imagine what the feedback would have been like.

The transition from the Kekkonen era to Koivisto's time ultimately happened in good democratic order in 1982. We live, in principle, in the new age of healthy parliamentarianism that began at that time. Governments consist of various parties, and none of them as a matter of course.

In the other, external, upheaval, when the Cold War ended, President Mauno Koivisto made decisions in autumn 1991 about Finland's application for membership of the European Community as well as the ending of the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, at a time when Finland's interests required fast solutions. At the same time, Mauno Koivisto ensured the continuity of Finland's foreign policy.

1991 was not year zero for Finland. We did not come out of the cold, rather we went into the European Union head held high, and as good a Western country as all the others in the Western community. For this journey, which took place with good neighbourly relations, we can thank our great presidents Paasikivi, Kekkonen and Koivisto.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mauno Koivisto combined aristocratic dignity, a relaxed disposition, sometimes mischievous humour. Volleyball as well as agricultural and forestry work at Tähtelä were his lifeblood. There was no better agricultural policy expert in Finland than the host of Tähtelä.

Mauno Koivisto loved to play volleyball anywhere, whenever there was an opportunity. On a visit to Dubrovnik in Yugoslavia in 1980, when preparing for a volleyball match against a local women's team, he taught me in the warm-up to receive a serve. After I managed somehow to put my hands into the receiving position, Koivisto exclaimed: "Quick-learner!" It was the best recognition I ever received from him.

The Finnish dream was realised in Mauno Koivisto, and it was to the benefit of his country. He could appear to be distant, but he was experienced as close by everyone.

Plato created the idea of the philosopher king, who would simultaneously be both wise and able to control his passions in exercising power. Plato did not find such a ruler in the Greek sphere of influence. In our time, of all the statesmen I have known, Mauno Koivisto corresponds best to that unachievable ideal of wisdom.

Machiavelli defined politics as a struggle for power in the market for votes, when it is advantageous to appear virtuous. Sometimes, it may even happen, Machiavelli continued, that he who is elected is virtuous.

When today we think with longing about Mauno Koivisto, we feel content about what he was and what he did for his country.