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A hundred years of independent Finland; see how things stand today.

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A long-time battleground between Sweden and Russia, Finland has gone from strength to strength since WWII.

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Finland Today

Though Finland was affected by the global downturn, overall this hundred-year-old nation is in good health, always scoring highly on indexes measuring quality of life, education, democracy and equality. Bailouts and increased immigration have led some to question involvement in the euro and EU, but in general the country is focused on tackling challenges like climate change together with the rest of Europe.

Best on Film

Man Without a Past (2002) One of Aki Kaurismäki's best.

Miesten Vuoro (Steam of Life; 2010) Brilliant documentary of men sharing the stories of their lives in the sauna.

Tuntematon Sotilas (The Unknown Soldier; 1955) Considered Finland's greatest film about the Winter War.

Best in Print

Kalevala (Elias Lönnrot) Readable 'national epic' compiled from the songs of bards.

The Year of the Hare (Arto Paasilinna) Offbeat tale of hare-y travels.

Seven Brothers (Aleksis Kivi) A 19th-century Finnish classic.

Century of Success

Since independence from Russia in 1917, remote, forested, cold, sparsely populated Finland has had a hell of a last century. It has propelled itself from agricultural backwater of the Russian Empire to one of the world's most prosperous nations, with great standards of living and education, low crime, a practical, deep-rooted sense of environmentalism, strong cultural output and a muscular technology industry. On the centenary in 2017 Finns can toast a remarkable success story.

Russia

The enormous eastern neighbour has been one of the main talking points in Finland since the 12th century, when Russian power began to loom over the land. Long experience with the Bear has stood Suomi in good stead, and the two countries have a strong relationship, with much exchange of commerce and tourism. It's a very important market for import and export of goods and services, and any Russian counter-sanctions against the EU could cost Finland dear. Nevertheless, Finns on the street are understandably nervous of a nationalistic Moscow, exacerbated by events in Ukraine in 2014. Memories of bitter fights for freedom are too painful for national service and the army not to be taken seriously here.

External Relations

The 2011 parliamentary elections in Finland sent a shockwave through Europe as the nationalistic, populist True Finns party came from nowhere to seize 19% of the vote. Their absolute rejection of bailouts of other EU economies meant that rather than compromise their principles by entering a coalition government, they opted to become the major opposition party instead, establishing them as a serious political force. Meanwhile, the other MPs finally formed a six-party coalition under the prime ministership of centre-right Jyrki Katainen.