

Center-right Fidesz party wins parliamentary vote

By PABLO GORONDI

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BUDAPEST | Hungary's center-right Fidesz party, led by Viktor Orban, won a two-thirds parliamentary majority on Sunday, the National Election Office said.

With 97.2 percent of the ballots counted, Fidesz was projected to have 263 seats in the 386-seat legislature, five more than the 258 seats needed to control two-thirds of the parliamentary mandates.

"We can promise that we will strive to deserve this trust," Lajos Kosa, one of Fidesz's main politicians, told a crowd celebrating the victory in downtown Budapest.



Viktor Orban

Fidesz already had won the right to form the next government in the first round of elections April 11, but the two-thirds majority will allow it to pass legislation without having to secure support from the opposition.

The now-governing Socialist Party will have 59 deputies in the next parliament, followed by the far-right Jobbik, with 47; and a green party, Politics Can Be Different, with 16. There will be one independent deputy.

Fidesz, which led the governing coalition from 1998 to 2002, has pledged to reduce bloated national and local government payrolls, simplify the tax system, grant citizenship to ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries and halve the number of parliamentary deputies.

Twenty years after the collapse of communism and the 1990 democratic elections, Hungary is paying the price of postponed reforms, costly campaign pledges and the continued appeal of a paternalistic state.

Only a loan of \$27 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)



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Supporters of Fidesz, Hungary's main center-right party, cheer preliminary official results in Budapest. Fidesz took a commanding lead in the second round of parliamentary elections Sunday, while Jobbik, a far-right party with an anti-Gypsy and nationalist agenda, was a strong third just behind the governing Socialists.

and other institutions saved the country from defaulting on its debts in late 2008, while record-high unemployment levels and a recession in which the economy shrunk by 6.7 percent last year present a real challenge for the next government.

Fidesz is expected to negotiate with the IMF for a higher budget deficit than the current 2010 target of 3.8 percent of GDP, giving it room to consolidate loss-making state companies and possibly implement modest tax cuts.

"Essentially, Fidesz will deliver reform plans in return for a deficit target which is less detrimental to the growth outlook," said a report from investment bank Morgan Stanley in London.

Fidesz also would be able to elect the country's next president and choose members of the Constitutional Court, the State Audit Office and other public institutions.

Fidesz has promised to clear up at least a dozen notorious corruption cases linked to the outgoing Socialist

government and some already being investigated by police and prosecutors.

Analysts said Fidesz could struggle to satisfy voters yearning for easy solutions.

"Fidesz's popularity ... is to a considerable extent based on illusory expectations of the party's supporters concerning a painless way out of Hungary's current situation," said Sandor Richter at the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies.