

Hungary's far-right Orban claims victory as party takes sweeping poll lead



Women in traditional Hungarian outfits prepare their votes in Veresegyhaz, 30km east of Budapest, on Sunday. Picture: AFP
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Hungary's firebrand nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban claimed a "historic victory" as his right-wing party took a thumping lead in Sunday's parliamentary election.

With almost 98 per cent of votes counted, Mr Orban's Fidesz has won 48.81 per cent of the vote, the National Election Office (NVI) said, surpassing even the expectations of many in the ruling party.

The score represents an improvement on four years ago, and puts the 54-year-old on track for a third consecutive term in office — and more possible clashes with the EU.

Voter turnout had reached 69.26 per cent, up more than seven percentage points on elections in 2014, the NVI said, with several polling stations forced to open late to accommodate the increase.

Addressing flag-waving supporters in Budapest yesterday, Mr Orban said the result gave Hungarians "the opportunity to defend themselves and to defend Hungary".

The crowd cheered as a giant TV screen showed electoral maps of the country almost completely covered in Fidesz's orange colour.

At end of his speech, Orban led the crowd in singing a song from the country's 1848 revolution, *Long Live Hungarian Freedom*.

One supporter, 53-year-old Eva Halasz, said: "Viktor is the only leader for Hungary, this proves he has the nation behind him, there is no one in this country like him, there is no opposition here."

Before the vote it had been thought a surge in voter turnout would favour the opposition Jobbik, a far-right party that has been moving towards the centre, and the centre-left Socialists. However, with nearly all votes counted, results show Jobbik trailing far behind with 19.67 per cent, the Socialists on 12.42 per cent and the environmentalist LMP party on 6.97 per cent.



'Hungary is first for us!': Viktor Orban claims victory in Budapest. Picture: AFP

Jobbik's leader Gabor Vona resigned on Sunday night, as he had promised to do if Jobbik did not win, and railed against the "lies" and "constant attacks" he said his party faced during the campaign. It became clear on Sunday night Mr Vona would struggle to win even the seat he contested in his hometown of Gyoengyoes.

Mr Orban will likely seize on the results as vindication of his clashes with EU institutions over his hardline anti-immigration policies and rejection of the EU's refugee resettlement program, as well as his moves to clamp down on civil society groups.

An Orban victory will also provide a fillip for other nationalist politicians and those on the far right around Europe who look to him as an inspiration.

In his speech, Mr Orban thanked Jaroslaw Kaczynski, leader of Poland's governing PiS party, for his support. Poland and Hungary see each other as key allies in their battles with EU institutions.

France's far-right leader Marine Le Pen tweeted her congratulations, saying the "reversal of values and mass immigration promoted by the EU has been rejected once again".

Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders was also quick to welcome the "excellent result".

"These elections have proved that migration is indeed a winning card for Orban's Fidesz. In the current Hungarian context, migration prevails against all other issues, from corruption to healthcare," said analyst Andras Biro-Nagy from the Policy Solutions think tank.

In terms of what a third Fidesz term may hold, Mr Biro-Nagy said "we should take seriously what Orban promised to his opponents (in a speech) on 15 March". In that speech, Mr Orban had said he would take unspecified "moral, political and legal" measures against his opponents after the vote, prompting fears of a crackdown on opposition.

Fidesz may even be on track to win its coveted two-thirds "supermajority" in parliament that would grant it wide powers to press ahead with controversial measures and change the constitution. Some of the previous measures passed using this mechanism include those that have put Mr Orban on a collision course with Brussels.

They include what critics call the erosion of media and judicial independence and a crackdown on civil society organisations linked to liberal US billionaire George Soros.

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