

# Forum ahead in Hungarian poll

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in Budapest

**T**HE centre-right Hungarian Democratic Forum last night secured a narrow first round lead after Sunday's parliamentary elections in which it and its rival, the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats, polled much more heavily than any other contender.

Jozsef Antall, leader of the Forum and the man emerging as frontrunner for prime minister, claimed a qualified victory, but the cumbersome and slow counting procedure left the outcome inconclusive.

"On the basis of the information available, the Forum can qualify as the winner of the election," said Mr Antall. He said that the Forum would improve its showing in the second round of voting in two weeks' time, when it would emerge in a position "without which it will be impossible to form a government".

But although the Forum took a three to four point lead over the Free Democrats with more than 75 per cent of the votes counted, it was not clear what the result meant in terms of parliamentary seats. The 386 seats are awarded on the basis of a mixed system of first past the post balloting and proportional representation.

Only five of the 176 constituency seats were decided in the first round, three going to the Forum, one to Miklos Nemeth, the outgoing Prime Minister, and none to the Free Democrats.

While the Free Democrats conceded that the Forum was likely to be ahead by around four or five seats, it argued that it stood to gain in the second round and could still emerge as the biggest single party.

The big two, polling between 20 and 24 per cent, were well ahead of the pack. The clearest outcome of Hungary's first free elections in decades was the emergence of a nascent two-party, non-Communist system, as domestic and foreign observers alike declared the biggest victor in Sunday's polls to be the mature and democratically minded Hungarian electorate.

But now the big two are wooing the third placed party, the Independent Smallholders, for its coalition favours.

There remains the possibility that the main two will get together in a grand coalition, but this would only happen if all other coalition-building efforts run aground.

A leading Free Democrat ruled out any talks with the Forum ahead of the second round.

The Smallholders fared worse than predicted, at around 12 per cent, but retained a key position in deciding with whom to throw in their lot.

While the rump of the old Communist Party looked unlikely to clear the 4 per cent hurdle needed to enter parliament, its reformist successor, the ruling Socialist Party, polled 10 per cent, and Imre Pozsgay, its most prominent figure, spoke of looking forward to its role as a loyal opposition.

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