

Presidential Election in Hungary, 29th June 2010

RESULTS

Pal Schmitt, elected President of the Republic of Hungary

On 29th June last Pal Schmitt was elected President of the Republic of Hungary. The candidate put forward by the ruling party (FIDESZ – Young Democrats Alliance) led by Prime Minister Viktor Orban won 263 of the 386 possible votes from the members of the Orszaggyules, the only chamber in parliament i.e. +5 votes more than the 2/3 majority required for this election. 59 MPs voted in support of one other candidate, the present Ambassador of Hungary in Thailand, Andras Balogh (Socialist Party MSZP) who qualified the election of Pal Schmitt as a farce – 44 others abstained including MPs from the far right party, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik). Members of the Do Politics Differently party (LMP) believe that the candidates were not men qualified to occupy the supreme office.

Presidential Office

The President of the Republic of Hungary is elected by secret ballot by Members of Parliament at least 30 days before the end of the mandate of the outgoing Head of State for a five year term in office. The Constitution prohibits him from undertaking more than two consecutive mandates. Candidates for the supreme office must be 35 years old. The President of the Republic is the head of the armed forces; he appoints the ambassadors and the plenipotentiary ministers as well as the president and vice-president of the Hungarian Central Bank and the rectors of the universities. The head of State can attend the sessions of the Orszaggyules and the parliamentary committees – he can also take the initiative to organise a referendum.

Pal Schmitt, the new President of the Republic

68 year-old Pal Schmitt is a former sportsman. A gold medal winner in fencing at the Olympic Games of Mexico in 1968 and in Munich in 1972 he has been a member of the International Olympic Committee since 1983 – a structure he was Vice-President of from 1995-1999. Pal Schmitt is an economist. In the 1990's he became a diplomat and was appointed ambassador of Hungary in Spain from 1993-1997, then in Switzer-

land from 1999-2002. The following year he joined FIDESZ of which he became the Vice-President. He was elected MEP in the June election of 2004 and he was re-elected on 7th June 2009. Between 2009 and 2010 Pal Schmitt was Vice-President of the Parliament in Strasbourg before being appointed leader of the Orszaggyules after the Hungarian election on 11th and 25th April last.

Pal Schmitt sees himself as a "President of the People" and hopes to "be close to the population" and "ready for dialogue". He also hopes to "enhance the dignity of the position of Head of State". He said he was "devoted to the nation" and that his values were those of "Christian humility, humanism and public spirit." The new president, who according to his own words, has "good relations with the country's authorities" declared that "he did not want to impede the legislative process without reason".

"Let us complete the post-Communist era. A modern, self-confident Hungary with its thousand year history behind it, must now emerge together with a new Constitution for a new, united Hungarian nation – this is our responsibility with regard to history," declared Pal Schmitt during a speech that he gave in Parlia-

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ment after his election – a speech he concluded with a quote from Istvan 1st (Saint Stephen), the first King of Hungary (1001-1038) : *“Leading a nation and a country has nothing to do with pride and superiority but with humility and service”*.

“The new President of the Republic will not be an impediment to government impetus. His presidency will be cooperative and without conflict,” declared Orsolya Szomszed, an analyst at the Nezapont Institute. *“The present President of the Republic, Lazlo Solyom defended the Constitution tooth and nail, Pal Schmitt*

will be a less political head of State,” he added. Prime Minister Viktor Orban hopes to modify the Hungarian Constitution by 2011, a measure that will have to receive a 2/3 approval by MPs, (263). A committee responsible for preparing for the changes has just been set up.

The new President of the Hungarian Republic will officially take office on 6th August next.

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