

Austria Neo-Nazi Presidential Hopeful Concedes Election Defeat



Vienna, December 5 (RHC)-- Quelling fears of an expansion of Europe's far-right revival, Austria's ultra-conservative presidential candidate Norbert Hofer's campaign conceded defeat after polls closed in Sunday's election, as independent candidate and former Green Party leader Alexander Van der Bellen locked in a lead in preliminary results.

"The bottom line is it didn't quite work out," Hofer's campaign manager Herbert Kickl told broadcaster ORF as initial projections showed Van der Bellen leading with a score of around 54 percent to Hofer's 46 percent.

"In this case the establishment — which pitched in once again to block, to stonewall and to prevent renewal — has won," he added. Hofer's anti-immigration Freedom Party, also known as the FPO, was formed by a Nazi SS general and has been described by Vienna's mayor as the "xenophobic face of Austria." The candidate's racist and bigotry-filled rhetoric has also won him the moniker "the European Trump" during his campaign. Ahead of Sunday's election, he had been poised for a win after securing key endorsements.

Van der Bellen, on the other hand, enjoys the support of the Green Party and many progressive groups in the country. In the final days ahead of the election, an 89-year-old Holocaust survivor also threw her support behind the candidate, calling on Austrians to “vote wisely” in the polarized election.

Sunday’s election, a rerun of the initial election six months ago, comes as a vindication for Van der Bellen, who defeated Hofer in the original runoff in May. A runoff was later ordered due to alleged irregularities in the vote.

The election results bring a sigh of relief to Europe, particularly for progressive forces, as a win for Hofer would have ushered in the first elected far-right government in Austria since World War II.

Initial results showed Van der Bellen held a strong lead over Hofer with 54 percent to 46 percent.

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