

By Associated Press

Estonia's parliament on Monday re-elected U.S.-educated President Toomas Hendrik Ilves for a second five-year term as head of state of the eurozone newcomer which is celebrating 20 years of independence from the Soviet Union.

The 57-year-old received 73 votes, compared with 25 for challenger Indrek Tarand. One vote was blank and two were disqualified in Monday's ballot.

The results were read by the speaker of the 101-seat Parliament.

It was the first time a presidential candidate has managed to get the required two-thirds majority since Estonia declared independence in 1991. Previous presidential elections were decided by an electoral college after lawmakers failed to select a winner.

Ilves was a strong favorite heading into the election, with backing from the parties in the center-right government as well as the opposition Social Democratic Party, which he used to belong to.

Tarand, 47, was supported by the left-leaning opposition Center Party, which is favored by Estonia's sizable ethnic Russian community.

Estonia joined the eurozone on Jan. 1 and now boasts one of the best-performing economies in the 17-nation bloc.

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