European Elections monitor

Outgoing head of State Ivo Josipovic running favourite in the Croatian Presidential election

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Analysis

Abstract :

The President of the Republic of Croatia Ivo Josipovic (Social Democratic Party, SDP) announced on 19th October last that he wanted to run for another term as head of State. He will be facing 3 other candidates on 28th December. His most serious rival is undoubtedly Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, member of the main opposition party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) led by Tomislav Karamarko. The presidential election will be test for all of the country's political parties in view of the general elections planned for the end of 2015.

Ivo Josipovic is a popular character amongst his fellow countrymen but his image may suffer due to the poor economic results of the government led by Zoran Milanovic (Social Democratic Party, SPD) and of the weakening of the Social Democrats.

The date of the presidential election, which is unusual, can be explained in that in 2009 the Prime Minister Jadranska Kosor (HDZ) decided to organise the presidential election just after Christmas to increase her own party's chances of winning, since a great number of expats return home for the holiday period.

According to the polls Ivo Josipovic is due to win the first round on 28th December next with 42.3% of the vote ahead of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (27.3%) and Milan Kujundzic (Croatian Dawn-People's Party HZ), 11.2%. The same polls suggest that the outgoing president will win the second round on 11th January with 51.6% of the vote.

A Josipovic-Grabar-Kitarovic duel?

To date 4 people are officially standing for the Presidency of the Republic:

– Ivo Josipovic (Social Democratic Party SDP), the outgoing president supported by the Sustainable Development of Croatia (ORaH), Croatian Workers-Labour Party (HL-SR), the People's Party- Liberal Democrats (HNS-LD), the Democratic Party of Istria (IDS) and the Pensioners' Party (HSU). Nine pensioners' associations have also said they support the outgoing head of State;

– Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ), is the former European Integration Minister (2003-2005), she was then Foreign Affairs and European Integration (2005-2008), and Ambassador for Croatia in the US. In 2011 she became the first woman to be appointed Deputy Secretary General of NATO responsible for public information. She has the support of the Croatian Farmers' Party (HSS), the Social Liberal Party (HSLS) and Ruza Tomasic, former leader of the Party of Rights-Dr Ante Starcevic (HSP-AS);

– Milan Kujundzic (Croatian Dawn-People's Party, HZ), candidate of the Alliance for Croatia, a group of 8 right wing parties;

– Ivan Sincic, Zivi Zid movement

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic presented her presidential programme called "Platform for a better Croatia" on 11th November. The text includes many promises regarding social stability, the strengthening of the rule of law and the fight to counter corruption, the promotion of education and healthcare, as well as national security and the protection of the Croats of Bosnia-Herzegovina etc. Earlier in the year 2,800 Croats living in the neighbouring republic voted in the European elections on 25th May. In order to be able to vote in the presidential election hundreds of Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina must register by 17th December with the Embassy or the consulates.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic also stands as the defender of the rights of the members of the armed forces, notably of veterans and those injured in the war of independence (1991-1995) a number of whom have been demonstrating for the last few weeks in front of the Ministry for

Veterans in Zagreb. They are demanding the resignation of the Minister Predrag Matic and the adoption of a bill to protect their rights, notably those concerning social protection which they believe are threatened. The veterans are also accusing Bojan Glavasevic, the minister's assistant of having declared that "those who fought on the other side (the Serbs) might also suffer post-traumatic distress". They say that they are disappointed and angry with the Zoran Milanovic's government's attitude regarding the sacrifices they made during the war of independence.

In October last 60 year-old Nevenka Topalusic set herself on fire outside of the ministry and died of her injuries. Recently a man also tried to commit suicide outside of the ministry.

Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic is critical of the amounts spent by the outgoing President– 31.6 million € in her opinion – during his term in office, deploring the fact that a sum like this has led to so little achievement. She said that she wanted to reduce the number of people working for the head of State and that she will call on external advisors, who would work as volunteers. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic has also said that she would not increase the number of staff responsible for the management of how the European funds are used. She is against any modification of the Constitution, a move put forward by the outgoing head of State. Finally she wants to promote economic growth, an area in which the Croatian head of State has no power of influence however.

Linking up with Milan Kujundzic, establishing a protection zone in the Adriatic to replace the present ecological fishing zone and rehabilitating the generals who have been retired from the Croatian army since 2000 will be the first things that Kolina Grabar-Kitarovic will do if she is elected to the presidency of the Republic on 11th January next.

Croatia's economic difficulties are a handicap to Ivo Josipovic. The outgoing head of State recently recalled that the country needs serious economic reform, but this also applies to reforming the judicial sectors, the civil service and regional organisation. "*All governments have failed to undertake the reforms necessary to attract investments, create jobs and bring the country out of recession which is threatening to spread in 2015 for the 7th year running*," he declared in an interview with the British daily *The Financial Times* at the end of October.

Croatia struggles with an outsized and therefore costly public sector, it suffers due to a lack of budgetary discipline (in 2013, the country's government debt represented twice the 2008 figure) and low competitiveness. Last September unemployment affected 17.7% of the working population.

The amendment of the Constitution is one of the high points in Ivo Josipovic's programme for his second term in office. The outgoing head of State wants the Fundamental Law to be modified so that citizens can ask for a subject to be debated in parliament (on condition that they collate at least 10,000 signatures). He also wants to modify the voting method in the general elections and is suggesting a mixed system whereby half of the MPs would be appointed by a majority vote and the other half by proportional representation (with a preferential vote). Finally he would like Croatia, which is divided into 20 counties, to be reorganised according to 5 to 8 regions.

"*It is a project for a new Constitution, for a more modern Croatia, for a new Croatia, a project for a second Republic," declared Ivo Josipovic, adding, "our Constitution was effective and helped us during a period of transition but now the country has entered the EU we have begun a new post-transition period marked by new expectations on the part of the citizens for more democracy, a better run State and a more efficient economy*."

He finally indicated that if parliament did not accept the changes he was suggesting he would turn to the electorate and call for the organisation of a referendum on his proposals.

Milan Kunijdzic presented his programme entitled "*The New Croatia*" on 30th November. He also asked for the draft of a new Constitution. He would like to modify the present text's preamble which states that Croatia is a Republic founded on the Anti-Fascist Council for the Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH) for it to state that the country was founded after the war of independence 1991-1995. He also asked for the introduction of a new electoral system and for the country's regions to be reorganised. He also wants to reduce the number of ministers in the government and said that the establishment of a ministry for Croats abroad would one of the first things he would do if he were to be elected head of State.

The Presidency of the Republic of Croatia

The President of the Republic of Croatia is elected for five years by direct universal suffrage and by a majority vote. He can only stand for office twice. The Constitu-

tional reform of 28 February 2001, which strengthened the powers of the Sabor (Parliament), since it abolished the former Upper Chamber (the Chamber of Comitats) considerably reduced the head of State's powers. The latter appoints the Prime Minister and the members of government, represents Croatia abroad and accredits the ambassadors. He has a say regarding diplomatic issues and works with the government in setting out and undertaking the country's foreign policy. Chief of the armed forces he has exceptional powers in times of war. Finally the head of State can dissolve Parliament and submit to referendum – with the government's agreement - a draft bill or constitutional reform. He can even request an exceptional council of ministers to be held on certain issues but he cannot oppose any law approved by MPs.
All candidates running for the Presidential office must collate 10,000 signatures from the electorate in order to be able to run for office.

Reminder of the results of the presidential election on 27th December 2009 and 10th January 2010.

Turnout: 43.96% (1st round), 50.13% (2nd round)

Candidates	No. of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No. of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Ivo Josipovic (Social Democratic Party, SDP)	640 594	32,42	1 339 385	60,26
Milan Bandic (Democratic Party, Democratic Farmers' Party, HDSS)	293 068	14,83	883 222	39,74
Andrija Hebrang (Democratic Union, HDZ)	237 998	12,04		
Nadan Vidosevic (Party of the Coastal Regions of Primorje-Gorski Kotar, PGS)	223 892	11,33		
Vesna Pusic (People's Party-Democratic Liberal, HNS-LD)	143 190	7,25		
Dragan Primorac	117 154	5,93		
Miroslav Tudjman	80 784	4,09		
Damir Kajin (Democratic Party of Istria	76 411	3,87		
Josip Jurcevic	54 277	2,74		
Boris Miksic	41 491	2,10		
Vesna Skare-Ozbolt (Democratic Centre DC)	37 373	1,89		
Slavko Vuksic (Slavonic Democratic Party	8 309	0,42		

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