European Elections monitor

The right-wing opposition takes the lead in the Croatian general elections

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Results

Abstract:

The right-wing opposition coalition Domoljubna Koalicija (Patriotic Coalition), led by the Democratic Union (HDZ) and Tomislav Karamarko, rallying the Farmers' Party (HSS), the Rights Party-Dr Ante Starcevic (HSP-AS), the Pensioners' Bloc (BUZ), the Social Liberal Party (HSLS), the Growth Party (HRAST) and the Christian Democratic (HDS), came out ahead in the general elections that took place on 8th November in Croatia. It won 59 of the 151 seats in Parliament.

The coalition Hrvatska Raste, (Croatia is growing), led by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and outgoing Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic, which rallies the People's Party-Liberal Democrats, the Pensioners' Party, Labour-Workers' Party (HL-SR), the Native Peasants' Party and the Zagorje Party (region in the country's north-west) is due to take 56 seats.

As in Poland, two weeks ago, the right-wing opposition has won the general elections just a few months after the victory of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (HDZ) in the election for the country's presidency on 11th January with 50.74% of the vote (49.26% for the outgoing head of State Ivo Josipovic (SDP). The right-wing has not however won the absolute majority and will have to start talks to be able to form a parliamentary majority.

Four other parties rose above the 5% voting threshold necessary to be represented in the Hrvatski Sabor, the only house of parliament. Most-Nezavisnih Lista (Bridge-Independent Lists), a party founded in 2012 by Bozo Petrov, is due to take 19 seats. He declared before the vote that he would join forces with neither of the country's leading parties after the election: "*We shall keep our word. We are not going to join a coalition*." However he did indicate that his party would support a government that puts forward a reform of the legal system and the civil service and which supports businesses. "*The breakthrough by Most shows that voters no longer want a two party system and political elites are beginning to drift into a separate world, distant from the people,*" analyses Davor Gjenero, a political expert.

Zivi zid (Human Shield, ZZ), led by Ivan-Vilibor Sincic, who caused surprise on 28th December 2014, as he took 3rd place in the first round of the presidential election with 16.42% of the vote by standing as an anarchist, is also due to enter parliament, as will Milan Bandic 365 (MB 365), a populist party led by the present Mayor of Zagreb.

The general elections were the first organised in Croatia since the country's entry into the EU on 1st July 2013.

During the electoral campaign many analysts pointed out that neither of the two main parties were putting forward credible reform to save the country's economy that has been sorely affected by the crisis. "*Neither of the two major coalitions has said clearly that it would address the biggest economic issues. Their messages remained general with populist overtones,*" deplored the Croatian business owners association (HUP). "*Neither of the two main parties has provided any serious response to major issues*," maintained Davor Gjenero.

Croatia is one of the poorest States in the European Union. After six years of recession (- 13% GDP contraction since 2008), the country is due to recover growth in 2015 (1.1%). The unemployment rate totals 16.2% (last September's figure), and lies at 43.1% amongst young people; the budgetary deficit lies at 5.5% of the GDP.
The Croatian economy is still largely dominated by the State: the public sector is very big and the weak development of the private sector and notably of SMEs, is one of the country's main problems.

Outgoing Prime Minister Zoran Milanovic multiplied his promises during the electoral campaign, notably committing to the reduction of the government debt that is over 90% of the GDP. The opposition has criticised the Social Democrats results at the State's helm. Tomislav Karamarko promised to introduce plan called "Croatia +5" to enable GDP growth of 5% by 2019, a 5% reduction of unemployment and finally a 5 point reduction in the VAT rate. The Democratic Union's leader also promised to create 100,000 new jobs.

The issue of refugees crossing Europe as they flee war in Syria and Afghanistan entered the electoral campaign in the few weeks preceding the election. Zoran Milanovic showed a mix of firmness regarding the neighbouring countries and humanity towards the 350,000 refugees who have transited through Croatia since mid-September. The Prime Minister condemned Hunary's decision to build a barbed wire fence on its border with Serbia and criticised Serbia for the way it managed the crisis. The HDZ, which stands as a defender of "patriotic values", accused the government of having been lax and of poor organisation in terms of managing the refugees. Tomislav Taramarko suggested the use of the armed forces and the introduction of barriers as solutions to reduce the number of migrants crossing the country. According to political analyst Ivan Rimac "*the extremely human approach adopted by the government affected the citizens, who remembered their own situation during the war years in the 1990's* (this led to 500 000 refugees)" Davor Gjenero stressed that the refugee theme had succeeded in diverting attention from economic difficulties. "*The government was fortunate in that this crisis made all other themes in the electoral debate secondary*," he declared.

After the election Tomislav Karamarko is due to become the next Croatian Prime Minister. Aged 56, he originates from Zadar. A graduate in history from the University of Zagreb, he was one of the founders of the Democratic Union in 1989. Head of Cabinet of two Prime Ministers (Josip Manolic, 1990-1991 and Franjo Greguricil, 1991-1992) and also of the leader of the lower house of parliament (when there were two houses) (1992-1994), Stjepan Mesic, he became Director of the police force of Zagreb in 1992. In 2000, he led Stjepan Mesic's electoral campaign (People's Party, HNS), the candidate in the Presidential election on 23rd January and 7th February. After his victory with 56.01% of the vote Tomislav Karamako became head of security to head of State and Director of the National and Security Office.
In 2002, he became Director the Information Agency (POA) and two years later he became leader of the Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA). He was then appointed Home Affairs Minister, a post he occupied until the return of the Social Democrats to office in 2011. He became leader of the HDZ in 2012.

Results

Political Parties	Number of seats
Domoljubna Koalicija (Patriotic Coalition)	59
Hrvatska Raste, (Croatia is growing)	56
Most Nezavisnih Lista (Bridge-Independent Lists)	19
Democratic Assembly of Istria (IDS)	3
Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (HDSSB)	2
Milan Bandic 365	2
Zivi zid (Human Shield, ZZ),	1
Uspješna Hrvatska (Success Croatia)	1

Source : http://www.izbori.hr/140zas/rezult/1/nrezultati.html
http://www.24sata.hr/politika/sdp-u-zagreb-rijeka-osijek-i-varazdin-hdz-u-split-zadar-446022

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