

European
Elections monitor

The leftwing coalition forecast to win in the Croatian general elections on 4th December next.

From **Corinne Deloy**

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D-7
7 days before
the poll

Around 4000 people, from 21 political parties are standing in the general elections in Croatia on 4th December next. 151 seats are available in the Sabor, the only chamber in parliament.

For the first time in the country's history the Independent Serb Democratic Party (SDSS) is putting a list forward led by outgoing Deputy Prime Minister Slobodan Uzlac in one of the country's ten constituencies, the 9th (Zadar, Sibenik, Knin). Until now the SDSS only stood for the college of national minorities.

On 2nd November President of the Republic Ivo Josipovic made a television appearance to call on his countrymen to vote in the election. *"The voting slip is always democracy's most powerful arm and it is in your hands,"* he said. Likewise the Conference of Catholic Bishops wanted to motivate the electorate, *"we cannot complain about our life if we give up trying to influence it,"* reads their message.

The official electoral campaign that will be the shortest that Croatia has ever known, started on 16th November and will end on 2nd December at midnight.

Outgoing Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor, (Democratic Union HDZ), whose government includes the HDZ and the Farmers' Party (HSS), a conservative party led by Josip Frisic, is running in the 5th constituency (Pozega, Slavonski Brod, Vukovar), her home territory (she was born in Pakrac), and one of the HDZ's strongholds. According to some analysts this will enable her to avoid a duel with the opposition leader Zoran Milanovic (Social Democratic Party SDP), who is standing in the 1st constituency (Zagreb). The HDZ will be represented by Miroslav Tudjman, son of the former President (1990-1999), Franjo Tudjman.

"The economy, strengthening the economy is the heart and intelligence of our programme. We want a social responsible, fair, European Croatia that develops in an equitable manner," repeats Jadranka Kosor, who is, however, aware of the difficulties the HDZ faces.

Since 3rd November last the party has had to contend with the trial of its former leader and former Prime Minister (2003-2009) Ivo Sanader, who is appearing before the courts accused of six crimes including corruption, illegal funding

and abuse of power. He is accused of having received illegal funds (to a total of 480,000€) from an Austrian bank (Hypo Alpe Adria) whilst he was Deputy Foreign Minister during the Croatian War (1991-1995) and of having later received a bribe of 10 million € from the Hungarian petrol company MOL, which was trying to take over the national Croatian petrol company INA. Ivo Sanader risks the maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. Four other party executives are appearing alongside the Prime Minister.

In addition to this the HDZ is the focus of an inquiry by the Bureau to Counter Organised Crime (USKOK) on the funding of electoral campaigns in the elections of 2003 and 2007 and the presidential election in 2005. *"It is an attempt to demolish the Democratic Union,"* declared the outgoing Prime Minister. *"The party will emerge stronger from these investigations,"* maintained the party Deputy Chairman Ivan Jarnjak. *"It is a clear sign of the determination to address corruption at the highest level and to show that no-one can now be protected,"* indicates political analyst Zarko Puhovski. *"What is happening confirms that*

we are telling the truth to our European friends. Today no-one is untouchable in Croatia. We are a country in which the rule of law holds sway," stresses President of the Republic Ivo Josipovic. Struggling in the electoral campaign, the HDZ is relying on patriotism. It has called in several of its old executives, such as former Justice Minister (2003-2006) and present leader of the Democratic Centre (DC), Vesna Skare-Ozbolt. Jadranka Kosor, who launched her campaign in Veliko Trgovisce, Franjo Tudjman's home town, qualified this choice as a *"return to the source."* In the 9th and 10th constituencies the party has chosen to join forces with the controversial leader of the Croatian Citizens' Party (HGS) and Mayor of Split, businessman Zeljko Kerum, who sits third on the HDZ's list in the 10th constituency (Split-Dalmatie Dubrovnik-Neretva, Lika). This alliance has however been accepted differently by the party's members.

Finally Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor has to face the discontent of the Croatians, who are suffering major socio-economic difficulties. GDP growth is stagnating (1% forecast in 2011 by the Central Bank) and unemployment is close to 17%. Over the last few months the government has introduced austerity measures (budgetary cuts, tax increases, salary reductions in the public sector and retirement pensions), measures which have brought a great number of Croats out into the streets of Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Djakovo.

The Farmers' Party (HSS) presented its electoral programme in Bjelovar – entitled *5+ equitable development*. "5" refers to the pillars on which it would like to found Croatia's development. Apart from the family, this involves equitable development, tourism on new bases, environmental protection, the revival of rural areas and the protection of natural resources. Its leader, Josep Frisic, wants to turn the HSS into the country's main rightwing party.

As for the opposition, the Social Democratic Party led by Zoran Milanovic has joined forces with the Democratic Party of Istria (IDS) led by Ivan Jakovic in this election, the People's Party-Liberal Democrats (HNS) led by Radimir Cacic and the Pensioners' Party (HSU) led by Silvano Hrelja. The four parties have joined together in a leftwing coalition called *Kukuriku* (Alliance for Change).

"Our first task will be to create jobs," says Radi-

mir Cacic, who might become Economy Minister in the event of a leftwing victory on 4th December. To reduce unemployment, the opposition wants to stimulate investments notably in the sectors of tourism, transport and energy. They also want to reform the tax system and have set themselves the goal of reducing the budgetary deficit by half over the next four years, since this represents 6.2% of the GDP. Finally they want to change the retirement system. 1.4 million workers support 1.1 million pensioners, who receive social aid and this even includes war veterans, according to figures provided by the national statistics institute released in September. *"People retire too early in our country and do not receive the allocations they need,"* declared Radimir Cacic.

Branimir Glavas, former lawyer and founder of the Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja (HDSSB), a party chaired by Vladimir Sisljagic, is not standing. Believed to be a hero in Slavonia, the first Croat to have been found guilty of war crimes, was sentenced to 10 years in prison (reduced to 8 by the Supreme Court) for having ordered the torture and murder in 1991 of at least 10 Serb civilians in Osijek, a town where he was in charge of security. At present he is in prison in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a country whose nationality he holds and where he fled to after the war. Branimir Glavas gave up his electoral bid after the Constitutional Court said that his candidature infringed the codes of fundamental democratic values.

On 9th December Croatia is due to sign an accession treaty with the 27 heads of State and Government of the European Union in Brussels. On 1st July 2013 the country will become the second former republic of Yugoslavia to join the European Union. *"Accession to NATO and the end of negotiations with the EU confirm that Croatia now respects most international standards. The outgoing government has done a great deal of work towards achieving this result,"* declared the President of the Republic Ivo Josipovic, who will travel to Brussels with outgoing Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor on 9th December.

The Croatians will be called to vote in a referendum on the country joining the European Union in January 2012.

Jadranka Kosor is using this event to motivate her countrymen. *"The question of who will lead*

the country at the time of accession is vital. The HDZ is a member of the European People's Party (EPP), the biggest political group in the European Parliament, which has enabled us to receive 3.5 billion euros from the European Union," she declared.

According to the latest polls the Alliance for Change is due to win the general elections and the HDZ is forecast to achieve its lowest score ever. The People's Party-Liberal Democrats, the

Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja, the Farmers' Party, the Right Party (HSP) and the Independent List Ljubo Jurcic are also due to win seats in the Sabor.

Just one week before the election, the victory of the opposition seems to be almost certain. The main question focuses on the future of the party in office at present. Will the HDZ manage to maintain a parliamentary group that is able to represent real opposition to the left in the next Sabor?

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