

# The outgoing President of the Republic, Zoran Milanovic, could hold on to his office in Croatia

Croatians are being invited to elect their President of the Republic. The 1st round of the presidential election will be held on 29 December and the 2nd on 12 January. This election will bring a 'super year' of elections to a close, following the general elections to renew the 161 members of the Sabor (single chamber of parliament) on 17 April and the European elections to appoint the 12 MEPs in Strasbourg on 9 June. Croatians living abroad can vote at 105 polling stations in 38 countries. The largest numbers are in Bosnia-Herzegovina (42) and Germany (17).

Following the general elections on 17 April, the Democratic Union (HDZ), which won 61 of the 151 seats in the Sabor, formed a government in alliance with the Patriotic Movement (Domovinski Pokret, DP), a right-wing populist party founded by Miroslav Skoro and led by Ivan Penava, (14 MPs). The outgoing Prime Minister, Andrej Plenkovic (HDZ), therefore retained his post, which he has held since October 2016.

The Rivers of Justice (Rijeke Pravde) coalition, led by Sinisa Hajdas Doncic's Social Democratic Party (SDP), came second in the election and won 42 seats.

A month and a half later, the Democratic Union (HDZ) once again came out ahead in the ballot box, winning 6 seats in the European elections (up 2 on the previous poll in 2019).

## THE CANDIDATES RUNNING

8 people are standing as candidates in the presidential election:

- Zoran Milanovic (independent), outgoing President of the Republic, supported by the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Peasant Party (HSS), the People's Party-Reformists (NS-R), the Independent Northern Platform (NPS), the Bloc of Pensioners (BUZ), Dalija Oreskovic and the People with a First Name and a Surname (DO i SIP), the Liberal Civic Alliance (GLAS), the Democratic Alliance of Medimurje (MDS), the Party of Pensioners (SU) and the Centre Party (Centar). The outgoing head of state announced on 15 March that he would stand as a candidate for his own succession;
- Dragan Primorac (independent), backed by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic's Democratic Union (HDZ), the Patriotic Movement (DP), the Croatian Party of Pensioners (HSU), the Christian Democratic Party (HDS), the Social Liberal Party (HSLs), the People's Party/Liberal Democrats (HNS-LD) and the Independents. He was Minister of Science, Education and Sport between 2003 and 2009 in the governments of Ivo Sanader (HDZ);
- Marija Selak Raspudic (Independent), MP, philosopher and bioethicist;

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- Ivana Kekin (We Can! (Mozemo!)), MP. She is committed to defending left-wing and environmentalist values;
- Tomislav Jonjic (Party of Rights, HSP), lawyer, diplomat and advertising executive. He is supported by the Party of Sovereignists (HS);
- Niko Tokic Kartelo (independent), businessman;
- Branka Lozo (Fatherland and National Unity, DOMINO), professor of graphic art at the University of Zagreb;
- Miro Bulj (Bridge (Most)), MP and mayor of Sinj, a town in the north-east near the border with Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Opinion polls forecast that the outgoing President of the Republic will be the winner. According to the latest survey conducted by the Promocija+ institute published on 6 December, Zoran Milanovic will win 37.4% of the vote on 29 December, ahead of the Prime Minister's candidate, Dragan Primorac, who will win 20.8%. Marija Selak Raspudic could take 3rd place with 10.4% and Ivana Kekin 4th, with 9.2%. All the other candidates are credited with under 5% of the vote. All opinion polls indicate that Zoran Milanovic will win in the 2nd round.

### THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

*'For the presidency, vote for the president'* is the slogan chosen by the outgoing head of state, who wants "A Croatia that looks after itself and protects its interests must also be a country that respects each and every one of its citizens, a country whose institutions serve the people and not individuals".

Zoran Milanovic remains popular with his compatriots, despite the timing of the legislative campaign on 17 April. In mid-March, the President of the Republic had announced his candidacy for the general elections as leader of the SDP list in Zagreb in the first constituency of the Croatian capital, where Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic was running. *'Sometimes you have to leave your comfort zone to put together a solid majority and form a government of national salvation'*, he said.

Called upon to rule on this unprecedented situation, the Constitutional Court stated on 18 March that the

candidacy of a sitting head of state in the general elections was absolutely impossible. *'The candidacy of the President of the Republic in the legislative elections is incompatible with the Constitution and the principle of the separation of powers. The President of the Republic is a non-partisan person and cannot participate in the activities of any political party. If he wishes to stand as a candidate, he must resign'*, the Court ruled. The head of state is also not authorised to campaign in favour of a list, at the risk of having the election annulled. Zoran Milanovic, who was Prime Minister from 2011 to 2016, could not have ignored this provision, yet he described the members of the Constitutional Court as *'illiterate peasants'*.

Since then, the cohabitation between the head of state and the prime minister has been stormy.

Zoran Milanovic is opposed to the government's support for Ukraine and the participation of Croatian soldiers in the NATO-led training mission for Ukrainian soldiers. The outgoing president calls himself a *'nationalist'*, while Andrej Plenkovic advocates strengthening his country's ties with its Western allies. The Prime Minister has accused the Head of State of playing games with democracy. Recently, he prevented General Tihomir Kundid, Chief of Staff, from attending a meeting of Parliament's Defence Committee. He also refused to allow him to brief MPs on Croatia's involvement in a NATO mission in Ukraine. According to Andrej Plenkovic, this is nothing less than a *'coup d'état'*, an *'attack on the army'* and on the country's security and intelligence agency (SOA). For the head of government, the President of the Republic is behaving *'in a dictatorial and pharaonic manner'*, and his actions benefit only Russia, compromise Croatia's national security and destabilise the country.

*'Croatia needs a change. Zoran Milanovic represents history, while Dragan Primorac represents the future'* said Andrej Plenkovic, adding *"We need a President of the Republic who respects the Constitution and the rule of law, who will anchor Croatia in the West and who will bring civilised political dialogue back to the political scene"*.

The Prime Minister emerged victorious in early December from a no-confidence vote in Parliament called by the opposition parties following an investigation by the anti-corruption agency (USKOK). Health Minister Vili Beros was arrested and dismissed from his post on 15 November as part of this investigation. He is accused of corruption, money laundering, abuse of power and influence peddling. 76 deputies opposed the no-confidence motion, while 64 supported it.

If he is not re-elected, Zoran Milanovic's term of office will end on 18 February 2025.

### **THE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC**

The President of the Republic of Croatia is elected for a 5-year term by direct universal suffrage and majority vote. He may be re-elected only once.

The constitutional reform of 28 February 2001, which strengthened the powers of the Sabor (as parliament is known) by abolishing the former upper

chamber (*the Chamber of Comitats*), considerably reduced the powers of the Head of State.

The Head of State appoints the Prime Minister and members of the government, represents Croatia abroad and accredits ambassadors. He has a say in diplomatic matters and is involved with the government in formulating and conducting the country's foreign policy. As Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, he has exceptional powers in times of war. Lastly, the Head of State may dissolve parliament, submit a bill or constitutional reform to a referendum - with the government's consent - or call an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers to discuss certain issues, but he may not veto laws passed by members of parliament.

All presidential candidates must obtain at least 10,000 signatures on their name in order to take part in the ballot.

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**Results of the presidential elections in Croatia on 22 December 2019 and 5 January 2020**

Turnout: 51.18 % (1st round) and 54.99 % (2nd round)

Candidates	1st round		2nd round	
	Number of votes	Votes (%)	Number of votes	Votes (%)
<b>Zoran Milanovic (Social Democratic Party, SDP)</b>	562 783	29,55	1 034 170	52,66
<b>Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (independent)</b>	507 628	26,65	929 707	47,34
<b>Miroslav Skoro (independent)</b>	465 704	24,45		
<b>Mislav Kolakusic (independent)</b>	111 916	5,88		
<b>Dario Jurica (independent)</b>	87 883	4,61		
<b>Dalija Oreskovic (independent)</b>	55 163	2,90		
<b>Ivan Pernar (Ivan Pernar Party SIP)</b>	44 057	2,31		
<b>Katarina Peovic (Workers' Front, RF)</b>	21 387	1,12		
<b>Dejan Kovac (Social Liberal Party, HSL)</b>	18 107	0,95		
<b>Anto Dapic (Democratic Alliance for National Renewal, Desno)</b>	4 001	0,21		
<b>Nedjeljko Babic (Party of Dialect Speakers HSSCKS)</b>	3 014	0,16		

Source : <https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/predsjednik-2019>

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