



Croatia's Parliamentary Elections

Friday, November 21, 2003

This is the third in a series of weekly campaign reports produced by NDI's Zagreb-based staff on the November 23 parliamentary elections. With two NDI teams traveling through all of Croatia's electoral districts, the reports will relate staff observations on campaign activities and party campaign material at the district level. NDI is working in Croatia on political party development, parliamentary development, and citizen political participation. This third report provides a review of important events in the past week, discusses the choice presented to citizens on the eve of the elections, and offers NDI's impressions of the campaign on the field.

Key Political Parties: Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Croatian Party of Rights (HSP), Croatian Peasant's Party (HSS), Croatian People's Party (HNS), Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLs), Democratic Center (DC), Istrian Democratic Congress (IDS), Liberal Party (LS), Party of Liberal Democrats (Libra), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

The Week in Review

> For the first time in the campaign, on November 19, SDP President Ivica Racan and HDZ President Ivo Sanader participated in a nationally televised debate. They distinguished themselves on two issues: income tax cuts and the Hague Tribunal. While the HDZ seeks to return to a flat tax, SDP opts for a graduated tax system. The HDZ said that it would cooperate with The Hague, though it made it clear that it does not recognize the indictment against General Gotovina.

> The decision by the Independent Serbian Democratic Party (SDSS) and the Serb People's Party (SNS) to place candidates on the Diaspora list was new to Croatian parliamentary elections. Unfortunately, there are only 4 polling stations in all of Serbia-Montenegro at which Croatian citizens may vote in this election. In cooperation with the OSCE, the Serbia-Montenegro government has offered to provide buses to bring voters to the polling stations.

> The Ministry of Defense exposed the mixing of politics and the military in the campaign when it confirmed that 12 acting military officials are on opposition party election slates. According to the State Electoral Commission (SEC), the electoral law bans active military officers from running for office. Therefore, if elected, they must relegate their military positions.

> GONG, a non-partisan citizens' organization founded in 1997 to encourage citizens to take active participation in political processes, will have 2761 non-partisan election monitors for this year's elections. The number of international monitors has dropped from 500 to 82.

> Trade unions organized a roundtable with parliamentary parties to discuss their respective positions on labor issues. Discussion centered on the long and short-term consequences of the changes made to labor laws, such as severance pay and the flexibility of the work force.

The New Parliament

The polls below appeared during the last week of the election campaign. They present the possible division of the 140 seats* in the new parliament after the elections.

	Puls	JUTARNJI LIST	Media Servis	GfK	GLOBUS
HDZ	55	54	57	55	51
SDP + partners	38	40	42	43	45
HNS + partners	15	17	19	19	19
HSS	15	10	9	12	8
HSP + partners	9	9	6	6	10
HSLs-DC	6	10	7	5	7

*In addition to the 140 seats, there will be 8 seats for minorities, and likely 3 to 6 seats for Croatian diaspora.

Getting to the Heart of the Campaign

There are indications that citizens have come to realize the importance of the elections and the significance of their vote. Underlining citizens' civic responsibility to vote, Zagreb's Radio 101 started

its own 'get out the vote' campaign with the theme 'close your nose', which reflects the public's lack of confidence in politicians.

The HDZ, confident with its strong numbers in the polls, started to behave as if it was already victorious. The HDZ's campaign has focused almost exclusively on party president, Ivo Sanader, giving the impression, according to one commentator, that these were presidential rather than parliamentary elections.

To solidify HDZ's credentials among European leaders, HDZ released a television clip entitled 'Messages from Europe.' It contained interviews with prominent European conservative leaders, such as Edmund Stoiber, (CSU, Germany), Wolfgang Schüssel (Austrian Chancellor and President of the Austrian Peoples' Party), Bertie Ahern (Fianna Fail President, and Prime Minister of Republic of Ireland), Angela Merkel (CDU President, Germany), and Silvio Berlusconi (Italian Prime Minister and EU President). The interviews promoted HDZ as the best political option for Croatia's future.



HDZ President Sanader, Metkovic

The EC Commissioner for Enlargement, Günter Verheugen, said that citizens should think hard about the reasons for Croatia's failure to get closer to the EU prior to 2000.

In the past week, SDP president Racan explained the choice confronting voters in the wider context of Croatia's future as "these elections will not decide whether Croatia will go left or right... but whether it will go forward or backward." Accordingly, SDP attempted to show a softer, more human side of its leader in the campaign's final week. Whether by putting photos of Racan on billboards or adopting a more direct contact approach to the campaign by talking to people on the streets, the SDP is attempting to engage citizens.

However, other than sharing the stage at rallies, it is difficult to assess the level of coordination between the SDP and its coalition partners (IDS,

Libra, LS). Few, if any, joint press conferences, policy statements, campaign activities and materials



SDP President Racan, Sibenik

have been produced or organized. Although the SDP's coalition partners are not running a nationwide campaign, they tend to travel separately in the districts where they are campaigning and do not explicitly mention their partnership with the SDP on their respective campaign posters. The voter is thus left with the impression of choosing between a strong HDZ and a weaker SDP supported by a grouping of disparate parties.

Campaign Spotlights

NDI teams returned to Zagreb at the end of last weekend. There were a number of rallies and campaign events throughout the city, with parties establishing their presence by setting up stands to distribute wine and food. For instance, HDZ, HSP, SDP, and HNS were campaigning in Zagreb city district Trešnjevka. Zagreb district candidates for HNS and HSP were also present while volunteers distributed materials targeting local pensioners.

NDI/Croatia received a delegation of two trainers from NDI/Serbia. The group toured northern parts of Croatia, where it visited a well-organized SDP office in Varazdin, witnessed HNS volunteers distributing leaflets on roller blades in Osijek's town center, and Libra promoting its policy on civil or community work alternative to the military service on Osijek's university campus.

Zagreb's squares have been full of party activists distributing campaign material during the day, while major music events have mobilized large crowds of citizens and party supporters in the evening. On the evening of November 20, the SDP and HDZ had a "battle of the bands," as each held a large campaign rally in Zagreb with popular musicians. There were approximately 4,000 supporters at the HDZ rally and 15,000 at the SDP event.