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Election Analysis

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The 2014/2015 Croatian Presidential Election: Tight and Far-reaching Victory of the Political Right

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Introduction

The presidential election that was held in Croatia on the last Sunday of 2014 (first round) and the second Sunday of 2015 (second round)¹ resulted in a tight victory for Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, the candidate of the right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica*, HDZ) and another seven right-wing parties, over the incumbent Ivo Josipović, the candidate of the governing Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*, SDP) and another sixteen parties of the left and centre. Although presidential competencies in Croatia, which is a parliamentary democracy, are not extensive,² the presidential election provoked great interest not only in the country, but also internationally.³ Such interest should be attributed to the fact that Croatia, the youngest member of the EU,⁴ has been facing serious economic and social difficulties for more than six years, and that its

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¹ The President of Croatia is elected to a five-year term, with the whole country serving as one constituency. He or she is elected by a majority of votes. If no candidate succeeds in winning more than fifty percent of votes in the first round, the winner is the candidate who wins the majority of votes in the second round. In this election, the first round was held on 28 December 2014 and the second round on 11 January 2015.

² According to the Croatian Constitution, the President represents and acts on behalf of the state at home and abroad; he ensures the regular and orderly functioning and stability of the government; he grants pardons; he cooperates in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy; he is the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and has other authorities proscribed by the Croatian Constitution and laws. Although key powers are vested in the Croatian Government, the President is the only national officeholder elected by a general vote and therefore he or she has a great amount of legitimacy and important symbolic meaning. See [Ustav Republike Hrvatske. Zakon.hr](#) (accessed: 23 March 2015).

³ For instance, on 17 January 2015 in an article titled "Barbie Wins," *The Economist* wrote that "Mr. Josipovic lost largely because the Social Democratic-led government had failed to drag Croatia out of recession," and that the election was a "test of how voters feel ahead of a general election later this year. The answer: they are fed up.", in N.N. 2015. [A New Croatian President: Barbie Wins. The Economist](#), 17 January 2015. (accessed: 22 March 2015).

⁴ Croatia joined the European Union on 1 July 2013.

governments have not been able to address these problems adequately. Besides, the presidential election is regarded as mere foreplay to the more pressing and important upcoming November parliamentary election. The parliamentary election will primarily be a competition between the country's two ideological rivals, the SDP and the HDZ, although their primacy might be challenged by new political options that have started to emerge recently as a consequence of the country's poor economy and the general loss of trust in established political elites.

There are three reasons to consider the latest presidential election an important event for Croatia. First, this election represents the discontinuation of the last decade's trend of declining voter turnout.⁵ The turnout in the second round of the election was 59.1%, which is significantly higher than the turnout in the final rounds of the presidential election in 2009 (50.1%) or the presidential election in 2005 (51%). It was also just slightly lower than the turnout in the second round of the 2000 presidential election (60.9%), when democratic enthusiasm was widespread because the nationalist HDZ – after 10 years in power – lost the parliamentary election that was held just a few weeks before the presidential election.

Second, this is the first time in the history of Croatia's presidential elections (six elections were held so far) that the incumbent who was running for the second term lost the election. Ivo Josipović lost to Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović despite the fact that he was, according to the public opinion polls, the most popular Croatian politician. He had significant lead in the polls and was predominantly portrayed as the certain winner of the election.⁶ Finally, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is the first woman to be elected to the Croatian Presidency. Grabar-Kitarović, who declares herself a “modern conservative,” has made an impressive political career and was, among other things, the Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2005 to 2008 and the Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy at NATO from 2011 until she was elected President of Croatia. However, Grabar-Kitarović is not the first woman to hold one of the country's leading positions. From the middle of 2009 until the end of 2011, the Prime Minister of Croatia was HDZ's Jadranka Kosor, although she was not elected Prime Minister, but succeeded her predecessor, Ivo Sanader, after he surprisingly resigned. By electing Grabar-Kitarović, Croatia has joined a relatively small group of countries whose presidents are women.⁷

⁵ The turnout in the first European Parliament election was only 20.8%, which was the second lowest turnout in the history of the European elections. In 2014, the turnout in the same elections was 25.2%, which was one of the lowest scores in that election.

⁶ For instance, in November 2015 he had 53.1% of the support in the polls compared to Grabar-Kitarović's 37.7% (the scores refer to the second round and the potential choice between these two candidates). *Crobarometer*, Ipsos Puls, November 2015.

⁷ Croatia became the 11th country in the world whose president is a woman.

The Context

The social context of the presidential election was unfavourable for the incumbent Josipović, a distinguished university professor and a renowned composer of classical music. This context was primarily determined by six years of economic crisis, i.e., a recession in which the country's GDP cumulatively dropped by 13% and investments decreased by 40%.⁸ According to the information of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics,⁹ in November 2014 Croatia had 312,330 unemployed people and the unemployment rate was at 19.2%. Although the crisis in Croatia has been particularly present in the realm of the economy, it should be regarded as an "overall crisis,"¹⁰ manifesting itself in other realms of life. It has been very deep and conditioned by several factors: the global economic crisis, the crisis in transition (post-communist) countries of Eastern and Central Europe, and finally by the structural disruptions of the Croatian economy and within Croatian society in general.¹¹

During the last six years of the crisis, both the HDZ's and the SDP's administrations have failed to introduce reforms necessary to overcome the country's economic perils.¹² However, the failure to introduce required reforms has for the most part been blamed on the SDP, partly because the public memory of the HDZ's ignorance about reforms and hefty corruption has mostly faded.¹³ In the months preceding the presidential election, the SDP was losing voters while HDZ support was constantly growing in the polls, along with the support of the newly established Party for Sustainable Development (*Održivi razvoj Hrvatske*, ORaH), which has been attracting dissatisfied voters of the left.¹⁴ Such disappointment with the Government among the citizens has been a burden for Josipović, whose general lack of intervention was widely acknowledged, but did not seem to reflect on his public image until the election campaign. He was mostly criticised for not addressing the incompetence and inefficiency of the Government and for not undertaking actions that were within his presidential powers and that might have urged the Government to be more accountable and effective. Prime Minister Zoran Milanović's arrogant and offensive communication style was not helpful either; his detachment from the public and a bad economic record have led to the lowest government approval rating in Croatian history.¹⁵ Addressing the damage that Milanović's bad image may cause to Josipović, columnist Ivanka Toma wrote: "HDZ's

⁸ Šonje, Vladimir. 2014. Mijenjati se ili nestati: tri godine vlade Zorana Milanovića iz ekonomskog kuta. *Političke analize* 5(20), 3-14.

⁹ *Državni zavod za statistiku* (accessed: 23 March 2015).

¹⁰ Veselica, Vladimir. 2012. *Svekolika hrvatska kriza*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

¹¹ Lalić, Dražen. 2014. *Pet kriznih godina*. Zagreb: Izdanja Antibarbarus.

¹² The HDZ-led coalition governed from the beginning of 2004 until the end of 2011, and the coalition of the left center led by the SDP has been governing since the beginning of 2012.

¹³ Ivo Sanader, the former president of the HDZ and the Prime Minister of Croatia from 2004 until 2010, was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison for corruption. Several other HDZ officials shared a similar fate and the party itself was convicted for using secret funds. If the sentence is confirmed, the party will have to pay around four million euros in penalties.

¹⁴ According to the regular monthly survey of the *Promocija Plus* agency, in December 2014 right before the beginning of the campaign, the HDZ was supported by 26.7% of respondents, the SDP by 21.9% and ORaH by 14.6%. Exactly one year earlier, in December 2013, the SDP was supported by 24.3% of respondents, the HDZ by 21.1% and ORaH had not yet been established. N.N. 2014. *Javno mnijenje - CRO Demoskop. Promocija Plus*. (accessed: 23 March 2014).

¹⁵ See: Grbeša-Zenzerović, Marijana. 2014. Je li za loš imidž Milanovićeve vlade kriv Kennedy? *Političke analize* 5(20), 39-44.

campaign against Ivo Josipović is chamomile tea compared to what Milanović has been doing to him.”¹⁶

Finally, the presidential election was held in an atmosphere of intense political clashes and social tension. These involved severe political conflicts that have been present in Croatia for a couple of years now and that are mostly related to ideological issues and attitudes towards the Croatian Homeland War (1991 – 1995), its actors and consequences. For instance, in October 2014, a group of Croatian war veterans started to demonstrate in front of the Ministry of War Veterans, demanding the resignation of the Minister Predrag Matić. Their demonstration soon turned into a camping protest that lasted throughout the whole presidential campaign and that has still not been terminated. In the course of the campaign, other social protests emerged as well, although much smaller in scale. These have been mostly related to the eviction of people from their homes, mainly due to their inability to pay their mortgages. Activists of the Human Wall (*Živi zid*), a non-governmental organisation whose main objective is to obstruct the evictions by building a human wall in front of the peoples’ homes, have been particularly vociferous. They are led by a 25-year-old student Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, a political rookie who managed to collect the ten thousand signatures required by law to become a presidential candidate, and who consequently joined the group of four candidates who competed for the title of the fourth President of Croatia. Thus, the presidential election in 2014/2015 was a competition between the incumbent Josipović and his three challengers: the HDZ’s Grabar-Kitarović, the rebellious leader of the Human Wall Sinčić, and Milan Kujundžić, the candidate of the rigid right-wing coalition led by the Croatian Dawn – The Party of the People (*Hrvatska zora - stranka naroda*).

The Campaign

Ivo Josipović entered the campaign with a seventeen% lead in the polls.¹⁷ His public image was uninterruptedly favourable throughout his entire presidential term, despite the country’s pathetic economy and the growing public discontent with the Government and its performance. For most of the run up and the first part of the campaign, the majority of the media perceived Josipović as the uncontested winner. On 8 November 2014, one of the leading Croatian columnists wrote: “Ivo Josipović is definitely going to win the elections and remain the Croatian president for another term. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović is losing – no Pantovčak¹⁸ for her.”¹⁹ So, the prevailing perception was that this is going to be a rather boring campaign and an easy victory for Josipović. Accordingly, Grabar-Kitarović was perceived as an underdog with no actual chances to win the election. However, contrary to the dominant

¹⁶ Toma, Ivanka. 2015. HDZ-ova kampanja protiv Josipovića je kamilica prema onome što mu radi Milanović. *Večernji list*, 3 January 2015.

¹⁷ According to Ipsos Puls, in November 2014 Ivo Josipović was winning 42.7% in the polls, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović 25.8% and Milan Kujundžić 6.7%. Ivan Vilibor Sinčić had not yet declared his candidacy and was not even considered a candidate. Crobarometer, Ipsos Puls, November 2014.

¹⁸ The residence of the Croatian president.

¹⁹ Modrić, Sanja. 2014. Šteta novca, Josipović pobjeđuje. *Novi list*, 8 November 2014.

predictions and the poll results,²⁰ the first round ended in a tie: Josipović received 38.5% of the votes to Grabar-Kitarović's 37.2%. Ivan Vilibor Sinčić won 16.4% of the votes, which is a weighty score given that he was previously completely unknown to Croatian voters, while the rightist Milan Kujundžić was left well behind with only 6.3% of the votes. In the second round of the election, Josipović's rate of approval gradually dissolved – it dropped from 60% in September 2014 to 46% in December 2014.²¹ Finally, on 11 January 2015, Josipović lost the election to Grabar-Kitarović by an extremely narrow margin - 49.3% to 50.7%.²² The reasons for Josipović's defeat to a challenger, who was at least in the first round given little to no chance of winning, should be, in addition to the political and social circumstances and Josipović's own lack of delivery, looked for in the campaign itself.

The campaigns of both front-running candidates, Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović, were quite weak in terms of strategy. This was mostly visible in the clumsy attempts of both candidates to find the right message capable of striking a cord with the electorate. Josipović campaigned on a rather abstract and complicated request for constitutional changes that would encourage necessary reforms, and he was unable to translate his program into simple, coherent messages. In addition, the perceived lack of delivery made his messages sound less credible. The overall impression was that he was indifferent and passive, and that in five years he did not do much for the citizens. His approval rating remained stable and his image positive until his indolence was pushed on the campaign agenda, first by his opponents and later by the media. The perception that he failed to deliver was consequently intensifying towards the end of the campaign.

Grabar-Kitarović, on the other hand, was wandering from a Sarah Palin-like "hockey mom" campaign,²³ pledging to have paedophiles chemically castrated, to messages addressing the victims of the communist regime in World War II and "the dictatorship" of Tito. Her campaign was initially focused on conservative, right-wing voters. However, towards the end of the campaign, her rhetoric became less ideologically divisive, more balanced and focused on the economy and people's every-day problems, probably in an attempt to reach for the voters at the centre of the political spectrum and the undecided: "We have 318,000 unemployed, 32,000 people with blocked accounts, 1.6 million people live on the verge of poverty and 30% of them are children. They all want a better life."²⁴ Her forte towards the end of the campaign included attacks on the Milanović government and Josipović's inactivity: "Croatia does not need a new constitution – it needs a new government instead of this incompetent one"²⁵ and "Josipović would now like the new beginning. What was he doing for the last five years?"²⁶ The HDZ provided strong organisational support to

²⁰ According to IPSOS Puls, in December 2014 Ivo Josipović was winning 46.5% in the polls and Grabar-Kitarović 34.9%.

²¹ Ipsos Puls, *Crobarometar*, 2014.

²² She won by 32,509 votes.

²³ See: Wasburn, Philo C. and Mara H. Wasburn. 2011. Media coverage of women in politics: The curious case of Sarah Palin. *Media, Culture and Society* 33(7), 1027–1041.

²⁴ Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in an interview for *Večernji list*, 9 January 2015.

²⁵ Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović at a rally in Rijeka, *Večernji list*, 7 January 2015.

²⁶ Kolinda Grabar Kitarović in an interview for *Jutarnji list*, 9 January 2015.

Grabar-Kitarović's campaign and canvassed all over the country to summon supporters and attract new voters. According to a number of commentators, the HDZ's impressive party discipline, which resulted in a huge mobilisation of supporters, was decisive for Grabar-Kitarović's victory: "Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović owes her success to her own character and to the army-like functioning of her party."²⁷

The campaign slogans on both sides were very vague and unoriginal. Josipović was offering "The right path" and Grabar-Kitarović was pledging "For a better Croatia." The advertising was equally pale and modest. Several billboards featuring smiling photos of the candidates and their slogans were hardly motivating. Each candidate had a few, rather unimpressive, television ads (Josipović five and Grabar-Kitarović two) that were well below the standards of production set in previous national and local campaigns. Both teams relied heavily on digital technology, especially social media – YouTube, Facebook and Twitter in particular.

Ivan Vilibor Sinčić, a student of electrical engineering, presented himself as the spokesperson of the deprived. He insisted on populist appeals and avoided questions that would position him ideologically on any side of the political spectrum. His social appeals and strong anti-elitist rhetoric resonated well with the politically disenchanted and economically exhausted voters, turning him almost overnight into a prospective political star. The media labelled him "the moral winner of the first round" and "the biggest surprise of the elections."²⁸ He had no advertising campaign and relied mostly on media attention. The votes he received were, for the most part, an expression of resentment towards the despised political elites. Milan Kujundžić, a renowned doctor and the candidate of the right-wing coalition, campaigned on rigidly conservative messages with a strong nationalist slant. His performance and rhetoric became increasingly aggressive towards the end of the campaign, which probably pushed away some of his voters. His prospects additionally dropped with the appearance of the young Sinčić, who was more successful in articulating antipathy towards the two dominant parties, the SDP and the HDZ. He campaigned with slogans "Milan Kujundžić - Our President" and "New Croatia." Sinčić and Kujundžić also relied on social media.

The expenditure limit for presidential elections in Croatia is set at 8 million kunas (somewhat more than 1 million euros) per candidate in the first round and an additional 1.6 million kunas in the second round. The candidates' preliminary campaign reports showed that even the two frontrunners spent much less than that.²⁹ This is probably due to the economic crisis and restricted campaign resources, but also due to the fear that in meagre circumstances voters would disapprove of lavish campaign spending. Final reports indicate that Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović spent more than that after all (7.9 million

²⁷ Lovrić, Jelena. 2015. Kolinda je najviše pomogao HDZ, ali i SDP-ova Vlada. *Jutarnji list*, 12 January 2015.

²⁸ *Večernji list*, 3 January 2015; *Jutarnji list*, 29 December 2014.

²⁹ Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Ivo Josipović reported that they spent 3.9 million kunas and 5.8 million kunas respectively. See N.N. 2015 *Koliko su potrošili Grabar Kitarović i Josipović?*. *Gong*, 6 January 2015 (accessed: 22 March 2015). Ivan Vilibor Sinčić and Milan Kujundžić reported that they spent 120,000 kunas and 391,000 kunas respectively.

kunas and 8.1 million kunas respectively), but they still did not hit the ceiling.³⁰

Given the previous research that suggests that Croatian election campaigns are highly Americanised,³¹ it may be argued that this campaign represents certain regression in terms of the Americanisation and especially professionalisation of Croatian election campaigns. Nevertheless, Americanisation is still reflected in the presidential debates organised by the three major national television channels - commercial RTL, Nova TV and the public Croatian Television (HTV). Altogether nine debates were held between 9 December 2014 and 9 January 2015. Organisation of debates in Croatia depends completely on television channels, which set all the rules – they decide on the candidates who will participate and independently define the design of the debate. Until recently, Croatia had very strict regulation of the media representation of the candidates. All candidates, regardless of their strength, had to be given equal time in the media, including in presidential debates. However, in 2014 changes were introduced that liberated this segment, and media outlets now enjoy complete autonomy in deciding whom they want in their program.³² Extreme provisions – such as severe restrictions, on the one hand, or complete autonomy, on the other – come as a consequence of the generally defective campaign regulation in Croatia, which has been subject to heavy criticism not only from national experts, but also from international institutions, such as the OSCE. In the 2014/2015 presidential election, there were only four candidates and they all had equal treatment in the debates. In the campaign, which was not especially information rich, debates provided a useful platform to inform the voters about candidates' positions and programs. They were especially useful in introducing "outsiders" Sinčić and Kujundžić to the voters. Although the data is still not available, given the change in the public opinion polls in the last three weeks of the campaign and a generally very weak advertising campaign, it may be suggested that the debates had some impact on voters' opinion. Finally, an important segment of the campaign consisted of media reports. Josipović and Grabar-Kitarović were equally visible in the media, as opposed to Kujundžić and Sinčić, who were significantly less present.³³ Although conclusive evidence is still not available, preliminary analyses suggest that the press favoured Ivo Josipović in the first round of the election. In the second round of the election, the media reports became more balanced and the number of stories advocating Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović increased. Yet the most challenging feature of the media reports, which will certainly translate into a number of academic articles, is the gender framing of Grabar-Kitarović. At the very beginning of the campaign, an anonymous offending dossier appeared in which she was labelled "Barbie," giving her a nickname that would stick to the end of the campaign. Even a superficial

³⁰ N.N. Koliko su potrošili Grabar-Kitarović i Josipović?

³¹ See: Kunac, Suzana, Lalić, Dražen and Martina, Andrijević. 2013. Tihi glas, ujutro u Americi: izborna kampanja 2011. u Hrvatskoj. Politička misao 50(2), 75-97; Lalić, Dražen and Suzana Kunac. 2010. Izborne kampanje u Hrvatskoj. Zagreb: FPZ.

³² Narodne Novine. 2014. Provisions on the actions of media with a national licence in Croatia during an election campaign. (accessed: 23 March 2015).

³³ Conclusive data are still not available, but a preliminary analysis conducted at the Faculty of Political Sciences suggests that the ratio between the number of articles published in the first round that mention Josipović or Grabar-Kitarović and the number of articles that mention Sinčić or Kujundžić is about 2:1 in favour of the former two.

glance at the reports suggests that the main indicators of the gendered reporting were vehemently present: she was commonly referred to as “Kolinda,” rather than Grabar-Kitarović, she was questioned about her emotions, looks and the role of her husband and his “strange” choice to look after the children while his wife was pursuing a professional career, and finally, she was subjected to chauvinistic remarks addressing her competency and professional independence.

Conclusion: Implications of the Presidential Election

In conclusion, we examine four trends that will be affected by the presidential election and the victory of the HDZ's Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. The first trend refers to the probable change of focus in foreign policy from the region to the West, primarily towards the United States and the European Union. While Josipović was focused on the region, Grabar-Kitarović, who has strong professional links with the United States and the EU, clearly advocated for a shift in foreign policy in the campaign. In this respect, Grabar-Kitarović said: “There will be no more mentioning of the region, the basis for politics with our neighbours are resolved issues.”³⁴ The political right warmly greeted such a change of focus.

The second trend refers to the intensification of political divisions that have been mostly visible in the actions of the two conflicting parties, the HDZ and the SDP. These divisions are a reflection of the different social cleavages that have become more prominent in recent years.³⁵ Aware of the dangers of such deep social and political rifts, the winner of the election, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, exclaimed “No more divisions!” in her victory speech and called for national unity. However, the understanding of “national unity” that is being reinforced by the HDZ and other parties on the right is predominantly traditional and nationalistic, and for some citizens evokes traumatic memories of the past HDZ governments. Contrary to Grabar-Kitarović, the SDP's Prime Minister Zoran Milanović has been repeatedly presenting his Manichean understanding of the political situation in the country. For instance, he has said “The choice is clear: it is either us or them. Good or bad, light or darkness.”³⁶ No matter how they communicate about the schisms, the two biggest parties evidently reinforce political divisions in Croatia. The nature of these divisions is primarily linked to Croatian history (the Second World War and the Homeland War) and ideological divisions (nationalism, conservatism and liberalism), and only to a lesser degree to constructive contemporary discussions about the economy and other mundane issues, which is why they will be very difficult to overcome.

³⁴ Körbler, Jurica. 2015. Prvi nastup prve hrvatske predsjednice. *Jutarnji list*, 15 February 2015.

³⁵ Zakošek, Nenad. 1998. Ideološki rascjepi i stranačke preferencije hrvatskih birača, in *Birači i demokracija: utjecaj ideoloških rascjepa na politički život*, edited by Kasapović, Mirjana / Šiber, Ivan and Nenad Zakošek. Zagreb: Alineja, 11-50; Bagić, Dragan. 2007. Društveni rascjepi i stranačke preferencije hrvatskih birača u izborima za Hrvatski Sabor 2003. Godine. *Politička misao* XLIV(4), 93-115.

³⁶ N.N. 2015. *Ili Mi ili Oni, Izbor je Jasan. Dobro ili Loše, Svjetlo ili Tama. 24 Sata*. (accessed: 23 March 2015).

The third trend refers to the strengthening of the political right in general and the HDZ in particular. The results of the presidential election have indicated that the voters in Croatia are divided into two camps that are pretty much equal in size. However, they are very different in terms of their behaviour and discipline. The first one gathers enthusiastic voters of the right, marshalled by the HDZ and its mighty electoral machinery. The enthusiasm of the HDZ voters has recently been encouraged by several of the party's subsequent victories – in the European Parliament elections in April 2013 and May 2014, in local elections in May 2013, and finally in the presidential election in January 2015. On the other side, the voters of the left are relatively weakly motivated. Their political enthusiasm has been disturbed by the defeat of the most popular politician of the left, Ivo Josipović, and before that by the defeats in the European and national elections; most importantly, the voters have been impacted by the loss of trust in the SDP and the Government of the left centre. Given the idea that presidential elections are considered foreplay to the parliamentary elections and the continuous climb in the polls, it may be argued that the HDZ has a fair chance of winning the forthcoming parliamentary election. Its chances seem even stronger if we take into account its demonstrated efficiency in mobilising voters, which should be primarily attributed to the strong party organisation and its efficient canvassing.

The fourth trend refers to the fragmentation of the political left. The SDP and other parties of the governing coalition, which have failed to drag the country out of the crisis, have been progressively losing voter support. Newly established parties, ORaH and the Human Wall, have benefited the most from such a development. Nevertheless, ORaH, whose ratings were rapidly increasing before the presidential election, started to lose its support right after the election, probably because it advocated for Ivo Josipović.

In the weeks following the election, the Government introduced certain measures to alleviate the situation of socially disadvantaged citizens (for instance, those who have loans in Swiss francs, impoverished citizens who cannot pay their utilities, workers in bankrupt companies). However, all these measures are predominantly regarded as mitigation of the consequences of the crises, rather than a solution for overcoming its structural causes. The repeated attempts of Zoran Milanović to achieve some kind of agreement with ORaH, which still has relevant support in the polls, have failed. The leader of this party, Mirela Holy, who used to be a member of the SDP and who left the party because of disputes with Milanović, refuses any kind of partnership with her former boss. On the other hand, the Human Wall, which is now the third most popular party in Croatia, right after the HDZ and the SDP,³⁷ with its robust anti-elite rhetoric is hardly a potential partner for the governing SDP.

Given all these trends, the HDZ has significant chances to win the next parliamentary election in Croatia. However, this party too, has not demonstrated a willingness to undertake the reforms ignored by the SDP. Therefore, it may be expected that the ideological divisions between groups of political actors that are not prone to reform, in a country severely devastated

³⁷ According to Ipsos Puls, in January 2015 the HDZ was winning 27.6% in the polls, the SDP 21.2%, the Human Wall 12.5% and ORaH 12.2%.

by an economic crisis, will continue to decisively determine the political and social life of Croatia.

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