

## The Results of the 2019 European Parliament Elections in Croatia

The biggest winners of the European Parliament elections in Croatia were parties on the right, chief among them the 'Suverenisti' (*sovereignty* being the easily recognisable keyword) led by Ruža Tomašić, and a newcomer with heavy populist appeal, judge turned anti-corruption campaigner Mislav Kolakušić. The strong result achieved by these two parties, each of which attained about 8 percent of the vote, has managed to squeeze out other newcomers on the right and left side of the spectrum, as well as to push below the threshold a party that was, until recently, the third strongest political option in Croatia ('Most Nezavisnih Lista', the Bridge of Independent Lists).

While Tomašić and Kolakušić established themselves as the surprises of the election, it is however also true that the centre *did* hold. Eight out of Croatia's twelve MEP seats (though at present, in pre-Brexit times, they are still eleven) were won by mainstream parties. These eight seats were evenly distributed between the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and the opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP) – which have been, respectively, the right- and left-wing heavyweights in Croatia since the country's independence (1991).

### European Parliament elections 2019 – Croatia – Results

Party	Percentage	Seats	MEPs elected
Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)	22.72%	4	Karlo Ressler, Dubravka Šuica, Tomislav Sokol and Željana Zovko
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	18.71%	4	Biljana Borzan, Tonino Picula, Predrag Fred Matić and Romana Jerković
Suverenisti	8.52%	1	Ruža Tomašić
Mislav Kolakušić	7.89%	1	Mislav Kolakušić
Živi Zid (Human Shield)	5.66%	1	Ivan Vilibor Sinčić
Amsterdam Coalition	5.19%	1	Valter Flego

Source: [State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia](#)

There are a few reasons for this outcome. First and foremost is the internecine fight within the HDZ, which is the most significant party competition battle currently ongoing in Croatia. Andrej Plenković, Croatia's prime minister and leader of the HDZ, is embroiled in an extended struggle with the right-wing of his party. The prime minister fielded fresh faces as candidates for the European Parliament, aiming to embellish further the moderate image of his party on the EU stage (an effort that, no doubt, was aimed to win plaudits from the likes of [Angela Merkel](#)). But the poor showing at the election (the HDZ was tipped to obtain at least five seats), and the realisation that the party had clearly lost votes to the far right, has blown wind into the hard-liners' sails. They are now undoubtedly planning retaliation against the prime minister. Currently, the situation is in flux: in a government reshuffle in July 2019, it first seemed that Plenković would get rid of most of the HDZ's 'old guard', but he eventually opted for a [compromise](#).

After a few years in free fall in the ratings, the SDP punched above their weight at the EP elections. Part of it was luck: the various progressive parties in the fold – START, Mozemo, Pametno – failed to come together and their initial strong standing in the polls faded away.

But part of it was down to the sheer strength of the SDP candidates: veteran MEPs Biljana Borzan and Tonino Picula enjoyed very high standing for their continued engagement in the European Parliament. Their names led the way for an unexpectedly strong outcome – four seats in total. As a result, aside from the Amsterdam Coalition (comprising the Istrian Democratic Assembly, with a strong presence in the Istria region), which managed to get hold of one seat, the SDP dominated among left-leaning voters.

Less successful was Croatia's main Eurosceptic party, Zivi Zid (Human Shield), whose final result of 5.66 percent of the vote was underwhelming, compared to earlier projections. It is likely that a large number of their votes passed to the new populist in town, Mislav Kolakusic, who combined a generalised anti-system message with an anti-corruption emphasis. The indication that [Euroscepticism in Croatia](#) is more about the disillusionment with the mainstream than about anger directed against the EU was therefore confirmed.

A special mention should be made concerning the vote from outside Croatia. In Croatia, the 'diaspora vote' is usually a byword for right-wing (and hard right) voting. That is because the largest number of diaspora voters live in Bosnia and Herzegovina and are assiduous HDZ backers – and is the reason why the three MP seats assigned to the diaspora in the Croatian parliament are always a foregone conclusion. The [results of the 2019 EP vote](#) were no exception: 51.20 percent of the preferences from abroad went to the HDZ, and a further 20 percent to hard right parties Hrast and Independents for Croatia. A new pattern, however, has started emerging with voters from the 'new diaspora': the HDZ has managed to win only one (1) vote in Ireland, where anti-system and progressive parties were much better represented. While this piece of data may not be statistically significant (there were 53 voters in total), it may be an indicator of larger changes. Croatia has experienced a huge level of emigration since its EU accession in 2013, with a large contingent of Croatians moving to Ireland, and the people who are leaving are often those disillusioned with the status quo (more on this in a forthcoming [Politikon Network](#) report).

The 2019 European Parliament elections in Croatia indicated that right wing forces are in ascendance, while exposing a further crack within the ruling centre right party, HDZ. The more moderate 'façade' of the party, sought after by prime minister and HDZ leader Andrej Plenkovic, has left some space to populist and far right parties to score a stronger showing than usual. New options on the left, conversely, failed to capitalise on the crisis of the centre-left SDP. As a net result, in spite of the anti-establishment sentiment that has been brewing for a while, the centre still holds in Croatian politics.