

# CROATIA

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## I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The Republic of Croatia is a parliamentary democracy. Parliament is the representative body of the people and is vested with the legislative power. Its most important function is to make laws and to amend the constitution. The government as the executive power consists of the prime minister, one or more deputy prime ministers and other ministers. The main function of the government is to propose legislation, to execute laws, to guide foreign and internal policies, to direct the state administration and to take care of the country's economic development. The head of the state is embodied by the president. The president represents the Republic of Croatia at home and abroad. He or she oversees the regular and harmonious functioning and stability of the state government and is responsible for the defence of the country's independence and territorial integrity. The president is elected directly by the people for a term of five years and is limited to two terms. *Political system*

Croatia's political system has been determined by its totalitarian past, by the struggle to gain independence as well by the many casualties and destruction experienced during the war in the 1990s. Many ethical and political issues remained unresolved. The first democratic constitution of the Republic of Croatia, which accompanied its independence, was adopted in December 1990. It outlines a strong role for the president. Following the war of the 1990s and two smaller modifications, the most significant amendments of the constitution were made in 2001. The power of the president was reduced and the two-chamber system was replaced by a one-chamber parliament. The *Županijski dom* (House of Counties) was abolished and the *Zastupnički dom* (House of Deputies) remained as the only chamber of the Croatian parliament, named *Sabor*. Although the power of the president has been reduced, the position outlines responsibility for important tasks. The president functions as the highest official representative of the republic, is commander-in-chief of the armed forces with influence over their personnel decisions and those of the security services, and has to cooperate with the government in the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

The constitution of Croatia was changed in 2001 following the experience of a decade of war and the complete establishment of the independent republic. Constitutional changes were initiated in accordance with Croatia's new role as a free democratic and independent state. The constitution provides a legal base for building a political system corresponding to the model of Western liberal democracies. The constitution defines the framework of the political system and determines basic civil and human rights. They are guaranteed by several articles of the constitution; for example, articles 14–69 comprise human rights and fundamental freedoms. The common provisions outlining fundamental rights are described in articles 14–20. Articles 21–47 delineate political freedoms and rights and articles 48–69 include economic, social and cultural rights. Furthermore, human rights are also subject to other constitutional regulations, for example article 82, which outlines the legislative procedure concerning the rights of minorities and personal rights and article 92, which defines the role of the ombudsman. *Constitution*

The implementation of human rights in a society can be seen from different points of view. On the one hand it may be part of social evolution, such as emerging free and professional mass media, public discussion of important political issues and the role and status of the judiciary. Personal freedoms in Croatia are guaranteed by the constitution as well as by a number of further legal acts. At the same time, different views of social relations, values and social policy among political elites can however affect the opportunities of individuals and groups. Generally, the legacy of the communist regime – the political and social practices of which remain important up to the present day – continues to result in undemocratic behaviour, in spite of accepted and legally guaranteed democratic values. In reviewing their past, many politicians and journalists who held leading positions under the communist regime still tend to deny its dark side, and in so doing they undermine today's promotion of the values and attitudes characterizing a democratic society.

*State of democracy* Croatia is a republic founded on the principles of liberal democracy, freedom, parliamentarism, free justice and democratic values such as permissiveness, dialogue and fairness. These values and principles are not only quoted in legal acts, they are also transferred to the public as measures to promote democratic attitudes among citizens and institutions.

After a decade of war and the struggle for independence in Croatia, which was concluded with the constitutional changes of 2001, there were no further significant changes within the political system. That decade was nevertheless full of dynamic developments owing to Croatia's efforts to join the European Union (EU) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Over the last few years the miscellaneous components of the political system, for example the role of parliament, the judiciary and the mass media, have stabilized, along with economic growth. Croatia joined NATO in April 2009 and has been accepted as a candidate for EU membership. Since end of 2008, negotiations with Brussels have been blocked by the EU member Slovenia because of a border dispute between the two countries. In the meantime the Sabor continues to revise national laws in order to prepare Croatia for EU membership. This includes work on constitutional modifications and the adjustment of national law to EU standards. In early 2009 parliament announced constitutional changes to come into effect before summer, but as a result of delayed negotiation talks with Brussels these changes are assumed to be postponed.

*Separation of powers* The constitution of Croatia outlines a parliamentary system in which exercising membership of parliament and in the government simultaneously is not forbidden. Therefore, a strict division of legislative and executive power is not intended. In practice however all members of the government give up their parliamentary mandate if applicable. It is of more importance that the powers of the president and those of the government respectively of the prime minister in foreign affairs and security policy are overlapping. In reality this dualism necessitates continuous coordination between these constitutional bodies. Depending on how the political ambitions of incumbents are developed and, of course, their specific party-political intentions, this division of power is the reason for many latent conflicts.

Judicial power in Croatia is institutionalized by the Constitutional Court (Ustavni sud) as an authority responsible for the accordance of legal acts with the constitution, with a Supreme Court (Vrhovni sud) at the top of the judicial pyramid. The judges of the Constitutional Court as well as the president of the Supreme Court are appointed by the Sabor, while the appointment of the president of the Supreme Court is suggested by the president of the republic. Other judges are appointed by the state justice council (Državno sudbeno vijeće), whose members are determined by parliament. In the last few years particular problems have arisen due to the fact that the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court have had difficulty synchronizing their jurisdiction. It is manifest that this problem is caused by unclear and inaccurate regulations within the constitution and that it should be resolved within the announced constitutional reform.

The division of power between the national, regional and local levels is organized as follows: Croatia has 20 counties (21 including the capital territory of Zagreb as a separate territorial unit). The counties (županije) are self-governing units with their own assemblies, but they are also

governmental bodies. They regulate local tasks under their own authority, but due to legal regulations their autonomy is strongly restricted, primarily in favour of the central state, i.e., concerning budgetary policy.

According to its self-definition, “[t]he Croatian Parliament is a representative body of citizens and is vested with the legislative power in the Republic of Croatia. The Parliament, as the oldest state institution, has been advocating, guaranteeing and protecting Croatia’s statehood and national interests throughout centuries” (Sabor). In accordance with its constitution, the Croatian parliament decides on constitutional amendments by a two-thirds majority, it adopts legal acts and the state budget, decides about war and peace, takes decisions about national security strategy and defence strategy, decides about referenda, decides about the appointment of state officials and controls the executive powers. Members of parliament (MPs) are elected for a period of four years. Members of the government, as well as other state officials, cannot be members of parliament at the same time.

*National assembly*

**Table 1 | DISTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS**

<b>Party</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>Present status</b>	<b>2003</b>
HDZ – Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica)	66	PPM/GS	63
SDP – Social-democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske)	56	O	30
HNS – Croatian People’s Party (Hrvatska narodna stranka)	6	O	11
HSS – Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka)	6	GJ	9
IDS – Istrian Democratic Assembly (Istarski demokratski sabor)	3	S	4
HDSSB – Croatian Democratic Federation of Slavonia and Baranja (Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje)	3	O	3
SDSS – Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna srpska demokratska stranka)	3	GJ	3
HSLS – Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka)	2	GJ	3
HSP – Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska stranka prava)	1	O	5
HSU – Croatian Party of Pensioners (Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika)	1	S	3
SDA – Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije)	1	S	1
Independent	5		12

*Abbreviations: PPM/GS = party of the prime minister and senior partner of a coalition government  
GJ = party is junior partner in the government | O = party is in opposition | S = party supports government but without formally coalition agreement.*

The Croatian constitution states in article 71 that “[t]he House of Representatives shall have no less than 100 and no more than 160 representatives, elected on the basis of direct universal and equal suffrage by secret ballot.” Moreover, it specifies that MPs shall be elected for a term of four years (art. 72). According to election law (the most recent version in 2003), 140 representatives are to be elected by a simple majority vote within 10 constituencies, with 14 representatives elected from each. Furthermore, there is a special constituency for the votes for representatives of Croatian citizens living abroad. The number of seats from this special constituency depends on the

total number of voters within the ten domestic constituencies. Usually the number of mandates elected by this special constituency (the diaspora constituency) is about five. Finally, ethnic minorities in Croatia have also the right to choose their eight representatives within the national assembly. According to the Constitutional Act on Rights of the National Minorities, the Serbian minority elects three representatives to parliament, the Hungarian and Italian minority elect one representative each and the Czech and Slovak minority together elect one representative. Austrian, Bulgarian, German, Polish, Roma, Rumanian, Russian, Turkish, Ukrainian, Vlach and Jewish minorities together elect one representative. Albanian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian and Slovene minorities also collectively elect one representative in parliament.

The Sabor is traditionally dominated by the two largest parties, the Christian democrat Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (HDZ) and the Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske (SDP). Apart from these two parties, there are a number of smaller parties represented in the assembly.

After the national elections in 2007, the HDZ developed a coalition agreement with the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) and the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLHS). The HDZ – which since July 2009 has had a new leader, Jadranka Kosor, who succeeded former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader following his retirement as party leader and prime minister – is supported by smaller parties and ethnic minority representatives in order to ensure necessary support in parliament for the government. Many parties listed in Table 1 are therefore neither specified as opposition nor are they part of the government. Due to close cooperation, however, a representative from the SDSS did become a deputy prime minister of the government.

## **II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM**

### **II.1 Party System**

*Legal regulation* Political parties are central to Croatia's political system, as mentioned in article 6 of the constitution. Article 6 stipulates for example the conditions for founding a new party, the rules concerning the party's relationship to fundamental constitutional democratic principles and the regulation of the party's financing. Elsewhere, the role of political parties and their legal basis are outlined in the Political Parties Act of 1993 (last amended in 2003), which claims that "through their free founding, the political parties are an expression of the democratic multiparty system as the highest value of the constitutive order of the Republic of Croatia." The act regulates the legal status, conditions, methods and establishing procedures, registration, closure and financing of the political parties. In following this act, parties need to organize themselves in accordance with the regional structure of the country.

Coming into effect in 2003, the amended act on the elections of members of the Croatian parliament requires parties to make public their approximate spending during campaigns, as well as their sources of finance from the very outset. MPs are to be elected within 10 constituencies, with 14 MPs from each. Candidate lists or independent candidates have to reach an electoral threshold of 5 per cent of the votes in a single constituency. The state's electoral committee, whose members are appointed by parliament, is in charge of monitoring the elections; an ethical committee provides a code of conduct for the candidates and oversees their behaviour. Non-governmental organizations are also invited to watch over the elections.

*Party financing* The financing of political parties, independent candidate lists and candidates are regulated by the Political Parties Act. According to this act, parties are financed by their members, the parties' own legal activities, donations and state financing. The act stipulates the maximum amount allowed from donations, and anonymous donations are forbidden. Parties which have at least one MP can claim for state funding. According to additional regulations covered by this act, the amount available

for party financing is allocated in the state budget as well as in the budgets of local self-governing units, in line with the number of representatives each party has in parliament. The act also sets out control mechanisms and penalties in the case of violations. Parties publish their financial reports annually, which include data about income, spending and their sources of financing.

Certain experiences over the last few years seem to confirm that the country's legal framework continues to leave opportunity for potential fraud and financial irregularities. Indeed, party financing, especially spending on election campaigning, is generally neither precisely shown nor explained anywhere.

Apart from the two largest parties of the HDZ and the SDP, there is a range of smaller parties represented in parliament, though most of them with a minimum of seats, won mostly through cooperation within a pre-election coalition. On the strength of having had parliamentary representation for at least two consecutive terms, the relevant parties are:

*Relevant parties*

- HDZ: Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica);
- SDP: Social-democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske);
- HNS: Croatian People's Party (Hrvatska narodna stranka);
- HSS: Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka);
- IDS: Istrian Democratic Assembly (Istarski demokratski sabor);
- HDSSB: Croatian Democratic Federation of Slavonia and Baranja (Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje);
- SDSS: Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna srpska demokratska stranka);
- HSLS: Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka);
- HSP: Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska stranka prava);
- HSU: Croatian Party of Pensioners (Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika);
- SDA: Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije).

The number of relevant parties has remained unchanged over the last five years. The two largest parties, the HDZ and the SDP, have consistently dominated the political landscape. At the same time, a number of smaller parties – the HNS, the HSS, the HSLS, the HSP and the IDS, for example – maintain a degree of influence. Other small parties use the shortcomings of the benefit system to their own advantage by integrating small groups of voters. Moreover, electoral regulations guarantee parliamentary seats to parties representing ethnic minorities, such as the Independent Democratic Serb Party (SDSS) and the Party of Democratic Action (SDA). These changes affecting small parties notwithstanding, relations among the most relevant parties have however been unchanged over the last few legislative periods.

Croatia's political landscape is traditionally determined by specific ideological criteria or according to special relations within Croatia, such as the status of minorities or regional affiliations.

*Party families*

**Table 2 | IDEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION OF CROATIA'S PARTY SYSTEM**

	<b>Name and founding year</b>	<b>Present situation</b>	<b>Situation prior to present</b>
Conservative	HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), 1989	PPM/GS	PPM/GS
	HSP (Croatian Party of Rights), 1990	O	O
Post-communist/ social democratic	SDP (Social-democratic Party of Croatia), 1990 <sup>(1)</sup>	O	O
Liberal	HNS (Croatian People's Party), 1990	O	O
	HSLs (Croatian Social Liberal Party), 1989	GJ	GJ
Rural	HSS (Croatian Peasant Party), restored 1989/90 <sup>(2)</sup>	GJ	GJ
Regional/liberal	IDS (Istrian Democratic Assembly), 1993	S	–
Regional	HDSSB (Croatian Democratic Federation of Slavonia and Baranja), 2005	O	O
Ethnic	SDSS (Independent Democratic Serb Party), 1997	GJ	–
Ethnic, with religious/ Muslim background	SDA (Party of Democratic Action), 1990	S	–
Others	HSU (Croatian Party of Pensioners), 1996	S	–

<sup>(1)</sup>In 1990 the ruling communist party Federation of the Communists of Croatia changed its name into the Party of Democratic Changes (*Stranka demokratskih promjena – SDP*). In 1993 the party changed the name again, becoming the Social-democratic Party of Croatia.

<sup>(2)</sup>Founded in 1904, the HSS was active in exile from Western countries throughout the communist era, but re-entered Croatia's political system in 1989–90.

Abbreviations: PPM/GS = party of the prime minister and senior partner of a coalition government  
GJ = party is junior partner in the government (holds some ministers) | O = party is in opposition  
S = party supports government but without formally coalition agreement.

*Origins of parties* Croatia's political parties show similar characteristics in comparison with parties in many traditional democracies: their programmes and attitudes suggest developed ideological backgrounds; they have originated from traditional milieux; and they attempt to establish competition between each other based on different programme orientations. At the same time, Croatian political parties suffer from the experience of the country's totalitarian past and lack democratic knowledge and routine. In the aim of acting as a modern and democratic organization, Croatian parties have so far not developed the tools and skills necessary to fully support the political development of the country. The strongest parties, notably the HDZ and the SDP, the most influential, are deeply embedded within political tradition in Croatia, possessing insufficient political thinking to further develop democracy in the country. However, Croatian politics have been affected by a development which can be seen in other European countries, that is, a decrease or even loss of parties' political profiles gradually causing a weakening of traditional political distinctions.

The experience of the totalitarian past exacerbates the current political situation. The strongest political party in Croatia, the HDZ, is trying to preserve its profile as a party of patriotism and as the guarantor of national interests. In this context, the party reminds the Croatian people of its own leading role in times of fighting for independence (1990–95). In this way the HDZ succeeded in integrating a rather conservative and patriotic electorate.

The social-democratic SDP is still affected by the party's communist past, especially with regard to its internal personal structures. It is striving to strike a balance between its ambition to be a modern social-democratic party on the one hand while maintaining a continuity with particular political visions and methods from the past on the other. Both the HDZ and the SDP have many old communist leaders who still have some difficulty profiling themselves as real democrats.

In addition to the aforementioned limited abilities of parties as successful promoters of political solutions based on the ideas, needs and interests of Croatia's citizens, parties have missed opportunities to gain knowledge about general political issues as well as to fully manage the social phenomena they have been confronted with. At times it seems that parties are in reality not concerned with their basic principles and values but rather with discarding them for the purpose of achieving particular short-term goals.

*General  
significance  
of parties*

Under these circumstances, ideological differences within society are not necessarily fully represented by parties, and in many cases it is hard to determine ideological differentiation between them. Many people join parties only to find a "political homeland". This lack of profiles generates dissatisfaction with political parties, allowing smaller parties to act as permanent potential alternatives to the established parties. It also prepares the ground for parties targeting political niches, like regional parties or parties for special interest groups. Furthermore, party membership is often simply regarded as an opportunity to pursue personal interests and to promote one's own business.

Despite all the programmatic and structural indecisiveness of the parties, each party counts on a traditional section of the electorate. The HDZ's following is very strong in the countryside and smaller cities. The SDP's support is normally based within larger cities owing to their large numbers of working people. Nevertheless, public debate and opinion indicate that the majority of voters tends to vote according to traditional beliefs and ideals and less on the strength of a party's actual performance. Statistical data show relatively stable relations between parties and voters, but also parties' inability to respond to citizens' distrust. This may lead to significant changes along with changes in voters' party preferences. Election results over the last decade show, however, that it is not so much larger parties but smaller parties that have been affected by this phenomena, especially due to their concern with getting over the 5 per cent threshold.

*Voter-party  
relations*

## **II.2 Individual Parties**

There are no official statistics on party membership available, though some party officials make statements publicly about membership figures. According to those sources the HDZ has by far the largest membership, while the second-largest party in parliament, the SDP, has been placed at rank four, according to unofficial information. Some parties refuse to specify their member statistics, arguing that these figures should be kept in the dark for political reasons.

*Party membership*

Figures shown below are based on the statements of party officials (according to the daily newspaper Slobodna Dalmacija).

**Table 3 | MEMBERSHIP FIGURES**

<b>Party</b>	<b>2009</b>
HDZ	More than 220,000
SDP	30,000
HNS	39,000
HSS	43,000
IDS	unknown
HDSSB	unknown
SDSS	unknown
HSLs	25,000
HSP	unknown
HSU	30,000
SDA	unknown

*Source: Slobodna Dalmacija, 16 February 2009 (www.slobodnadalmacija.hr [last accessed on 15/07/09]).*

It is not possible to verify this data, but that which relates to parties' activities and performances makes it very likely that they are not far from reality. However, there is no official information on past growth or on the total number of current members.

The regional parties the IDS and the HDSSB generally represent populations from Istria, Slavonia and Baranja respectively. The SDA (a branch of the SDA Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina) focuses its efforts mainly on people of Bosnian origin, who are mostly Muslim, while the SDSS is the political representation of the Serb minority in Croatia. The HSU is a pensioners' party. The HSS as a peasant party focuses on the rural population. In contrast to these parties related to special interest groups, the HDZ, Croatia's largest party, sees itself as a people's party integrating representatives of all important social groups, comparable with the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The section of the electorate that the SDP attracts is somewhat consistent. Although it commands no traditional voters in a classical sense, the party gains votes mainly from former and current employees of state-owned industry and those in the public services, especially in the larger cities.

*Party organization* Each Croatian party has its own statute. According to legal regulations, all parties are organized in a manner reflecting the regional structure of the republic. All parties have local and county branches. The local branches perform no significant activities in between elections, apart from their activities within local governments and local assemblies.

Political parties in Croatia have generally established internal organizations and wings promoting particular social interests and goals of member groups, e.g., youth and women's organizations. The HDZ has a youth organization and a women's group. The SDP has established several groups within the party called fora, for example a youth forum, a women's forum and a seniors' forum.



Members of these groups within these two parties as well as within other parties are generally represented in parties' leadership.

Political parties in Croatia have not established notable relations or cooperation with civil society organizations. Only occasionally do parties organize public debates (roundtable discussions or conferences) on important political questions. Systematic cooperation with other organizations is quite rare. There are contacts between the SDP and workers' unions, predominantly through educational projects, while the HSS has ties with some farmer organizations, but a strong example of systematic cooperation between a party and a civil society organization has yet to emerge.

*Societal  
entrenchment*

In general the most important decision-makers within the Croatian party landscape are the leading party executives. There are some exceptions of this rule, e.g., in the SDP. There are at times serious tensions between regional leaders and powerful party members. The HDZ was dominated over the last few years by its chairman Dr Ivo Sanader until his resignation in July 2009. From his shadow a number of strong and dominating leaders have emerged to act with considerable influence within the party.

*Internal  
decision-making*

Decision-making and the formatting of policy within these two parties, including the work of party bodies, occur within the context of these power relations. Decision-making based predominantly on personal influence rather than on the results of public debates or internal discussions is a feature of most political parties in Croatia. This tendency also goes for personnel decisions in the case of nominations for elections. Formally, decisions about the nomination of candidates for national parliament are taken by a party body, usually the party's main committee. Despite statute regulations outlining the formal need for democratic processes within the parties, relationships are often hierarchical, with a powerful party leadership and members forced to follow their leaders' instructions. On the other hand, parties do take into account particular generally adopted standards concerning personnel decisions, with many of them striving to respect quotas for female candidates within their nomination process.

The name of each political party reflects its mission and principal goals. By choosing their name and using abbreviations, parties try to attract the public and create an identity. Most of them attach importance to the adjective "Croatian" as the first word of their name, which was particularly important in the early 1990s at the time when most of the country's parties were founded during the struggle for independence and national identity. Some party names even take account of special circumstances related to their establishment, while others simply reflect efforts to reach broad numbers of voters. The HDZ, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica), was a key power in the process of national independence and Croatia's self-determination. The name reflects the focus of its founders; the party has been designed as the vehicle of a democratic movement following the collapse of the totalitarian system and is designed to attract all those who promoted a democratic political system in Croatia and who wish to see traditional Croatian values and attitudes at the centre of politics.

*Stability  
of ideology/  
programmes*

Since Croatia's independence in the early 1990s, most parties have retained their names. An exception is the SDP. Being the successor of the former Yugoslavian ruling Communist Alliance, the change of the party's name suggested a new beginning as a genuine Croatian party with a democratic identity. The party's first name was the Party of Democratic Changes (Stranka demokratskih promjena), and it later became the Social-democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske). Also significant is the fact that it is the only relevant party in Croatia which uses the word "partija", a traditional mark for the communist party, while all other parties call themselves "stranka", which is the regular Croatian term for "political party".

The HNS, the Croatian People's Party (Hrvatska narodna stranka), is recognized as a liberal party owing to its programmatic work, though its name suggests the idea of a people's party integrating different social groups.

The HSS, the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka), stands in the tradition of the peasant parties' movement in Central and Eastern Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is by far the oldest party in Croatia. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the HSS dominated the political scene in Croatia, whereby the party integrated Croatian farmers into the struggle for independence. The IDS, the Istrian Democratic Assembly (Istarski demokratski sabor), is a regional party representing the identity of Istria, a region in western Croatia. The HDSSB, the Croatian Democratic Federation of Slavonia and Baranja (Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje), is a protest party of former HDZ members. The party seems to be an attempt to strengthen regional political powers in eastern Croatia and, of course, to ensure better political influence at the national level.

The SDSS, the Independent Democratic Serb Party (Samostalna srpska demokratska stranka), is an ethnic minority party, bringing together Serbs in Croatia trying to build a specific political milieu based on the Serbian identity. The HSLS, the Croatian Social Liberal Party (Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka), insists on social security as a precondition for personal freedom.

The HSP, the Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska stranka prava), whose older members played an important role in establishing the fascist scene in Croatia before and during the Second World War, opted at the beginning of the civil war in the 1990s for extreme nationalistic positions, but then became more and more democratic and distanced itself from totalitarian ideas.

The HSU, the Croatian Party of Pensioners (Hrvatska stranka umirovljenika), is one of the youngest parties in Croatia, albeit with the oldest population. The HSU promotes policy focused on the interests of the country's older population, proclaiming a political attitude without ideological colours. The SDA, the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije), represents the interests of the Bosnian population within Croatia as Croatia's branch of the SDA party of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Through their programmes, which have generally been published on the internet, the parties strive to state political issues and goals as well as methods. The public presence of the parties – their contributions to debates as well as their campaigns – are guided by their programmatic principles and proclaimed aims. There is generally no systematic, structured discussion around basic political items, and parties' public discourse tends to be rather light and dedicated to short-term goals. The same attitude has been seen in internal debates within party bodies, where personal relations prove a stronger determining factor than the proclaimed basic principles of the party. This is also reflected in the cooperation between parties, particularly through the development of coalitions at all levels (national, regional and local).

*Communication* All political parties in Croatia have developed their public relations mechanisms according to the conditions of modern communication tools. Each party presents itself on the internet, publishing its basic documents as well as all it has to tell to the public. The media, including the communication possibilities presented by new media, is recognized by parties as an essential way to present their work and to stay in touch with their targeted voter population. Parties make public their positions regarding current political issues and they usually find an appropriate way to do so. At the same time, however, occasionally they fall short adopting a position encompassing studied reflection on the diverse aspects behind any political matter. In essence it seems that while parties know how to project a message, they are unable to tell which message to project at which time. It is striking that in Croatia many political actors show a populist attitude, telling citizens what they want to hear without addressing the real issues. By listening to the statements of certain Croatian politicians, one gets the impression that political responsibility is often left for others, with the issues tackled in a very simplified fashion. Political statements seldom face intense political challenges.

Political parties, especially the larger ones, continuously work with professional public relations agencies in order to present their policies as well as to learn how to react appropriately to current political situations, i.e., to develop a media strategy at a given moment. Parties publish their

financial reports annually, but with general data and without itemized figures around revenue and expenses. Detailed information about expenditure on advertising and communications is lacking. Normally, the annual financial reports of the parties show only general figures and rarely data about specific activities, as there are few legal requirements around the need for detailed public records of expenses.

The lack of a wide democratic experience, together with the poor level of democratic education of many politicians, seems to hinder political communication.

The majority of MPs are with political parties. In the current assembly, following the most recent national election in 2007, there are 5 independent representatives out of total number of 153 MPs. The previous legislative period featured a greater number of independents, namely 12 out of 151 MPs. MPs are organized into parliamentary groups, according to the party membership of the deputies. Members of parliament discuss and give their votes, taking account of the decisions of their parliamentary group. These decisions are discussed within the group beforehand, already reflecting the policy defined by the party leadership through the appropriate bodies of the party. Croatian officials usually do not give personal statements on current political issues; rather they present the official view of the parties or institutions they belong to.

*Relationship  
between party  
and parliamentary  
groups*

### III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Croatia's political identity is determined by its traditional affiliation to Western values, by the decades of the Yugoslavian communist era, by the national emancipation of the brutal war during the 1990s, along with the process of consolidating the political system in the post-war period. As a new member of NATO and an EU candidate, Croatia is going through a number of changes with regard to its structure. Successfully adopting the methods of a dynamic modern society, Croatia is facing new political experiences. Political parties in Croatia demonstrate through their work the typical dilemmas of a post-totalitarian society, trying to present themselves as successful political managing agencies. These parties are nevertheless making notable efforts to organize their basic political work, namely through building a system of political education for their own voters and for all citizens to better understand political matters. Political leaders try to integrate party members and voters as they belong to specific social groups. Political parties seem to accept political socialization as their own mission, especially with regard to the public, but other tasks are still not understood by almost all party leaders. Parties have established themselves successfully as the source of political solutions, but they also face a challenge in terms of credibility.

The HDZ profiled itself as the promoter of Croatia's independence and as a leader in the process of building a new political system. The responsibility stemming from this role likely excuses much of the party's lack of sensitivity in regard to some of the challenges facing the young Croatian democracy; for example, its lack of discussion around basic programmatic values and general political principles. The SDP, the successor of the former communist party, participated significantly in the introduction of democracy to Croatia. Its evolution shows how difficult it is to be split between old traditions and aspirations for a modern party fully dedicated to democratic values.

The HDZ and the SDP together dominate the political scene in Croatia. While both parties seek to demonstrate their willingness to face up to the difficult questions presented by the country's totalitarian past when addressing voters, there is almost no discussion of their specific historical roots and experiences within the parties themselves. "Historical" arguments are used mainly for daily political disputes and are only loosely related to the actual results of research findings. Other parties are far less important players; they are not able to integrate wide groups of populations and many of them simply operate within different political niches – such as regional or ethnic minorities – or they stand for a single social group.

Public discussion of political issues in Croatia represents a style of facing political challenges based on the principle of adopting solutions from abroad without deeper analysis of the circumstances behind that particular political issue. Over the past few years the Croatian parliament has passed a number of acts to synchronize Croatian law with that of the EU, without much in the way of debate; the most common arguments explaining these legal solutions were based on the need to prepare Croatia for integration within the EU. The basic meaning of a law, namely the regulation of relationship within the complex network of a political system, taking account of a system's own attributes and traditions, has been overlooked by such legislative practice. Croatia continues to face important challenges, such as the reorganization of the justice system, the development of new economic and social strategies and the discussion of issues related to its totalitarian past. For these purposes, Croatian society needs qualified leaders and institutional networks combining the nation's own heritage and needs with professional knowledge and widely developed communication with other countries. Croatia's political parties, at least its leading ones, have the necessary organizational structure to take part in this work, though they still lack the necessary relations to wider society in the form of suitable and systematic connections to social groups and civil society organizations. The parties' programmes, their experience of facing political changes and their endurance during times of change could prove a solid base for successful political work in the future, though this will require a change in attitude, notably with regard to their relations to citizens, as well as in their ability to develop the country's democratic consciousness, both outside parties and within.

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