

## Zoran Milanovic, former PM elected President of the Republic in Croatia

Former Social Democrat premier (2011-2016) Zoran Milanovic (SDP) won the second round of the presidential race that took place in Croatia on 5th January 2020, ousting incumbent rival Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who was running as an independent, with the support of the centre-right HDZ. According to an almost complete count Mr Milanovic won 52.73% of the vote and Ms Grabar-Kitarovic, 47.27%.

Turnout rose to 55%, up in comparison with the first round (51.2%).

On the announcement of the result Mr Milanovic declared, *"Four million of us ... are looking for our place in Europe which is, despite all the problems, the nicest place to live, the most peaceful project in which Croatia must find its place and interest"*, calling for Croatians to be *"united in their differences"*. Indeed, the former centre-left premier had campaigned in support of a "normal" Croatia in which the country would leave war and its divisions behind.

The race against Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic was a tight one, with a narrow margin separating them in the first round, in which Mr Milanovic won 29.65% and Ms Grabar-Kitarovic 26.65%.

But the hopes held by the incumbent president to win over the far-right, who in the first round voted massively for populist candidate Miroslav Skoro (24.45%) failed. And yet during her campaign and in a bid to convince the more extreme wings on the right, amongst others she minimised the crimes committed by Ustashi regime during the Second World War, expressed support for "dubious" characters such as Zagreb Mayor, Milan

Bandic (indicted for corruption) and Julienne Bušić, American-born author and activist, who hijacked a TWA flight in 1976 to promote Croatian independence.

Hence it was feared that nationalist trends, caused by migrant pressure on the country's borders, mass exodus of the population, endemic corruption and clientelism, would gain the upper hand in this election. But with the right divided, it seems that the message repeated by Zoran Milanovic that Croatia "is a Republic for all, for equal citizens" was heard.

Zoran Milanovic's win comes at a particularly crucial time for Croatia since there will be legislative elections in the autumn. Although the presidential position is largely an honorific one, the president still has a certain influence. This election was seen as a test for the ruling HDZ party and its moderate Prime minister Andrej Plenković. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic's defeat will complicate the latter's task. As political analyst Tihomir Cipek suggests that it will have weakened the HDZ party and damaged Plenkovic's reputation. Not only this, he faces possible discontent on the part of HDZ hardliners who disagree with his moderate policies.

This period is also important since Croatia took over the six-monthly rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union on 1st January 2020 which priorities are EU-UK relations post-Brexit, EU membership for the Western Balkan countries, climate change and the EU's next multiannual budget (MFF).

53-year-old Zoran Milanovic has a lengthy experience as a politician. In addition to being Prime Minister between 2011 and 2016, he was also leader of the

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Social Democratic Party (SDP) from 2007-2016. He oversaw Croatia's entry into the EU in 2013 and was instrumental in reforming the tax code. Since his defeat in 2016 he has worked as a political consultant, notably for the Albanian Premier Edi Rama.

Standing in this election he promoted himself as the candidate with "character", teasing his critics, who sometimes deem him to be a little arrogant.

He will enter office on 18th February.

### Results of the Croatian presidential election of 22nd December 2019 and 5th January 2020

Turnout: 55%

Candidates	Number of votes won (1st round)	% of votes cast (1st round)	Number of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes cast (2nd round)
<b>Zoran Milanovic (Social Democratic Party, SDP)</b>	562 779	29.55	1,034,389	52.73
<b>Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic (independent)</b>	507 626	26.65	929,488	47.30
<b>Miroslav Skoro (independent)</b>	465 703	24.45		
<b>Mislav Kolakusic (independent)</b>	111 916	5.87		
<b>Milan Bandic (Bandic Milan 365-Workers' Party and Solidarity)</b>	87 882	4.61		
<b>Dalija Oreskovic (independent)</b>	55 163	2.89		
<b>Ivan Pernar (Pernar Party)</b>	44 057	2.31		
<b>Katarina Peovic (Workers' Front)</b>	21 387	1.12		
<b>Dejan Kovac (Social Liberal Party, HSL)</b>	18 107	0.95		
<b>Anto Djapic (Democratic Alliance for National Renewal, Desno)</b>	4 001	0.21		
<b>Nedjeljko Babic (Party of Chakavian, Kajkavian and Shtokavian Speakers)</b>	3 014	0.15		

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