

FROM SANADER TO KOSOR; FROM MESIĆ TO JOSIPOVIĆ. THE RESHAPING OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN CROATIA IN 2009/2010

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The year 2009/2010 altered the political system of Croatia more than any other in the last decade. Besides local and presidential elections, the country also received a new prime minister. In this article, the political changes of the past year in Croatia will be clustered and related to one another. As an introduction and by way of understanding the political system, the background to the constitutional rank of president will be illuminated.

The two previous Croatian presidents Franjo Tuđman and Stjepan ("Stipe") Mesić have both both perceived their office in different ways. The first president's time in office was characterised by the fight for Croatian independence, the building of democratic structures and the assertiveness in the war against the Serbs. The former army general and historian Franjo Tuđman was elected the first President of the Republic of Croatia on April 8, 1990. He held this position until his death on December 10, 1999. His autocratic manner of government and his nationalistic foreign policy isolated that country in the second half of the 1990's. His successor, elected in January 2000, Stjepan Mesić shaped the first decade of the new century. Mesić is considered by some observers to be the prototype of a whole generation of Croatian politicians, who essentially shaped the Croatian fight for independence and consolidation. It was characteristic for the political generation to promote the western community of values of democratisation and the integration of Croatia during all inconsistencies and fractures, despite the fact that hints of their own socialisation during the time of communism remain. The name Mesić will remain forever linked with the success of the Croatian transformation processes. During his time, first under social-democratic but from 2003 under conservative leadership, the country developed into a state with stable democratic structures and economic success that, compared to other countries in the region, are examples.

The current Croatian constitution is based on the so-called "Christmas Constitution" from December 22, 1990 that allotted extensive legislative and executive functions to the president. Between the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, the representatives of the Sabor (the Croatian parliament), adopted drastic changes to convert the Croatian constitution from a presidential to a parliamentary democracy. The representatives thus diminished the concentration of power in the president; a rule that was tailored to the former office holder Franjo Tuđman.

The president is directly elected for a five year term, after which a single re-election is allowed. In articles 93, 97, and 99 of the constitution the president is assigned the powers which are necessary to ensure the smooth functioning of the state. Here the position of president is expected to be unprejudiced and impartial. For this reason, the president must suspend his party membership during his term of office ("ostavku na članstvo").

The first important political occurrences for Croatia in 2009 were the municipal elections on May 17 and May 31, 2009. There were valued as an important referendum on the sitting coalition government in the middle of their legislative term. Here the strongest political power of Croatia, the conservative christian-democratic HDZ, could expand their clout. Except for Istria and the far north of the country, everything is "HDZ-Blue".

The elections proceeded smoothly except for a few complaints. As expected, the "duel situation" of the mayoral candidates of the large cities was central in the public's interest, whereby more about their personal backgrounds and preferences was reported and discussed than about their party political programs. The success of the governing parties was thoroughly astounding because at that time the effects of the economic- and financial crisis were clearly obvious. In the public ranking of the issues this was clearly in first place, even ranking above the border conflict with Slovenia.

Four weeks after the municipal election, on July 1, 2009, the long-time prime minister Dr. Ivo Sanader resigned from all political offices. This step was met with complete surprise by friends and rivals. His direct and indirect impact is still perceptible today. The reasons for his resignation are still unclear today. Sanader claimed that he felt deserted by the EU in the border conflict with Slovenia and wanted to send a warning signal. Given that his successor shortly thereafter reached an agreement with the neighboring country, this justification must be doubted.

In addition it was agreed that a treaty would be declared, with the mandate for the establishment and selection of a court to rule in the border conflict with Slovenia and issue a binding decision for both sides. The treaty was signed on November 4, 2009 by the prime ministers of Croatia and Slovenia in the presence of the sitting EU Council President Reinfeld. The agreed-upon court should now determine the land and sea border as well as the access of each country to international waters and the use of the relevant sea regions. In doing so, different principles were utilised. During the determination of the land and sea borders the "Rules and Principles of International Law" were crucial, and for Slovenia's connection to the high seas and the use of the Adriatic resources "The Principle of Good Neighbourly Relations" was consulted. In the mean time, the Croatian Parliament ratified the treaty. In Slo-

venia it was discussed as to whether the ratification of the treaty in parliament required a two-thirds majority or if a national referendum should occur.

Despite this agreement, Slovenia continued to hamper entry negotiations for Croatia's admission to the EU. By the end of December, Croatia could successfully meet 17 of the 33 requirements, but Slovenia, without detailed, concrete reasons, prohibited the consideration of three other requirements. The other nine are currently being negotiated. In the meantime the EU Commission appointed a working group that is currently formulating the entry agreement.

This conflict overshadowed a huge foreign policy victory for Croatia: on April 4, 2009, the country, along with Albania, was accepted into NATO. The long-term effort to stabilize the foreign- and security policy situation in south east Europe was thus fulfilled. This will be assessed as fragile in light of the unclear relationship between Serbia and the West and to EU integration, and the hardening of the Kosovo Question as well as the fragile situation in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina. Joining NATO relieved the country from several worries.

In the run up to the presidential election, the conservatives could not settle on a single candidate, resulting in five conservative-leaning aspirants running for office. The left-leaning parties limited themselves to two candidates. The starting shot for the presidential election came unusually early; around six months before the actual election.

The deciding question of the first ballot was who would reach the second round besides the official candidate of the SDP (who received 32.4 percent of the vote). Because the centre-right candidates paralysed themselves, eventually two Social Democrats competed against each other. Besides Ivo Josipović the other was the mayor of Zagreb, Milan Bandić, who was recently shut out of the party. The latter received 14.8 percent on the first ballot to qualify himself for the second ballot.

Josipović's campaign, which cost approximately ten million Euros, adopted the slogan "Truth and Clarity." In doing this, he indirectly took aim at the current corruption scandal-shaken centre-right government, as well as directly taking aim at his competition. At considerable expense, Bandić tried to reach voters outside his own base in the last two weeks of the election campaign. His tactic was to stylize himself as the candidate of "all" Croats and to depict his competition Josipović as an SDP party hack and a "Red Danger." These considerations did not lead to the desired success. A coalition campaign was not possible. Nevertheless, Bandić could attract more votes from foreign Croats, many of whom lived in Bosnia-Herzegovina (the homeland of Bandić), than his rival. In every other region of Croatia, particularly the eco-

nomically successful north, the vote for Josipović was noticeably higher. Moreover, many Croatians had the feeling that an academic education paired with parliamentary experience are better qualifications for a candidate than the administration of the mayor's office in Zagreb. Even in his "own" city, Bandić could not win the support of more than 37 percent of the votes. Therefore, the presidential election was decided for Josipović without major difficulties. In the second round of voting on January 10, he received 60.29 percent of the vote, clearly pushing Milan Bandić into second place. The conservative governing coalition will now have to deal with a "left-leaning" president in a "quasi-cohabitation". This is, in principle, a repeat of the political configuration as it has existed since 2003, when an elected conservative government met with a left or more specifically, left-liberal president.

IN: *Auslandsinformationen* 3/2010, ISSN 0177-7521, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Berlin, p.134-138