



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mission to Croatia

Headquarters

7 January 2005

Spot Report

Second round required for the Presidential election

I. Results of the first round

The first round of the Presidential election in Croatia took place on Sunday 2 January 2005. It was the fourth presidential election since Croatia gained independence: the late President Franjo Tudjman was elected twice, in 1992 and 1997; the incumbent President Stjepan Mesic won the 2000 election.

According to the final results delivered on 6 January, President Stjepan Mesic, who was supported by the centre and left-wing parties, failed by a small margin to win in the first round with 48.92 per cent of the votes. The candidate of the centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Jadranka Kosor, came second with 20.30 per cent and was followed by the independent candidate Boris Miksic who received 17.79 per cent. None of the other ten candidates obtained more than 3 per cent of the votes. The overall voter turnout was low at only 50.59 per cent.

A second round between Mesic and Kosor will take place on Sunday 16 January.

The first round confirmed President Mesic's leading position in the public opinion but the good result of Miksic, a relatively unknown American-based businessman of Croatian origin, who challenged the HDZ candidate for the second position, came as a surprise.

Despite the low turnout of the diaspora voters (19 per cent out of a total of about 400,000 eligible voters), mostly composed of Bosnian Croats residing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, out-of-country voting had an influence on the results. With their clear right-wing inclination, the diaspora voters prevented a first round victory for Mesic, who obtained only 13 per cent of the diaspora votes, and helped Kosor to secure the second place (she reached almost 60 per cent, whereas Miksic received only 10 per cent).

II. Conduct of the election

The organization of the election is under the responsibility of the State Election Commission (SEC). While the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)¹ decided not to monitor the elections, GONG, the leading election support NGO in Croatia, cooperated closely with SEC and sent 1,000 observers and 61 mobile observer teams to the field.

¹ See ODIHR Election Reports on Croatia from 1997 to 2004 on OSCE website

According to GONG's preliminary report delivered on 4 January, the elections were conducted in an "atmosphere of peace and tolerance" and were held in compliance with the electoral legislation, even if a lack of professionalism was observed in some polling stations. Furthermore, GONG deplored that the Central State Office for Administration failed to issue instructions to local government offices regarding the update of voters' lists. GONG expressed satisfaction with its cooperation with SEC.

In the course of the campaign, repeated expressions of dissatisfaction with the selection of candidates, campaign funding or fair access to public media emerging from Croatian actors such as SEC, GONG, the media and various candidates, have highlighted the need to further pursue electoral reform. On 18 and 19 November 2004, the Mission, together with representatives of the ODIHR and the Venice Commission (Council of Europe), held a roundtable in Zagreb on electoral legislation reform to facilitate dialogue between Government, Parliamentary representatives, civil society and academic experts. The Mission intends to submit reform proposals after the presidential election based on the conclusions from the roundtable and ODIHR recommendations from previous elections.

Independent candidate Boris Miksic, who ended up 56,000 votes short of entering the second round of elections instead of HDZ candidate Jadranka Kosor, proclaimed on Monday 3 January that "the elections were rigged" and that "Ukraine is repeated in Croatia". He lodged a complaint with the State Election Commission (SEC) which quickly rejected his claims, and invited citizens to hold peaceful protests in the main squares of Croatian cities the same day. About 2,000 of his supporters gathered for a protest rally in Zagreb. Miksic, insisting that there were "massive irregularities," particularly in voting abroad, appealed on 4 January to the Constitutional Court, demanding that the results be annulled and the ballot repeated. However, the Constitutional Court turned down Miksic's two complaints on 5 and 6 January (the first ruling regarding SEC's decision not to allow Miksic's representatives to monitor the final vote count on Sunday evening, the other involving alleged irregularities in the voting procedure in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Boris Miksic told reporters on Wednesday that he would respect the Constitutional Court's decisions but would hold a rally in Zagreb's central square on Friday 7 January to thank all those who had supported him during his presidential campaign.

Out-of-country voting remains an issue of concern. The Mission welcomed the Government's decision to open polling stations in 3 new locations in Serbia (Serbia and Montenegro): Novi Sad, Sombor, Sremska Mitrovica, in addition to those in Belgrade, Kotor and Subotica. Even if the turn-out was low, this initiative represented an opportunity for more Croatian citizens living as refugees in Serbia to engage in Croatia's future. Accredited representatives sent by the Mission to these polling stations witnessed the overall high quality of the electoral process there.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, where 42 polling stations were in operation, GONG lacked the resources to conduct an extensive monitoring but voiced concerns about allegations of significant irregularities. The Mission will support GONG's efforts to cover the out-of-country voting in Bosnia-Herzegovina, along with its own efforts to follow out-of-country voting in neighbouring countries with high concentration of Croatian citizens.