



Weekly Briefing

Croatia external relations briefing:
THE ROLE OF CROATIA IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
Rolando Andrade Matamoro

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.
Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin
Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.
 +36 1 5858 690
 office@china-cee.eu
 china-cee.eu

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Summary

Croatia elected twelve Members of the European Parliament (MEP) in the elections that took place in May 2019. Eleven MEPs have already taken their seats, while the twelfth MEP will go to the European Parliament (EP) once the United Kingdom leave the European Union. The eleven MEPs come from the following parties. Four are from the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and they will join the European Peoples Party (EPP) group in the EP. Four were elected on the Social Democratic Party (SDP) list and they will join Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group in the EP. The remaining four were each elected from the following parties: the anti-systemic Human Blockade (Živi zid) and he will be a non-attached member of the EP; Mislav Kolakušić who was elected as an independent candidate and will also be non-attached in the EP; Ruža Tomašić who served in the previous mandate of the EP and was now reelected on the list of coalition of conservative parties – Croatian Sovereigns – will join the European Conservatives and Reformists Group; and Valter Flego from the Istrian Democratic Forum (IDS) party who will join the Renew Europe group (former ALDE).

1. Introduction

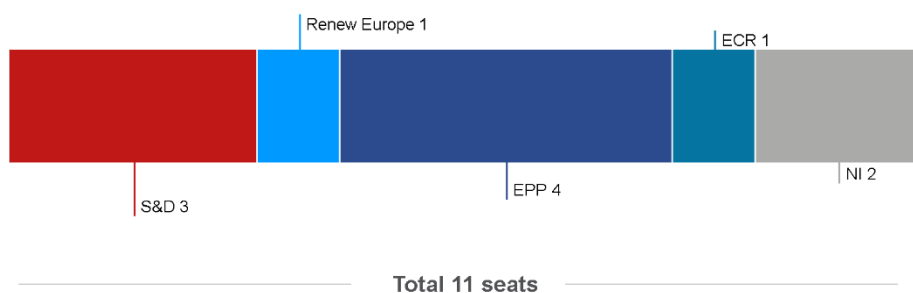
The elections for the European Parliament held in May 2019 raised questions about what to expect from the Member States and their new representatives. Especially interesting is the role that Croatia might take. In January 2020, the country will hold the presidency of the Council of the EU and would like to use the presidency term to underline its European image. In that sense Croatian MEPs will be very active from the start of the new EP.

Depending on their party affiliation and their political programme, they will join different party groups in the EP to consult with other colleagues, coordinate activities and propose policy initiatives. Two Croatian MEPs will be non-attached which usually is a position where a MEPs impact on the work of the EP is rather weak.

With a 29.86% of turnout, which means an increase of more than 4 points from the previous elections (25.24%), the HDZ was again the most voted party. From the total 11 seats, the party led by Karlo Ressler will contribute with 4 MEPs to the EPP (European Peoples Party) Group, keeping the representation the party had in the previous term. Social Democrats

won four seats in the EP. Three MEPs will go immediately to the EP, while the fourth will do so once Brexit is over. Three Social Democratic MEPs are part of the S&D Group (Socialists and Democrats). Croatia voters also elected one MEP from a coalition of liberal parties who joins the Renew Europe Group in the EP. A MEP from the Croatian Conservative Party joins the ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists). Finally, two MEPs (one from anti-systemic Human Blockade party and one independent) will enter in the EP as non-attached members. Now, these members, appointed by their groups, will join an EP Committee for a 2-year-and-a-half term. The purpose of this paper is to observe in which committees of the EP these members are entering, their political affiliation and which will be their role there. The objective is to have a clear overview of the role that Croatia will have in the EU during the next years.

Table 1. Seats by political Group.



Source: European Parliament

2. Croatian MEP'S

Karlo Ressler, former Vice President of the Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP) and until recently a member of the Prime Minister's cabinet, will join the Committee on Budgets, which works on future budgets and negotiate affairs related to them. For him, this role is key *“to ensure higher investments in competitiveness, innovation and security but also to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated for the cohesion policy”*. Besides, he will join the Delegation for relations with the People's Republic of China, as well as the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, this time as a substitute.

Tomislav Sokol, until recently a deputy in the Croatian Parliament from HDZ, will join the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, which examines and controls the regulation of the EU regarding the freedom of circulation of goods, services, and professionals. He will take part also of the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. Besides, he will join as well the Committee on Regional Development as a

substitute, emphasising the need for Croatia to receive funds so the country can catch up the wealthier EU Member States.

Dubravka Suica, who was a MEP in the previous mandate of the EP from HDZ, will join for the EPP the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which she believes is important for the enlargement policy that the country has towards its neighbours, highlighting the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. For that purpose, Suica will also join the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Furthermore, she will enter as a substitute in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

Zeljana Zovko is a former member of the diplomatic body of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She also served as a MEP from HDZ in the previous mandate of the EP. As well as Suica, she is a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and of the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. She believes this Committee is relevant for the country especially regarding the issue of peace and security on Croatia's borders in which, she said, "*active influence by third countries exists*" even affecting tourism and life in Croatia. Besides, she is a substitute in the Committee on Culture and Education.

Biljana Borzan is a member of the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP), which integrates into the Socialists & Democrats Group (S&D). In fact, she has been elected as the vice-chair of this group. Furthermore, she will join the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, as well as the Delegation for relations with the countries of South Asia. As a substitute, she will enter the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

Tonino Picula, also a member of SDP, will continue to work in the Committee on Foreign Affairs. In addition, he will sit as a substitute on the Committee on Regional Development, highlighting, as Tomislav Sokol, the importance of Cohesion Funds: "*the fight for the cohesion policy which is not just a fight for more funding but for cohesion itself.*" As Suica and Zovko, he will be part of the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo.

Predrag Fred Matić is an awarded former military who started his political career after the Homeland War. He was elected on SDP list and is also a former minister of defence in Croatia. On behalf of the S&D Group, Matić will enter the Committee on Fisheries and the Committee on Culture and Education, as well as the Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula. Besides, he will be a substitute in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

Valter Flego is a member of the liberal Istrian Democratic Assembly part (IDS) who served as mayor of the town of Buzet for three terms. He was elected as a candidate of a coalition of liberal parties in Croatia, called the Amsterdam Coalition. At EU level, his party is integrated into the Renew Group (former ALDE). He is a member of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and a substitute on the Committee on Transport and Tourism. For him, his first committee is especially relevant taking into account that we are living the fourth industrial revolution: the digital age in which the Artificial Intelligence is the protagonist.

Ruža Tomašić is a Croatian police officer and politician. She has been a member of the European Parliament since 2013, within the lists of the HDZ. However, in 2015 she joined the newly founded Croatian Conservative Party and, since the last elections, she is a member of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group on behalf of that party. She is a member of the Committee on Fisheries and the fourth Croatian member of the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. Besides, she will sit as a substitute on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

Mislav Kolakušić was a candidate for a judge at the Constitutional Court of Croatia, but he was not elected. Nowadays, he is an independent politician who, after had enough votes in the European elections to enter the EU Parliament as a non-attached member, announced that he will run for the presidency in Croatia. He entered the Committee on Budgets and also the one on Legal Affairs. He will be part of the Delegation to the EU-Moldova Parliamentary Association Committee, and a substitute of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

Ivan Vilibor Sinčić is an anti-eviction activist, chairman of the Human Blockade (Živi zid) party, who was a member of the Croatian Parliament since 2015. At EU level, he is a non-attached member and he will enter the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety as well as the Delegation for relations with India. As a substitute, he will enter the Committees on Industry Research and Energy as well as on Agriculture and Rural Development.

3. Conclusion

The Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo is the in which four Croatian MEPs will participate. Then, the Committees on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, each have three Croatian MEPs. We observe a clear interest of Croatia in Foreign Affairs, but especially towards its neighbour country Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which it is increasingly trying to strengthen its influence. Finally, several Committees count with two MEPs. Among them, we can highlight the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection and the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, which shows the interests that Croatia has in transforming its industry and make its market attractive for investment and its products more competitive. In less than six months, once Croatia takes the presidency of the Council of the EU, we will see if its actions are indeed oriented to the interests we have identified in this paper.

Croatia MEPs pledge to be active in order to bring the EP closer to its voters and to represent Croatia's interests successfully in the EP. Croatian citizens still feel quite detached from the work of the EP, probably also due to the fact that Croatia is the newest member state and its experience of participating in EU politics is shorter than other members. However, despite relative success of EU sceptic MEPs in the last elections, the majority of Croatian MEPs are very pro-European and will contribute actively to the European policy-making encouraged by the possibility of defending their ideas and interests at the European level. Those can be identified by looking at the EP Committees they are joining. There are 20 specialised committees in the European Parliament, each conformed of between 25 and 73 members and the equivalent number of substitutes. Those substitutes have an identical role to that of the member, however, they only have the right to vote in cases of a committee member's absence. As we can see, not only their main committees are relevant, but also the ones in which they are substitutes, as they have voice and possible influence.