



# Weekly Briefing

**Croatia political briefing:**  
**The Results of the Latest CRO Demoskop Survey and Party Chances**  
**Ahead of 2024 Parliamentary Elections**  
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# **The Results of the Latest CRO Demoskop Survey and Party Chances Ahead of 2024 Parliamentary Elections**

## **Summary**

*This article will present the results of the July 2023 CRO Demoskop survey which measures the popularity of Croatian political parties and politicians. After several corruption affairs in which the officials of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) were included, the assumption was the rating of the party will decline. However, the decline was only minor, with the party still having a massive advantage over its main opponent Social Democratic Party (SDP). The latter also faced rejection from the We Can! (Možemo!) platform in forming a pre-election coalition. The article will discuss this matter and underline its different perspectives.*

## **Introduction**

The beginning of July was quite tumultuous in Croatia; first, there has been an ongoing conflict between President Zoran Milanović and Prime Minister Andrej Plenković about the next chief of the Military Security and Intelligence Agency (VSOA); and second, an enormous affair surfaced regarding HEP Group (Hrvatska elektroprivreda), a national power company, which has been selling gas below the price and lost approximately 10 million EUR. Since 2024 is the election year with three elections on the radar – European, parliamentary, presidential – every move of political actors, either individuals or parties, is closely monitored with few of them already discussing and deciding upon coalitions. To mention some, the green-left platform We Can! (Možemo!) decided not to enter the pre-election coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SDP), a choice which was, one can argue, expected due to the stumbled reputation of the latter party. The results of the July CRO Demoskop survey show that SDP is indeed stagnating, while platforms such as Možemo! and the Bridge (Most) party are on a moderate rise. Given the latest affairs, the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) declined, but considering its power and infrastructure, it is way too early to make any predictions.

## **The Reputation of Plenković-led HDZ**

To begin with HDZ, their pro-European Union-oriented members and supporters often like to tell that neither of the opposition parties would have sufficient capacities, knowledge, and international recognition to represent the country abroad, for example in the European Council (EC) among other heads of state. Unfortunately for Croatian opposition, especially the main opponent SDP, this statement is arguably in place, taking into account SDP's current leadership, diffused party structures, and the lack of idea of how to navigate the party through the ongoing and long-lasting crisis. Therefore, even those parts of the population that do not support HDZ would agree that the current Prime Minister Plenković (but not his ministerial entourage) is the one who can get the most out of Croatian membership in the EU and who will not embarrass the country among his EU counterparts. Nevertheless, the reputation that Andrej Plenković exhibits in the international arena is countered by the never-ending corruption affairs that happen at the domestic level and that every now and then slightly shake the people's trust in the party. However, if looking at HDZ's rating, it appears that Croatian citizens are willing to tolerate occasional unlawful or unethical behavior of the party members as long as they feel safe and secure, and while the country achieves positive socio-economic results. But the question that concerns the author of this article is how the EU can claim that Croatia is advancing in its battle against corruption and in upholding the rule of law, while corruption is blooming on a monthly basis.

## **The Results of July 2023 CRO Demoskop**

The results of the latest CRO Demoskop show that HDZ remains by far the strongest party with 25,5% support, which is a neglectful decline comparing it with the party support in June (26,2%) and May (25,9%)<sup>1</sup>. Since the July survey was conducted after the HEP Group affair surfaced, for which Prime Minister argues he does not know anything, it can be said that the latest happenings concerning the power giant have moderately influenced the rating of the party. The same happened in the Autumn of 2022 when the affair regarding money embezzlement in the national oil and gas concern INA became public. Then, the ruling HDZ was in decline for three consecutive months; however, it did not take too long before the party

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<sup>1</sup> RTL.Danas.hr. 2023. EKSKLUZIVNO CRO Demoskop: Milanović na vrhu ljestvice najpopularnijih političara. HDZ, unatoč plinskoj aferi,... <https://danas.hr/rtl-danas/ekskluzivno-cro-demoskop-milanovic-na-vrhu-ljestvice-najpopularnijih-politicara-hdz-unatoc-plinskoj-afere-i-dalje-ispred-konkurencije-bbba9dd6-1e61-11ee-9529-d669351c7e97>.

went back to its usual rating. The good news for HDZ is that Croatian citizens seem to have a problem in tracking all the affairs that took place in the last few years; thus, forgetting that a significant number of Plenković's ministers, whether in his first or second cabinet, left the office due to their possible or confirmed link to such illicit activities. Prime Minister Plenković, on the other hand, is quite successful in his rhetoric that he is unaware of anything wrong that has been going on and that includes the wrongdoings of his ministers. The above-mentioned perception that he is the only one who can lead the country adds to his popularity.

### **The Rating of Opposition Parties**

As for the other parties, SDP is at the same rating as it was in June (16,7%), while Možemo! platform and Most party are third and fourth with 9,7% and 8,5%, respectively<sup>2</sup>. Here, it is worth mentioning that Možemo! and Most, as well as the fifth-placed, right-wing Homeland Movement, are on the rise when comparing their results to the last month. As for the most popular politician, President Zoran Milanović is in first place since the March of 2021, while Prime Minister Plenković has advanced significantly and currently holds the second place. The third place is occupied by Tomislav Tomašević, the leader of the green-left platform Možemo! and the mayor of the city of Zagreb. On the other side of the popularity spectrum, Milanović and Plenković are considered the most negative politicians which is somewhat self-evident considering their public feuds. It will be interesting to see how Možemo! will be placed in the upcoming months. Only recently, the leaders of the platform decided not to enter the pre-election coalition with SDP; however, they left the doors open for the coalition in some electoral districts or after the election to form a parliamentary majority. When commenting on such event development, many analysts pointed out that Možemo! does not need SDP, but vice versa, while SDP, as it currently is, would only be a weight rather than a constructive partner. The relations between Možemo! and SDP, thus, remain open for various interpretations.

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<sup>2</sup> RTL.Danas.hr. 2023. EKSKLUZIVNO CRO Demoskop: Milanović na vrhu ljestvice najpopularnijih političara. HDZ, unatoč plinskoj aferi,... <https://danas.hr/rtl-danas/ekskluzivno-cro-demoskop-milanovic-na-vrhu-ljestvice-najpopularnijih-politicara-hdz-unatoc-plinskoj-aferi-i-dalje-ispred-konkurencije-bbba9dd6-1e61-11ee-9529-d669351c7e97>.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, the July results of CRO Demoskop point out that there has not been much of a change in party ratings in Croatia during the last several months, one could say even a year. Without going into calculations about how the parliamentary elections in 2024 will eventually unfold, it is reasonable to assume that SDP will not be in a position to take charge of the country without the help of Možemo! and other minor parties. Nevertheless, the 2016 and 2020 elections have shown that HDZ under Plenković is rather skillful when it comes to negotiating and forming coalitions with parties that are not necessarily considered center-right. Likewise, it is yet to be seen if the Croatian citizens will punish the party for the affairs it was involved in, and whether it will hurt its chances.