

Intelligence Memorandum

DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force

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**President Tudjman Stacks the Elections**

Croatian President Tudjman is proceeding with plans to eviscerate the weak political opposition and institutionalize the dominance of his ruling Croatian Democratic Union party (HDZ) in the 29 October parliamentary elections. Recent military successes in the Krajina and western Bosnia have raised Croatian nationalism to one of its highest levels ever and has emboldened Croatian leaders to aggressively pursue their political and territorial objectives with only minimal regard for the democratic process and human rights.



- *Tudjman's party was likely to win the early elections handily in any case, given the inability of the divided and demoralized opposition to launch a serious challenge. But changes HDZ-engineered changes to the electoral law, unequal access to the largely government-controlled media, and the short 6-week campaign period will further skew the unlevel playing field to the HDZ's advantage.*
- *Tudjman's approach to the electoral process and his lack of serious response to broader human rights problems in the Krajina bodes ill for Croatia's democratic development.*
- *While Zagreb has tempered its behavior on human rights and democratization issues to some degree to deflect Western criticism, US and West European objections have had a limited effect on Croatian behavior and Western influence appears to be declining.*



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Ensuring an Electoral Victory

President Tudjman's ruling HDZ is likely to win an absolute majority in the 29 October election. Although no reliable polling is available at this time, it is clear that the HDZ's decision to move up elections--originally set for fall 1996--to capitalize on its victory in the Krajina has set the stage for an even better showing than in 1992, when the HDZ captured nearly 44 percent of the vote.

Election Modalities

Croatia's 29 October parliamentary elections will contest 127 to 128 seats for the lower--more powerful--house of parliament. (The one seat discrepancy will depend on rules related to seats allocated to minorities).

- Croatia's 3.7 million registered voters may cast a ballot for the party of their choice at the national level--determining 80 of the seats on a proportional basis--and a separate ballot for a candidate from their district--determining 28 seats (the number of geographic districts in Croatia).
- The Croatian Diaspora with citizenship papers--estimated by the government at 456,000--will vote for 12 seats. This may include some 300,000 Bosnian Croats, but not Krajina Serb refugees in Serbia who lack proof of citizenship, according to US diplomats and press reports.
- Croatia's ethnic minorities will choose 7 or 8 seats, based on complicated electoral rules, 3 going to the Serb minority--down from 13 in 1992--and one each to a number of other minorities.

According to a new election law, a single party will need 5 percent of the vote to enter parliament--up from 3 percent. Higher limits are set for coalitions, 8 percent for two-party coalitions and 11 percent for coalitions of three or more parties. Votes cast for parties that do not make threshold will be distributed among the remaining parties.

Although the election probably will be judged to be free and fair, HDZ-engineered changes in the electoral law, lack of transparency in the electoral process, unequal media access, and short 6-week preparation time, has created an unfair playing field that will severely damage the opposition's already poor chances for electoral success.

This memorandum was prepared by Office of European Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force

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- Croatia's election law changes were designed to **disadvantage coalition building, small parties, and regionally-based parties.** Although raising the electoral threshold to 5 percent is in line with thresholds in Western democracies, establishing an 8 to 11 percent threshold for coalitions is highly unusual and almost certainly aimed at discouraging coalition building among the fractured opposition. The shift to a largely proportional electoral system--votes cast for national party lists--also is designed to disadvantage small and regionally-based parties.
- Significant **expansion of the number of potential voters by over 10 percent**--mainly through increasing the number of expatriate voters which are highly likely to go to the HDZ--further increases the total number of votes a party needs to cross the threshold. In 1992, a party needed to win about 100,000 votes to enter parliament, but under the new rules a party must receive at least 185,000 votes.
- The new law has **gerrymandered electoral districts to favor the HDZ**, according to a variety of reporting.
- Several opposition parties have protested **unfair access to the media**, including the refusal of Croatia's state-run TV and radio (HTV) to run their paid campaign advertisements. The electoral commission recently ruled that HTV was acting outside the law in refusing to run the ads of Croatia's leading opposition party, the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLP), but HSLP says that HTV, as well as radio and many Croatian movie houses, still have failed to show its paid advertising.

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Croatia's Weak and Divided Opposition

Opposition parties have been too fragmented and fractured to effectively challenge either Tudjman or the HDZ. In the 1992 parliamentary election, the large number of competing opposition parties and their inability to cooperate was, in large measure, responsible for the HDZ's resounding victory, according to embassy reporting.

- Since the Krajina victory, enough opposition members of parliament have defected to the HDZ to give Tudjman's party an absolute majority in both houses. Defectors have also given the HDZ control over a number of local governments--including Split and Rijeka--that had been controlled by opposition parties, according to press reports. Opposition leaders have cried foul, but the defections are most likely be opportunistic politicians jumping on the popular HDZ bandwagon.

Raising the threshold to 8 to 11 percent for coalitions has discouraged the formation of electoral coalitions for the seats contested on nation-wide party lists, further reducing the opposition's electoral prospects. Nonetheless, some parties are cooperating.

- For the nation-wide party ballots, five parties have formed the only major coalition, led by the historically-significant Croatian Peasant Party (HSS), the Croatian National Party (HNS), and the Istrian Democratic Alliance (IDS). These parties' performance in the last election suggests it will be difficult for them to reach the 11 percent threshold--in 1992 the HSS and HNS polled a combined 10.8 percent and the IDS won its district but, along with the two other minor parties, did not make the threshold.
- For the 28 seats that will be contested in single member districts, seven of the largest opposition parties have agreed to cooperate by running a single opposition candidate rather than competing against each other, according to press reports.

Because the HDZ has nearly sole propriety over nationalist issues, particularly reintegration of Serb-held territory, the opposition's campaign themes focus on the overcentralization of authority, corruption, cronyism, and Tudjman's alleged desire to carve up Bosnia, according to diplomatic and press reports. A number of opposition leaders have told US diplomats that their main goal is simply to survive an almost certain HDZ landslide and that until Croatia comes off its war footing, the opposition will not be able to effectively challenge the HDZ.

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Ominous Atmospherics

Tudjman and other Croatian leaders are increasingly prone to arrogant and authoritarian behavior, in both domestic and foreign policy, according to diplomatic and press reports. Tudjman has invoked both publicly and privately Croatia's mission as the eastern bulwark of Christendom against Islam and Slavic Orthodoxy and its role in "civilizing" the Bosnians. In this atmosphere of national hubris, Tudjman has identified the HDZ party with the Croatian nation state, and has suggested that those who oppose the HDZ oppose the Croatian state, according to press reports.

- Tudjman's own words throw into question his commitment to a multi-party democracy. Calling opposition parties "unpatriotic" at a 14 October rally, he said, "The HDZ wants democracy but not democracy like Croatia has now. The HDZ wants opposition parties, but...not opposition parties that don't want to work for the future and for the good of Croatia."
- Several recent developments add to the symbolism linking today's Croatia to its World War II fascist "ustasha" past. For example, many Croatian military units and barracks have assumed their old ustasha names or been named after ustasha leaders. [redacted]

At the same time, Croatian leaders have refused to deal seriously with reports of atrocities and infringements of human rights, despite repeated objections by Western countries, according to embassy reporting. [redacted]

[redacted] the influence of US and other Western countries on Croatia's behavior is declining.

- Far from acknowledging well-documented human rights problems in the Krajina, Tudjman recently dismissed the issue, publicly saying that such occurrences were inevitable under the circumstances.
- Zagreb has done little or nothing to offer even minimal guarantees of rights to its Serb population and appears intent on creating a largely mono-ethnic state, according to US diplomats. Croatian officials have taken steps to ensure that most Krajina Serbs will never return, making no effort to respond to Krajina Serb refugees seeking to return from Serbia. It also has passed legislation making it nearly impossible for Krajina Serbs to apply for Croatian citizenship and allowing Croatian citizens to occupy and eventually own Serb property, according to US diplomats. [redacted]

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A Guide to Croatia's Political Parties

Party Name	Acronym	Orientation and Platform	1992 Electoral Showing (%)
Croatian Democratic Union (Franjo Tudjman)	HDZ	Rightist. Nationalist. Supports centralized government.	43
Croatian Social Liberal Party (Drazen Budisa)	HSL ⁺	Centrist. Nationalist. Supports decentralization, privatization.	18
Croatian Peasants Party (Drago Sipac)	HSS ^{**}	Center Right. Traditional rural issues. Nationalist.	4
Croatian People's Party (Radimir Cacic)	HNS ^{**}	Centrist. Nationalist. Economic focus, supports privatization.	7
Social Democratic Party (Ivica Racan)	SDP ⁺	Leftist. Former communists.	6
Croatian Party of Right (Ante Djapic)	HSP ⁺	Ultrnationalist. Neo-Fascist.	7
Croatian Independent Democrats (Sijepan Mesic)	HND ⁺	Centrist. Split from HDZ. Supports decentralization, privatization.	new
Serbian National Party (Milan Djukic)	SNS	"Loyal" Serbs. Urban, relatively moderate. Supports Serb rights.	< 3
Istrian Democratic Alliance (Ivan Jakovcic)	IDS ^{**}	Regional party. Favors decentralization, privatization, minority rights	< 3
Social Democratic Action (Mika Tripalo)	ASH	Leftist. Multi-ethnic, supports Serb rights.	new
Croatian Christian Democratic Union (Marko Veselica)	HKDU [*]	Center Right. Christian. Nationalist.	< 3
Dalmatia Action (Mira Ljubic-Lorger)	DA	Regional party. Favors decentralization, privatization.	< 3
Social Democratic Union (Branko Horvat)	SDU	Leftist. Supports a "Balkan confederation," and decentralization.	< 3

* Electoral coalition--will be listed together on one party list in the contest for the 80 seats determined by the nation-wide proportional vote for parties.

+ Cooperating in contests for the 28 district seats by supporting a single candidate.