

Croatian diaspora will have less say in Zagreb's policy

The right-wing government struck a deal on 22 May with the opposition Social Democratic Party on changing the rules for voting in parliamentary and presidential elections by Croatians who live abroad. The Social Democrats were demanding a reduction in the diaspora's influence (since it traditionally votes for right-wing parties) as a condition for their support for the package of constitutional amendments necessary to adjust Croatia's basic law to EU requirements.

The opposition's votes are necessary to pass by a majority of 2/3 of votes the constitutional amendments, needed in connection with the planned accession of Croatia to the EU. The Social Democratic Party (SDP), which is in opposition, made its support for the governmental constitution amendment bill dependent on the change of the voting regulations. The ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), for which progress in the accession negotiations has become a measure of its own success, agreed to the conditions set by the opposition. According to the deal, Croatian citizens who do not have a registered residence address in Croatia will have the right to vote only at diplomatic and consular agencies. Additionally, the parliamentary representation of Croatian expatriates has been reduced to three seats.

The amendments to the electoral regulations primarily will reduce the influence of Croatians living in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the results of elections in Croatia. Previously 124 ballot stations were opened for nearly 200,000 Croatians living in BiH. The Croatian diaspora, depending on the number of voters, could elect from abroad as many as 14 MPs. This improved the results of the right-wing HDZ, which traditionally enjoys very strong support (almost 95%) among the diaspora. Furthermore, this also had an impact on the ruling party's policy and had an indirect influence on such issues as Croatian policy towards BiH. The compromise on voting regulations with the left may weaken support for HDZ from radical right-wing circles, who have accused the leaders of HDZ of betraying their compatriots in BiH. <MarSz>