

Five minutes with Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of Croatia: “A referendum against minority rights is not going to happen – we shall oppose it by all legal means”

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Croatia joined the European Union in July 2013, becoming the 28th member state. Following the referendum on EU membership, however, a number of other referendums have been initiated by grassroots movements under the country's Referendum Law, including an amendment to the Croatian constitution banning same-sex marriage (which passed in December 2013), and a referendum against the official use of Cyrillic script. In an interview with EUROPP's Managing Editor Stuart Brown and LSEE's Tena Prelec, Croatian Prime Minister [Zoran Milanović](#) discusses Croatia's policy on EU reform, how the country has strengthened the rights of same-sex couples, and why his government will ensure the referendum on Cyrillic script will not take place.



In a referendum in December the Croatian electorate [voted in favour](#) of a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. What is your government doing to protect gay rights and tackle homophobia?

We have sent the Act on life partnership, which regulates the rights of same-sex couples in an identical way as traditional marriage, up to the Parliamentary procedure. Although the term for same-sex partnership used in the Act is *not marriage*, the rights are equal in legal and material status and include right of inheritance and other forms of legal arrangements, in the same manner as in all EU Member States.

This Act is not our response to the referendum. We started to prepare it almost two years ago. We consider the initiative that led to the referendum very harmful and intolerant and we were strongly against it from the beginning. The Act on life partnership is a form of social empathy, liberty and, if you wish, common decency. We protected this area of freedom regardless of the referendum, as a solution that doesn't offend or threaten anyone and which raises the level of protection of civil rights.

A referendum on restricting the use of Cyrillic script has also been proposed. Is Croatia now facing a 'tyranny of the majority' with referendums being used to attack minority rights?

A referendum which would limit minority rights in Croatia is no longer possible. These demands that you mention call for an open discrimination of a minority which is not in line with the Croatian Constitution and we will simply not allow it. We don't have to wait for the reaction of the Constitutional Court or maybe even hide behind it in this matter. For twenty years we have been building a legal system with positive discrimination and no signatures will discourage us in that. To be clear, a referendum against minority rights is not going to happen – we shall oppose it by all legal means.

Protests have taken place in Bosnia since the start of February. Would Bosnia be experiencing this level of social disorder if the EU had a clear policy on Bosnian accession?

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs a clear European perspective. We would like to see them engaged in some sort of accession negotiations as soon as possible. Bosnia and Herzegovina is not immune to flaws, but it is in the heart of Europe and we need to give them a chance.

The Eurozone crisis has led some politicians and commentators to suggest that the EU requires closer political integration. Do you support further integration or would you argue that we already have 'enough Europe'?

We are not in favour of changes to the existing legal framework, but though we believe that further national prerogatives should not be surrendered to Brussels, some corrections should be made. As to the deepening of Economic and Monetary Union and the coordination of economic policies necessary for its stability, we strongly support it. According to Article 5 of the Accession Treaty, Croatia will join the Economic and Monetary Union once all the conditions are met.

We also support the efforts directed towards the creation of a Banking Union. Its goal is to ensure a high quality framework for the preservation of financial stability at the EU level and reduce the financial fragmentation which has weakened the monetary transmission mechanism. The creation of a Banking Union also supports the search for adequate solutions which will help improve and fortify Eurozone stability. The Croatian financial system is already very well integrated into the financial market of the euro area, due to the fact that banks coming from the euro area own 90 per cent of Croatian banking assets.

The British government has advocated an [EU reform](#) process, with competences potentially being transferred back to the national level. Would the Croatian government support this?

After only 8 months of membership, we do not have extensive experience in practice that we can call upon when discussing subsidiarity. The discussion on subsidiarity and proportionality is very relevant. We believe that the Lisbon treaty has enough flexibility to ensure better functioning of the EU. The truth is that EU regulation is over extensive in some areas: it sometimes touches on national responsibilities and has no added value. The European Commission is aware of this and we consider the [Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme](#) (REFIT) initiative very useful.

*A video of Zoran Milanović's recent lecture at the LSE is available [here](#). If you are interested in South Eastern Europe, the **SEE at LSE Blog** will be launching on Monday 17 March. You can subscribe [here](#) for email updates and follow LSEE Research on SEE on [Twitter](#).*

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Note: This article gives the views of the interviewee, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the interviewee

Zoran Milanović

Zoran Milanović is the Prime Minister of Croatia and the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (SDP).

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