

Ivana Kekin's 2024 Presidential Campaign: Policies, Challenges, and Rivals

Croatia: Left candidate nears 10% in presidential election

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Ivana Kekin, a leading figure in Croatia's left politics, is running for the presidency in the 2024 elections. With an emphasis on social justice, feminism, anti-corruption, and public resource protection, Kekin aims to appeal to progressive voters while facing scrutiny from both allies and opponents.

Ivana Kekin, born on 24 January 1984, is a Croatian politician and psychiatrist representing the new left current in politics. She has served as the president of the New Left Party since 2020 and is currently a Member of Parliament in the Croatian Parliament (Sabor). In September 2024, she officially announced her candidacy for the presidential election scheduled for 29 December 2024.

Kekin launched her campaign under the slogan "President of a New Generation", emphasising the preservation of constitutional values, social equity, and public welfare. Her platform prioritises increasing pensions, combating violence against women, defending public resources, ensuring community safety, and pursuing a clear and consistent foreign policy for Croatia.

Croatia has a semi-presidential system where the president serves as head of state, primarily focusing on foreign affairs, defense, and representing the country abroad, while the prime minister handles most domestic affairs.

In early December 2024, Kekin ranked fourth among presidential candidates with 9.2% voter support. Ahead of her are the current president, Zoran Milanović (Social Democratic Party, SDP) with 37.4% support, and two right-wing candidates with a total of 31.2%.

Kekin's main support comes from Možemo! (translated as "We Can!"), a Croatian political platform founded in 2019, known for its progressive, environmentalist, and leftist stance, often compared to similar green-left movements in other European countries like Spain's Podemos or Germany's Greens.

"Možemo!" (We Can!) platform. For Možemo, the election is an opportunity to promote progressive alternatives in a conservative and nationalistic political environment, and to build support outside the national capital, Zagreb.

Kekin advocates green-left policies with a focus on social justice, environmental sustainability, and human rights. Her campaign is geared towards younger voters and those disillusioned with traditional political parties. She has also actively gathered grassroots support, amassing 18,000 signatures to qualify her candidacy.

Earlier this year, Kekin and Možemo! MP Sandra Benčić criticised Croatian institutions for failing to protect women from violence and femicide, despite having legal mechanisms in place. They highlighted two cases—the murder of a woman by her former partner and the rape of a patient by a

convicted gynaecologist who continues to work in a public hospital—as evidence that state institutions are not fulfilling their responsibilities. In both cases, the victims sought help from authorities but were not protected.

“Yesterday’s femicide starkly illustrates how predictable and preventable such crimes are, yet this year alone we’ve seen seven women murdered and two attempted murders,” said Kekin. Together with Benčić, she called on the government to take the implementation of the Istanbul Convention seriously.

“This is a fight against patriarchy,” Benčić said, emphasising the need to hold decision-makers accountable for failing to use available protective mechanisms. She dismissed the idea that legislative changes alone would resolve the issue, concluding: “The problem is that this is a country that hates women.”

The NGO Gong recently exposed a disinformation campaign targeting Kekin through anonymous “Ne Možemo” accounts on TikTok and Instagram. The campaign involved defamatory content, including false claims about Kekin’s property ownership, designed to influence the election outcome. The content was amplified using Instagram’s collaboration feature, allowing collaborators’ accounts to share posts automatically, increasing reach and visibility.

Key figures linked to the campaign have ties to Croatia’s ruling HDZ party. Dominik Alpeza, a marketing professional and former HDZ Youth executive member, was identified as a co-author of controversial posts. He has been publicly associated with prominent HDZ figures, including Prime Minister Andrej Plenković. Vinko Kojundžić, known for receiving IT contracts under questionable circumstances, and Neven Brnjas, a former Workers’ Front candidate now collaborating with Kojundžić, were also involved.

Kekin has faced criticism following reports that her husband, musician Mile Kekin (leader of the punk, group Hladno Pivo) had been seen socialising with Nikica Jelavić, a figure linked to organised crime. She denounced these claims as part of a smear campaign aimed at diverting attention from corruption scandals tied to the ruling right-wing HDZ.

Within the leftist sphere, she has been scrutinised for her handling of controversies. Mirela Holy, a former SDP minister, said Kekin has positioned herself as a victim rather than a strong leader. Former President Ivo Josipović also commented, calling Kekin’s reactions to criticisms overly dramatic.

Despite these challenges, Kekin continues to advocate for progressive change, focusing on anti-corruption measures, social welfare, and the protection of public assets. Her campaign positions her as a fresh alternative for voters seeking to disrupt the status quo in Croatian politics. Kekin has framed her presidential campaign as a call for generational change, focusing on issues which resonate with younger and progressive Croatian voters.