

EU-27 WATCH



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On the project

Due to the new treaty provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and the economic crises the enlarged EU of 27 member states is on the search for a new modus operandi while also continuing membership talks with candidate countries. The EU-27 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these and more issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 27 member states and the four candidate countries give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

The reports focus on a **reporting period from December 2009 until May 2010**. This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March and April 2010. Most of the 31 reports were delivered in May 2010. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-27 Watch website: www.EU-27Watch.org.

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Austria**Austrian perspectives on EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy**

Hakan Akbulut*

Given the changes brought about by the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the repercussions of the Greek financial crisis, neither the enlargement issue nor the European Neighbourhood Policy were paid much attention to in the reporting period. Nevertheless, from an Austrian point of view, the candidates most likely to join the EU in the next enlargement round are Croatia and Iceland. Croatia's admission is strongly supported by the Austrian government. Foreign Minister Spindelegger asserted that the waiting-room policy vis-à-vis the Western Balkan countries had to be ended.¹ Even though certain countries could not recognise any benefits in Western Balkan countries joining the EU, the Union should stick to its plans irrespective of the current problems, the Foreign Minister added. He also emphasised the importance of countries like Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia for Austrian investment and trade. Except for the latter, however, the inclusion of the Western Balkan countries was expected to be completed by 2020, Spindelegger argued.² Spindelegger also stated that Austria would assist these countries in the process of EU approximation. Since Croatia reached an agreement with Slovenia to refer the border dispute to an international court and the Commission offered the view that accession talks could be finalised in 2011, the country is anticipated to join the Union by 2012.³ From the point of view of Andreas Mölzer, a Member of European Parliament from the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) – a party which usually has strong reservations about EU enlargement – neither the border problems with Slovenia, nor any lack of cooperation with the tribunal in The Hague should be allowed to further delay Croatia's admission to the Union.⁴ Croatia's inclusion is also strongly supported by the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO). Croatia's quick inclusion in the Union would be good for both Austria and Croatia, the President of the Chamber, Christoph Leitl, claimed.⁵ With regard to Iceland, given positive signals from Brussels, it is expected to join in 2013.⁶ The country's accession process does not attract much attention and is almost taken for granted. Even for the aforementioned FPÖ, Iceland's accession does not constitute any obvious problems. Therefore, in the view of Mölzer, Iceland's accession could proceed quickly as the country is European and meets EU standards.⁷ Except for some problems related to the issue of fisheries, there are no stumbling blocks, Mölzer argued. However, according to a report by the daily *Der Standard*, Iceland is confronted with financial claims by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands as both had to compensate investors who lost their money when the banking system in Iceland crashed. Therefore, Iceland's response to these claims is expected to affect its membership prospects.

A candidate country that is not going to join the Union during the next enlargement round is obviously Turkey. Almost all political parties seem to have reservations against Turkish membership or categorically oppose it. Only the Greens seem to support Turkish accession to the Union – yet, insofar as Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, and only after the social, ecological and democratic integration of existing members has proceeded to higher levels.⁸ Moreover, from the Greens' point of view, the countries of Southeast Europe have to be given priority in the enlargement process. The coalition government, comprising the Social Democratic Party and the People's Party, is in favour of negotiations with an open end and emphasises the prospect of a referendum on the issue should the negotiations be finalised.⁹ However, their position is to some extent ambiguous, oscillating between a conditional "Yes" and a veiled "No".¹⁰ As for the Freedom Party and the Alliance for the Future of Austria, both parties categorically oppose Turkish membership. Andreas Mölzer from the Freedom Party reiterated in April 2010 that negotiations with Turkey should be stopped immediately saying that Turkish membership would pose a threat to the Christian-occidental culture of Europe.¹¹ It is also worth mentioning that Austrians are generally known for their enlargement scepticism. Eurobarometer polls conducted in the period from 27 October 2009 to 13 November 2009 showed, for example, that only 28 percent of the public supported further enlargement while 65 percent opposed the idea.¹²

In the reporting period, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) barely attracted any media coverage at all. Except for brief references to the difficulties Spain had in organising the next summit due to the refusal of Arab countries to participate in a conference where Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman would also be present and the announcement that the summit had finally been postponed, there were no debates or elaborations on substance of the UfM.¹³ As for the Eastern Partnership, even though there were no explicit references to the strategy as such, it is known

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that the Danube and Black Sea regions constitute core areas of interest to Foreign Minister Spindelegger. During a speech held in January 2010, Spindelegger reiterated the importance of both regions for Austria and Europe and maintained that due to an Austrian-Romanian co-initiative, the EU Commission was working on an EU Strategy for the Danube Region, which would be presented at the end of 2010.¹⁴ Spindelegger also pointed to the importance of the Black Sea region, especially for investment and energy security.

¹ ORF.at: EU muss "auf Schiene bleiben", 14 May 2010, available at: http://orf.at/100512-51162/?href=http%3A%2F%2Forf.at%2F100512-51162%2F51163txt_story.html (last access: 19 May 2010).

² Der Standard, 21 January 2010.

³ Der Standard, 14 October 2009; Der Standard, 8 November 2009.

⁴ Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub: Mölzer: EU-Beitrittsverhandlungen mit Kroatien so rasch wie möglich abschließen!, 5 May 2010, available at: http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20100505_OTS0047 (last access: 19 May 2010).

⁵ WKO: EU Panorama, 16 October 2009, available at: http://portal.wko.at/wk/dok_detail_file.wk?AngID=1&DocID=1249660&ConID=444130&StID=530063&titel=EU-Panorama_vom_22..J%C3%A4nner_2010 (last access: 22 May 2010).

⁶ Der Standard, 24 February 2010.

⁷ Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub: Mölzer: EU-Beitrittskandidaten dürfen nicht alle in einen Topf geworfen werden!, 23 November 2009, available at: http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20091123_OTS0147/moelzer-eu-beitrittskandidaten-duerfen-nicht-alle-in-einen-topf-geworfen-werden (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁸ Die Grünen: Türkei: EU-Beitrittsverhandlungen, available at: http://www.gruene.at/europaeische_union/tuerkei/ (last access: 23 May 2010).

⁹ Bundeskanzleramt: Regierungsprogramm für die XXIV Gesetzgebungsperiode, 2 December 2008, available at: <http://www.bundeskanzleramt.at/DocView.axd?CobId=32966> (last access: 18 May 2010).

¹⁰ As the daily Der Standard reported, during the election campaign to the European Parliament, Ernst Strasser from the People's Party, for example, called for aborting the negotiations. See Der Standard, 22 May 2009.

¹¹ Freiheitlicher Parlamentsklub: Mölzer: Türkeibeitritt wäre Bedrohung für christlich-abendländische Kultur Europas, 7 April 2010, available at: http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20100407_OTS0051/moelzer-tuerkeibeitritt-waere-bedrohung-fuer-christlich-abendaendische-kultur-europas (last access: 22 May 2010).

¹² Europäische Kommission: Eurobarometer 72. Herbst 2009, Nationaler Bericht Österreich, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_at_at_nat.pdf (last access: 28 May 2010).

¹³ Die Presse, 11 May 2010; Die Presse, 21 May 2010.

¹⁴ Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten (BmeiA): Rede von Bundesminister Dr. Michael Spindelegger zu den Schwerpunkten der österreichischen EU-Politik, 21 January 2010, available at: <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/aussenministerium/aktuelles/reden-und-interviews/2010/rede-von-bundesminister-dr-michael-spindelegger-zu-den-schwerpunkten-der-oesterreichischen-eu-politik.html> (last access: 15 May 2010).

Questionnaire for EU-27 Watch, No. 9

Reporting period December 2009 until May 2010 – Deadline for country reports 21 May

All questions refer to the position/assessment of your country's government, opposition, political parties, civil society organisations, pressure groups, press/media, and public opinion. Please name sources wherever possible!

1. Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty

On the 1 December 2009 the EU-reform ended with the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty. However, the new treaty provisions still have to be implemented. Some procedures and conditions have to be determined. In other cases, procedures, power relations, and decision-making mechanisms will change due to the new provisions.

- How is the work of the new President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, assessed in your country? Which changes to the role of the rotating council presidency are expected?
- How is the work of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, assessed in your country? Please take into particular consideration both her role within the European Commission and her relationship to the Council of the European Union.
- On 25 March 2010 a "Proposal for a Council Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service" was presented. How is this concept perceived in your country? Which alternatives are discussed?
- On 31 March 2010 the European Commission presented a proposal defining the rules and procedures for the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). What are the expectations for the ECI in your country? What are the various positions concerning the rules and procedures?

2. Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Commission has given its opinion on Iceland's application for EU-membership and a decision from the Council is expected before the end of June. Croatia seems to have settled its border dispute with Slovenia. Against this background:

- Which countries does your country expect to become members of the European Union in the next enlargement round? What are the opinions in your country on the membership of these countries?
- How are the membership perspectives of those countries discussed, which are not expected to become a member in the next enlargement round?

The Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean were the last major projects dealing with the European neighbourhood:

- How are these projects assessed in your country?

3. European economic policy and the financial and economic crisis

The European Council agreed on 25/26 March on the key elements of the Europe 2020 strategy, the successor of the Lisbon strategy. While not being on the formal agenda the economic and financial situation in Greece was discussed. The European Council agreed on a finance package combining bilateral loans from the eurozone and financing through the International Monetary Fund.

- How is the finance package for Greece assessed in your country? Are there any opinions on the process, how the agreement on the package was reached?
- Which lessons should be drawn from the Greek case for a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact?
- How is the idea of "a strong coordination of economic policies in Europe" perceived in your country? What concepts of an European economic governance are discussed in your country and which role do they assign to the Euro group?
- How is the Europe 2020 strategy discussed in your country? What are the priorities for the Europe 2020 strategy from your country's perspective?

4. Climate and energy policy

The climate conference in Copenhagen took note of the Copenhagen Accord but did not reach a binding agreement. The next conference of the parties (COP 16 & CMP 6) will take place at the end of November 2010.

- How is the Copenhagen conference assessed in your country? Please take into consideration the negotiation strategy of European Union and the results of the conference.
- Does the European Union need to change its own energy and climate policy in order to give a new impulse to the international negotiations?
- Is a global agreement within the UNFCCC the best strategy to fight climate change? If not, which alternative strategy should the European Union follow?
- What is your country's position on financing mitigation and adaptation efforts in developing countries?

5. Current issues and discourses in your country

Which other topics and discourses are highly salient in your country but not covered by this questionnaire?