

EU-27 WATCH



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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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Bulgaria**Low salience of Lisbon Treaty implementation in Bulgaria**

Katia Hristova*

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty had limited coverage in Bulgaria and provoked no major debate in Bulgarian society. This trend is inherited from the pre-accession period when an almost complete lack of public attention to the EU constitutional debate and the following ratification crisis prevailed. The few interested media publications have commented on the entry in force of the Lisbon Treaty mainly in reference to Bulgaria's deficiencies as a new member state in fulfilling its obligations and the remedies that the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union could bring to that situation with new provisions in the areas of freedom, security and justice. Special attention is paid to the further federalisation of the Union through the reinforcement of the EU criminal justice system that will bring about a "more effective prosecution of criminals and will guarantee individuals' rights more effectively in free movement Europe".¹

However, the changing role of the European Parliament within the EU institutional architecture was intensively discussed following the unsuccessful hearing of the then Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Rumiana Jeleva as commissioner designate.

The work of the new President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, is reflected in media articles mainly in relation to the settlement of the Greek economic crisis. Nonetheless, assessment of his performance so far is hard to be found either in official statements of political actors, or in public debate. Public opinion in Bulgaria is still not concerned with the work of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton.

Bulgaria will consider getting one head of mission position from 32 announced vacancies for heads of EU diplomatic missions in third countries a success. The procedure is part of a regular rotation of diplomatic representatives, which so far headed the delegations of the European Commission. With the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the missions become EU representations and are under the control of the European External Action Service (EEAS). According to the spokesperson of the Bulgarian Foreign Affairs Ministry Vessela Tcherneva, Bulgaria is hoping to get one position for an ambassador in a country from the Black Sea region or the Balkans, because it is there where "we have interests and expertise".²

Bulgaria was part of the group of new EU member states that insisted, while the diplomatic service was being established, that the principle of geographic balance be taken into account in order to ensure that younger member states would not be less represented – first, because the representatives of old member states dominate in the current bodies of the Union (where 2/3 of the EEAS personnel would come from) and, second, because the candidates from the "old" EU nations have greater experience and longer careers in European institutions.

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is still an unfamiliar concept in Bulgaria. Although the National Assembly, following the spirit of the Lisbon Treaty, adopted a new Law on Direct Civic Participation in the State and Local Government³ in June 2009 where the citizens' initiative is for the first time mentioned in Bulgarian legislation, the new instrument has never attracted public attention. A modest attempt by civil society organisations to comment on the opportunities that the ECI will open for civic interests to be forwarded to the EU political process was made in the framework of a conference "Europe 2020 – The Civic Vision" held in Sofia on 29 and 30 January 2010. The overall assessment agreed by participants is that the ECI is a very positive development and expectations of it are high, perhaps too high. Therefore it will need to prove itself with the necessary precaution to focus on proper issues so that the enthusiasm is not wasted. Another key aspect will be the Commission's response to this initiative.⁴

¹ Svetoslav Terziev: We are New Bulgarians, Are we? The Lisbon Treaty enhances the hope for Bulgaria to become a "normal" country, 2 December 2009, Segabg daily, available at: <http://www.segabg.com/online/new/articlnew.asp?issueid=4546§ionId=5&id=0000901> (last access: 30 July 2010).

* Bulgarian European Community Studies Association.

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- ² Available at: <http://www.euinside.eu/en/news/sofia-hopes-for-one-eu-mission-chief> (last access: 30 July 2010).
- ³ State Gazette 44, 12 June 2009, available at: <http://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/index.faces> (last access: 30 July 2010).
- ⁴ Available at: <http://parliament.europe.bg/en/?id=26996&category=371> (last access: 30 July 2010).

Bulgaria**Turkish membership perspective currently discussed**

Katia Hristova*

Bulgaria has always declared support for the accession efforts of present day candidate countries. Although Iceland's membership does not constitute an issue in public debate, attention is focused on the steps undertaken by Turkey and Croatia to speed up their negotiations. Croatia is expected to lead the way to the next enlargement round. Government officials have declared Bulgaria's support for Croatia's membership several times. Moreover, public opinion leaders share the view that Croatia's accession will open up prospects for future concrete steps in the integration of the other Western Balkan countries.¹

In parallel with this, the Foreign Ministry is starting a review of Bulgaria's policy towards the Western Balkans, which is one of the priority areas in Bulgarian foreign policy. Bulgaria is also ambitious to take part in the debate about a new approach towards the region, as well as to help the "the internal motors" of reform start in the countries there.

The question of Turkey's membership in the EU is a delicate and problematic issue for the Bulgarian general public because of historical, geographic, demographic and economic reasons. One political party – Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO) – is leading a "Stop Turkey's Road to the EU" campaign. Party bosses claim they have collected more than 320,000 signatures in support of their initiative.² IMRO was the first organisation in Bulgaria to take the opportunity envisaged in the Law on Direct Civic Participation in the state and local government, which empowers citizens to initiate consultations, and fought against Turkey's membership in the EU. The party failed to gather the 500,000 signatures binding the national assembly to call a referendum. Their petition involved 322,526 people and, since the threshold of 200,000 is overcome, the parliament now has three months to decide upon the initiative.

Experts assess the IMRO initiative as an attempt by IMRO to get out of public silence as it failed to get seats in the parliament after the last general elections held in July 2009. In such a context, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikolay Mladenov has made a few prudent statements that Turkey's road to joining the EU is "too long" and, as a new member state, Bulgaria is not going to lobby for any of the candidate countries.³

The general public in Bulgaria is aware that the issue of Turkey's accession is not in the current political agenda of the EU. The widespread view points out the fact that putting the cart before the horse and destroying neighbourhood relations with Turkey is a short-sighted policy in this situation.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the Union for the Mediterranean are still assessed by experts as two interlinked projects whose development is very much dependant on the support big EU member states provide for one at the expense of the other.⁴ The EaP is considered to be a tool for stabilisation of the EU neighbourhood in the East. An important deficiency of the tool is that it does not provide EU membership perspectives for the east European partners. Nevertheless, Bulgaria should focus on the economic and infrastructure aspects of the EaP as far as EU support for the pipeline and energy projects will provide for the further stabilisation of the region.

¹ Available at: http://www.expert-bdd.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=747&Itemid=38 (last access: 30 July 2010).

² Available at: http://dariknews.bg/view_article.php?article_id=561040 (last access: 30 July 2010).

³ Available at: <http://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/razshiriavane> (last access: 30 July 2010).

⁴ Nikolov, Simeon: One Year Eastern Partnership: A Chance or a Risk?, in: Expert electronic journal, Bulgarian Diplomatic Association, available at: http://www.expert-bdd.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=889&Itemid=38 (last access: 30 July 2010).

Bulgaria**Weakness of the common currency is a monetary phenomenon**

Katia Hristova*

Bulgarian experts and economists believe that the single currency was the victim of speculative attacks and its weakness during the first half of the year should be assessed as a momentary phenomenon. According to Lachezar Bogdanov from "Industry Watch",¹ the instability of the Euro is a negative trend that should be tackled in time by the European Central Bank and the governments of the Eurozone. The rescue package for Greece provoked an intense debate among experts and financial observers in Bulgaria. Some independent experts have assessed the package as pouring money into a bankrupt economy that would further weaken the Euro, others stressed the fact that the plan has the potential of providing a long-term remedy in case Greece will be ready to apply the envisaged drastic financial measures.² For the experts of Industry Watch, the Greek crisis uncovered public finance problems in Europe and has the potential to deteriorate Bulgaria's fiscal position rapidly.

The idea of "a strong coordination of economic policies in Europe" is mainly discussed by Bulgarian policy makers in the framework of their meetings with officials from other member states or EU institutions. During his visit to the European Parliament, former Prime Minister and leader of the parliamentary group of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) Sergey Stanishev expressed the view that the Europe 2020 Strategy should be much more ambitious. According to the leader of the Bulgarian Socialists, the EU should take much more courageous steps, such as raising the requirements for convergence of the national economies and economic policies of member states. Other measures should include the introduction of fees for financial transactions, allowing all citizens access to new information and communication technologies and the creation of "green jobs".³

Bulgaria still lacks a serious debate on the main priorities addressed in the Europe 2020 Strategy. In an attempt to overcome these deficiencies, a team of Bulgarian NGOs have tried to urge public discussions around the forum "Europe 2020 – The Civic Vision" held in Sofia on 29 and 30 January 2010. Recommendations from the civil society sector pointed out a list of needed further steps in strengthening the present social cohesion, the reform of the European employment policy, and the refocus of the solidarity policies towards concentrated investments in fields with growth potential.⁴

According to the Foreign Affairs Minister Nikolay Mladenov, Bulgaria has two priority areas in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy – education and innovation.⁵ Bulgarian officials fear the country will not be ready to fulfil the fifth objective of the Europe 2020 Strategy on poverty reduction. Although the country supports the idea that economic growth and employment are important objectives in themselves, the target set in the Strategy for reducing the number of people living below the poverty line by 25 percent in 2020 is not a realistic one for Bulgaria.⁶

¹ Available at: www.iwatchbulgaria.com (last access: 30 July 2010).

² Available at: <http://www.segabg.com/online/new/articlenew.asp?issueid=5795§ionId=4&id=0000701> (last access: 30 July 2010).

³ Available at: www.focus-news.net (last access: 30 July 2010).

⁴ Available at: <http://parliament.europe.bg/en/?id=26996&category=371> (last access: 30 July 2010).

⁵ Available at: http://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/novini_ot_es/2010/06/17/918748_nikolai_mladenov_obrazovanieto_i_inovaciite_sa/?ref=rss (last access: 30 July 2010).

⁶ Available at: <http://www.mfa.government.bg/bg/news/view/29867> (last access: 30 July 2010).

Bulgaria

Hardly anyone interested in climate policy

Katia Hristova*

Bulgaria entered the Copenhagen conference negotiations with the firm position of Prime Minister Boyko Borisov that the country is not ready to back up the EU's efforts to bring about positive results with financial allocations.¹ In a post-communist society where strong environmental concerns are still to take hold, the "deal" that Bulgaria will provide only 40 thousand Euros did not provoke intense public debate as to the lack of a pro-active state policy on the issue of climate change. Only a few independent journalists have blamed the government for this "factual denial of participation".²

Bulgarian civil society, experts, policy and public opinion makers have failed so far to articulate any kind of ideas on the strategy the EU should follow to fight climate change. No environmental NGO has initiated any substantial discussion on the efforts EU member states should make in order to give a new impulse to the international negotiations.

¹ Available at:

http://www.dnevnik.bg/evropa/novini_ot_es/2009/12/10/828979_borisov_izrazi_pesimizum_za_klimatichnite_pregovori_v/ (last access: 30 July 2010).

² Boyadjiev, Yassen: Baj Ganyo and the climate change.

Bulgaria**European Energy Community discussed**

Katia Hristova*

The policy proposal "Towards a European Energy Community"¹ by Jacques Delors provoked an intense debate in Bulgaria, where the issue of a future EU energy policy and the role Bulgaria should play in it is a salient one. Being situated at one of the important crossroads between East and West, Bulgaria is frequently seen as a country that could help improve the EU's overall energy security. However, the country has not yet done much to live up to this expectation. Since the beginning of the transition period, the national strategy for energy sector development has been one of the most disputed documents that never saw the light of day.

Jacques Delors' policy paper idea, that the most radical, but also the most promising option, for the EU would be to create a European Energy Community with its own rules and methods specific to the energy field, triggered a lively debate. The proposal for the implementation of a differentiated approach provided arguments from the energy experts' community criticising Bulgarian policymakers for their lack of a clear position on the issue. The prevailing opinion in this regard is that Bulgaria, being a new EU member state, will have to prove itself as a positive factor for European energy security and take part in the establishment of the European Energy Community.²

¹ Available at: http://www.notre-europe.eu/uploads/tx_publication/Etud76-Energy-en.pdf (last access: 30 July 2010).

² Available at: Georgiev, Atanas: The New Energy Euro-zone, available at: <http://www.publics.bg/bg/publications/35/> (last access: 30 July 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?