

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**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).

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?