

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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Czech Republic**The Czech Republic – neglecting implementation because of treaty ratification hangover?**

Mats Braun*

The Czech Republic was the last country to ratify the Lisbon Treaty. The late and dramatic Czech ratification of the treaty has been followed by a certain “treaty ratification hangover” which has manifested itself through little media interest in the implementation process of the treaty. At the same time, the political situation in the country, with a low profile caretaker cabinet in office, has had the consequence that the country lacks a clear vision of its priorities during the implementation phase. However, to the extent that there is a coherent Czech view on the implementation, this is a perspective that tones down the potential political dimension of the new offices and institutions introduced by the treaty, and prefers to view them as technicalities. From the Czech perspective, the President of the European Council should be a moderator, while the European External Action Service (EEAS) is preferably discussed as an expert team and not as a real diplomatic corpus, a European ministry of foreign affairs or something along those lines.

From the Czech official perspective it was essential that the first President of the European Council should be a person viewed rather as a moderator than as a strong political leader. Herman Van Rompuy was, from this perspective, a good choice, even if part of the political elite probably considered him too much of a Euro-federalist. Especially the Civic Democrats (ODS), who were in government until spring 2009, have a very intergovernmentalist vision of the EU. However, the first reactions to the appointment of Van Rompuy were rather positive, even if politicians, journalists and experts all agreed on one point – they knew very little about this man.¹ Even after his initial months in office, some commentators remained sceptical about the possibilities of this unknown Belgian getting something done in his new position. However, his involvement in solving the Greek economic crisis was in general viewed rather positively; at least, he was not considered to be the one to blame for the allegedly slow EU reaction. Politicians in general have remained positive or at least wanted to give Van Rompuy more time before commenting on his work.

It should also be noted that the Czech media has started referring to the President of the European Council as the “Euro-president”. This non-precise vocabulary is also common among well-established and respected newspapers and weeklies. It is likely that this increases the prestige of the office in the eyes of ordinary Czech citizens, but it is questionable what effect it has on their understanding of the EU and the general understanding of the second “EU President”, i.e., the President of the European Commission.

There was a large debate on the consequences of the Lisbon Treaty for the rotating presidency in the Czech Republic prior to the ratification of the treaty. In particular, this debate was intense before the first Irish referendum on the treaty, when it still looked likely that the treaty could come into force prior to or during the Czech Presidency of the first half of 2009. The debate at this time was rather self-centred and focused on the question of whether the Czech Presidency would be a “full-worthy” presidency or not. Especially the Civic Democrats remain critical of the possibilities of the President of the European Council and of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy representing the EU abroad. From the ODS’ perspective, there is the risk that they will primarily represent the big states of the EU, and therefore, where it is possible, they prefer the rotating presidency to still play a role.²

When Catherine Ashton was appointed High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, it was commented in positive terms by Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer, because of the good collaboration with then European Commissioner for Trade Ashton during the Czech Presidency.³ Some were of the view that it was a natural choice that the position was given to a representative of a big state. Ashton has been criticised for her failure to inform the member states prior to the appointment of the EU ambassador to the USA. One of the Czechs’ general demands is the need for greater transparency. This is considered important especially in relation to the EEAS. The Czech Republic has tried to harmonise its position on the EEAS with those of the other three countries in the Visegrad group, i.e., Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. One of the goals of the group was to make sure that small and new member states would also be represented in the EEAS, and, in order to

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obtain this, a third of the EEAS staff should be recruited from the member states.⁴ The prime motivation for the Visegrad countries is the fact that they are underrepresented in the EU's senior management in general, and regarding external relations in particular. As an example, it can be mentioned that, of 130 European Commission delegations, only one was led by a senior diplomat from the new member states at the end of 2009.⁵ Another Czech demand was that the EEAS should not lead to a cost increase.⁶

On the issue of the European Citizens' Initiative, the Czech government has demanded a higher minimum number of citizens than originally proposed. The government wants to see the same minimal percentage level applied to all countries and prefers a one percent threshold. The reason is that the government believes that a lower threshold would open the way for extremist groups to misuse the initiative. The Czech government also supports the idea of an ex ante possibility for citizens to check whether their proposal is admissible in case they manage to gather the required number of signatures before they start this process.⁷

¹ See, e.g., Černý, Adam: "Herman Kdo" z Bruselu ["Herman who" from Brussels], 23 November 2009, available at: <http://hn.ihned.cz/c1-39162900-adam-cerny-herman-kdo-z-bruselu> (last access: 24 June 2010).

² See, e.g., Vondra, Alexandr: Češi nebudou žábou na prameni [The Czechs will not be a fly in the ointment], 26 May 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.cz/cr-v-evropske-unii/interview/alexandr-vondra-cesi-nebudou-zabou-na-prameni-007532> (last access: 24 June 2010).

³ CeskeNoviny.cz: CzechRep considers Van Rompuy, Ashton good choice – Fischer, 19 November 2009, available at: http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/tema/zpravy/czechrep-considers-van-rompuy-ashton-good-choice-fischer/408443&id_seznam=20781 (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁴ Chmiel, Juraj: EU by měla být více "user friendly" [EU should be more user friendly], 12 April 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.cz/cr-v-evropske-unii/analyza/juraj-chmiel-eu-by-mela-byt-vice-user-friendly-007353> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁵ Khol, Radek: Klasická bilaterální diplomacie se vznikem vnější služby EU nezanikne [Classical bilateral diplomacy does not disappear with the External Action Service], 15 April 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.cz/evropske-institute/interview/radek-khol-klasicka-bilateralni-diplomacie-se-vznikem-diplomaticke-sluzby-eu-nezanikne-007372> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁶ Novinky.cz: O posty ve vznikající diplomatické službě EU usilují i Češi [Even Czechs aim at positions in the emerging EU diplomatic service], 15 April 2010, available at: <http://www.novinky.cz/kariera/197595-o-posty-ve-vznikajici-diplomaticke-sluzbe-eu-usiluji-i-cesi.html> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁷ Chmiel, Juraj: EU by měla být více "user friendly" [EU should be more user friendly], 12 April 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.cz/cr-v-evropske-unii/analyza/juraj-chmiel-eu-by-mela-byt-vice-user-friendly-007353> (last access: 24 June 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?