

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 keeps an eye on Eastern Europe**

Vít Beneš*

Further EU enlargement has been a long-term priority of the Czech Republic and a steady ingredient of Czech European policy.¹ In the past years, Czech diplomacy invested a good deal of political capital in the enlargement cause, trying to repulse the critique of the “enlargement-sceptical” governments. The Czech political elites tacitly agree on the merits of the EU enlargement in general. On the other hand, disputes arise when individual countries are being discussed. In fact, consensus is limited to the support of the Balkan countries’ membership.² The negotiations with Croatia are unanimously supported by all political players. Even though the support for EU enlargement was not a topic of strong proclamations by the Czech political representation, Czech diplomacy continuously expressed its support.³ Croatia’s case is also unproblematic due to the popularity of the country as a tourist destination among the Czech population.

Other Balkan countries are subsumed under a general priority in the EU enlargement to the Balkans. Individual actors rarely express preferences regarding individual countries. The key political actors and experts do not seem to prioritise one Balkan country over another. Everybody acknowledges that Croatia will enter the EU separately, but other Balkan countries are expected to join the EU within a short time span or as a group. All Balkan countries are expected to join the EU in a mid-term perspective. At this time, the focus is on keeping the enlargement agenda alive so that the individual countries can enter the EU depending on their merits.

On the other hand, Turkey is clearly a particular case. On the political level, Turkey’s accession is being discussed separately and more intensely, and the issue is controversial. The Czech Republic officially supports the accession of Turkey into the EU once all its entry conditions are met. The accession of Turkey into the EU is vocally supported by the Czech President.⁴ Most parties either openly support the prospect of full membership or at least favour the continuation of negotiations.⁵ The arguments voiced in the current debate often start with the observation that the suspension of talks by the EU would harm the reputation of the EU. Turkey is seen by supporters of its EU accession as an important partner in strengthening the EU’s energy security or as an important asset for the EU as a global political actor. On the other hand, the opponents of Turkish membership (the Christian Democrats – KDU-ČSL – and other, smaller parties including Public Affairs – VV)⁶ point to the cultural and civilisational differences (“non-Europeaness”) of Turkey. Even though these parties are marginal on the political scene, their positions echo the attitudes of the silent majority of Czech citizens which oppose Turkey’s EU membership. According to a 2007 poll, 57 percent were against Turkey’s membership and only 27 percent were in favour of it.⁷ Even though there are no newer opinion polls, we assume that this negative attitude persists.

In the examined period, the prospect of Iceland’s accession into the EU has been discussed by the media and think tanks in the wake of Iceland’s bid to join the EU. Since Iceland is a developed West European country, and there are no negative feelings towards it, the prospect of its membership is almost unequivocally accepted by all relevant actors. Czech political parties are ready to come up with innovative ideas when it comes to EU enlargement. For example, the right-wing parties seem to support the idea that, in the long-term period, Israel also should belong in the EU. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, communists dream about an EU “from Vancouver to Vancouver”.⁸

Most of the Czech political parties officially support further EU enlargement in their programme documents.⁹ Nevertheless, the issue of EU enlargement was not present in the election campaign. The same can be said about public attitudes: the Czech population supports further EU enlargement – according to the last Eurobarometer (Autumn 2009), 63 percent of Czech citizens support further EU enlargement while 31 percent oppose the policy, the Eurobarometer even recorded an increase in support.¹⁰ On the other hand, support for further EU enlargement has not been manifested in public discussions.

In late 2009, the Czech Štefan Füle became Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy.¹¹ This appointment has been welcomed by all political actors as a natural

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expression of the Czech Republic's long-term interests in EU enlargement. Even though the daily activity of the European Commission is somehow remote to the Czech media, they continue reporting the steps taken by Commissioner Füle.¹² Nevertheless, the issue of EU enlargement has been sidelined by the Greek crisis and the subsequent discussion about the fate of the Eurozone. EU enlargement as such or the prospects of individual candidate countries have not been discussed in the public debate and thus we have recorded no shifts in the positions of relevant actors.

With regard to the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), we may argue that it consumed some of the energy and attention previously devoted to enlargement. Czech diplomats participated in several activities (seminars, forums) devoted to the Eastern Partnership.¹³ The diplomacy of Mirek Topolánek's government focused its attention on the east, as it concentrated on fomenting a strong European position towards Russia on energy and other issues and towards the eastern neighbourhood in general. Fischer's government (in power since mid-2009) kept the focus on the Eastern Partnership, even though the discourse has somehow changed.

Originally, the Eastern Partnership was perceived as a counterbalance to France's Union for the Mediterranean,¹⁴ which would ensure the EU's attention and presence in the region of Eastern Europe in times of more assertive Russian foreign policy. In the first half of 2010, the Czech discourse changed a bit; for example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Kohout and his German counterpart, Guido Westerwelle, stressed in a joint article that the Eastern Partnership is not a private club and that third countries like Russia and Turkey are most welcome to participate in it.¹⁵

Even though Czech political parties differ in their assessments of Russia and its foreign policy, the Eastern Partnership is unequivocally assessed positively.¹⁶ There is a consensus among Czech politicians, the media and analysts that the initiative represents one of the successes of last year's Czech EU Presidency. On the other hand, the Eastern Partnership remains an "expert-driven" policy. As far as we can judge from the Czech media, the general public remains disinterested and uninformed in regard to it. In contrast to Poland, Czech society does not feel any deep emotional attachment to the region. As a consequence, the political parties rarely mention the Eastern Partnership as such in their electoral programmes, let alone in their election campaigns. The Eastern Partnership remains a domain of some party experts (the initiative fits into broader concerns over containing Russia and spreading democracy), professional diplomats and academics. While EU enlargement represents a tangible and understandable policy for the ordinary citizen, public awareness of the Eastern Partnership seems to be relatively low. The Union for the Mediterranean is not discussed in the media at all and it receives only limited (if any) attention from political parties, experts and academics.

¹ See, e.g., Beneš, Vít: A cherished child left out in the cold: the Czech Republic and her enlargement priority, in: Drulák, P./Šabič, Z. (eds.): The Czech and Slovenian EU presidencies in a comparative perspective, Dordrecht: Republic of Letters, 2010 in print.

² Mediafax.cz: Balkán do EU patří, shodují se politické strany [Political parties agree: the Balkans belong in the EU], 29 April 2010, available at: <http://www.mediafax.cz/politika/3032459-Balkan-do-EU-patri-shoduji-se-politicke-strany> (last access: 24 June 2010).

³ Government of the Czech Republic: J. Chmiel se setkal s chorvatským vyjednavacem pro vstup do EU [J. Chmiel met with the Croatian negotiator], 29 March 2010, available at: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/evropske-zalezitosti/tiskove-zpravy/j--chmiel-se-setkal-s-chorvatskym-vyjednavacem-pro-vstup-do-eu-70002/> (last access: 24 June 2010); Czech Social Democratic Party: ČSSD usiluje o co nejrychlejší vstup Chorvatska do EU [Social Democrats support a speedy entrance of Croatia into the EU], 17 May 2010, available at: <http://www.socdem.cz/inews/video/cssd-usiluje-o-co-nejrychlejsi-vstup-chorvatska-do-eu> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁴ Czech Television: Klaus a řecký prezident se shodli na rozšiřování EU i o Turecko [Klaus and the Greek president agreed on the EU enlargement including Turkey], 2 December 2009, available at: <http://www.ct24.cz/domaci/74238-klaus-a-recky-prezident-se-shodli-na-rozsirovani-eu-i-o-turecko/> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁵ Eurozprávy.cz: Srovnání programů politických stran v neekonomických tématech [A comparison of the party programmes in non-economic areas], 6 May 2010, available at: <http://domaci.eurozpravy.cz/politika/8490-srovnani-programu-politickyh-stran-v-neeekonomickyh-tematech/> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁶ Mediafax.cz: Lidovci, Zemanovci a Věci veřejné nechťejí Turecko v Evropské unii [The Christian Democrats, Zeman's Party and Public Affairs do not want Turkey in the European Union], 25 April 2010, available at: <http://www.mediafax.cz/politika/3030399-Lidovci-Zemanovci-a-Veci-verejne-nehceji-Turecko-v-Evropske-unii> (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁷ Public Opinion Research Centre: Postoje českých občanů k Evropské unii a jejímu rozšiřování [The attitudes of the Czech citizens towards the EU and its enlargement], 21 February 2007, available at: http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100656s_pm70221.pdf (last access: 24 June 2010).

⁸ Mediafax.cz: Balkán do EU patří, shodují se politické strany [The Balkans fits into the EU, political parties agree], 29 April 2010, available at: <http://www.mediafax.cz/politika/3032459-Balkan-do-EU-patri-shoduji-se-politicke-strany> (last access: 24 June 2010).

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- ⁹ Czech Social Democratic Party: Zahraniční politika [Foreign policy], Lubomír Zaorálek, shadow minister of foreign affairs, 30 January 2010, available at: <http://www.cssd.cz/volby/oranzove-knihy/> (last access: 24 June 2010); Civic Democratic Party: Podrobný volební program [Detailed election programme], available at: <http://www.ods.cz/volby2010/data/soubory-ke-stazeni/182/volebni-program-velky.pdf> (last access: 24 June 2010); Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09: Zahraniční politika [Foreign Policy], Election programme 2010, available at: <http://www.top09.cz/proc-nas-volit/volebni-program/volebni-program-2010/?clanek=1352> (last access: 24 June 2010).
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- ¹⁶ See, e.g., Government of the Czech Republic: Achievements of the Czech Presidency: Europe without Barriers, September 2009, available at: <http://www.eu2009.cz/scripts/file.php?id=61211&down=yes> (last access: 24 June 2010); Král, David/Bartovic, Vladimír/Řiháčková, Věra: The 2009 Czech EU Presidency: Contested Leadership at a Time of Crisis, Stockholm: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2009.

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?