


EU-27 WATCH



No. 9
July 2010

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-27Watch.org

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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.

The EU-27 Watch No. 9 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the *"Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung"*, and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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Estonia**In favour of an open-door policy and an ambitious Eastern Partnership**

Piret Ehin*

The Estonian government continues to support further enlargement, while emphasising that the process is dependent on progress made by each candidate state. According to Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, "Estonia is a supporter of the European Union's open-door policy so that nations that share common values and principles with our member states can be included in the Union."¹ The government faces no significant domestic constraints in pursuing this policy: according to the latest Eurobarometer survey, conducted in autumn 2009, 57 percent of Estonian respondents supported enlargement, compared to the EU average of 46 percent.²

Estonia maintains that accession negotiations with Iceland should be started as soon as possible and strongly backs Iceland's accession to the European Union. In April 2010, the Estonian Foreign Ministry held a seminar in Iceland, during which representatives and experts from Estonian government institutions shared Estonia's experiences with EU accession and membership. Foreign Ministry Secretary General Marten Kokk stated that "for any sectors in which Iceland is interested, Estonian experts will gladly share their experiences in joining the European Union."³ This commitment reflects the history of bilateral relations: Iceland was the first country in the world to recognise the Republic of Estonia following the restoration of independence in August 1991. This bold step by a tiny nation is remembered with gratitude, and ensures Estonia's whole-hearted support to Iceland's EU aspirations.

Estonia's support to the accession of the Western Balkan countries remains similarly firm. In May 2010, Vladimir Drobnjak, Croatia's chief negotiator with the EU, visited Estonia. Estonian officials acknowledged Croatia's progress and expressed hope that Croatia "will soon be able to open the final chapters and complete the negotiations on the technical level this year."⁴ According to the Estonian Foreign Ministry, "Croatia becoming a member of the European Union would be a positive sign to the entire Western Balkan region."⁵

During the meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić in Tallinn in March 2010, Foreign Minister Paet confirmed that Estonia recognises Serbia's steps towards the EU and completely supports Serbia's reform efforts. Estonia regards the decision made by the EU in December 2009 to begin implementing an interim stabilisation and association agreement with Serbia as a significant step in the integration process.⁶ EU's decision to extend visa-free travel to citizens of Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia constitutes another important and welcome development. Estonia attaches great significance to Serbia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Estonian officials share the general perception that, relative to the other Western Balkan countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina has fallen behind and needs to speed up the implementation of reforms, and the government needs to agree on a common vision regarding the general direction of the nation's Euro-Atlantic development.⁷

The EU's Eastern neighbourhood is an area of great importance to Estonia, and the country has been a keen observer and active participant in the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Estonia portrays itself as a proponent of an ambitious ENP and as a "principled, consistent, and strong, yet demanding, supporter of our Eastern Partners."⁸ Estonia is keen to share its transition experiences with other countries, and has expanded activities designed to transfer transition know-how. It participated actively in the compiling of the Transition Compendium, an overview of the member states' transition experiences prepared by the European Commission. The Foreign Ministry is expanding its training programmes for the Eastern partners. A five-day training seminar for specialists and experts from Eastern Partnership target countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus) was organised in Tallinn in April 2010. It focused on matters related to good governance and public administration reform. In the longer perspective, Estonia is prepared to establish an Eastern Partnership training centre in Tallinn similar to the Mediterranean Academy in Malta.⁹ Estonia also supports the Eastern neighbours by contributing to the Neighbourhood

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Investment Facility Trust Fund, and continues to implement bilateral development cooperation projects in its priority partner countries – Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, as well as in Belarus and Armenia.

Estonia's goal during the Spanish Presidency is the further development of the Eastern Partnership in accordance with goals specified in the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, and development of bilateral relations between the EU and the partner countries.¹⁰ The government emphasises the importance of concluding deep and comprehensive free trade agreements, the ultimate objective being a common free trade area. It also supports the expansion of visa-free travel and prioritises close cooperation in energy and infrastructure matters. It notes that Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia have already unilaterally dropped all visa obligations for EU citizens. According to Foreign Minister Paet, Estonia supports "the continuation of the visa dialogue with Ukraine, and the initiation of one with Moldova, as well as the speedy concluding of visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Georgia."¹¹ Paet also confirmed that Estonia will "do [its] best to reach a consensus on the association agreement negotiations mandates with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan" in the first half of 2010. Estonia also continues to emphasise the value dimension in relations with Eastern partners, arguing that the Eastern Partnership "must become a values-based policy that will provide effective aid to target countries in growing closer to the European Union and in developing democracy and building up the rule of law."¹²

Compared to the Eastern dimension of the ENP, Estonia has fewer contacts and experiences with the southern neighbours. The government recognises that "the EU's cooperation with neighbours to the south is equally important" but focuses its own attention mostly on the Eastern dimension. According to the Foreign Ministry, it is essential to ensure that financing for the neighbourhood programmes is allocated equally between the southern and eastern facets of European Neighbourhood Policy.¹³

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Foreign Minister Paet: Estonia Supports Serbia on Path to European Union, press release No 80-E, 09.03.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

² European Commission: Eurobaromeeter 72: avalik arvamus Euroopa Liidus. Sügis 2009. Rahvuslik aruanne: Eesti, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_ee_ee_nat.pdf (last access: 01.06.2010).

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Estonia Supports Starting EU-Iceland Accession Negotiations as Soon as Possible, press release No 114-E, 14.04.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Estonia Supports Rapid Accession of Western Balkans to European Union, press release No 149-E, 04.05.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Foreign Minister Paet: Estonia Supports Serbia on Path to European Union, press release No 80-E, 09.03.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Paet: Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro Closer to Europe Than Before, press release, 08.12.2009, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁸ Address by Foreign Minister Urmas Paet to the Riigikogu on behalf of the Government of Estonia, 11.02.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ State Chancellery of Estonia: Aims of the Estonian Government During the Spanish Presidency, available at: http://www.riigikantselei.ee/failid/EE_priorities_EN.pdf (last access: 01.06.2010).

¹¹ Address by Foreign Minister Urmas Paet to the Riigikogu on behalf of the Government of Estonia, 11.02.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/node/9002> (last access: 01.06.2010).

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Paet: Free Trade and Visa Facilitation with Eastern Partnership States in EU's Interests, press release No 304-E, 08.12.2009, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/taxonomy/term/61> (last access: 01.06.2010).

¹³ Estonian Embassy in the UK: Estonia in the European Union, 04.05.2010, available at: http://www.estonia.gov.uk/estonia_in_the_eu (last access: 01.06.2010).

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?