

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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Estonia
A binding agreement is needed; the Commission should be the driving force

 Piret Ehin*

On the issue of climate change, the Estonian government supports “an ambitious and binding global agreement” on cutting greenhouse gas emissions that includes all major polluters, and believes that, in this respect, “the role of the European Commission as a driving force is irreplaceable.”¹ According to the government, Estonia is prepared to contribute to both reducing greenhouse gases and financing the future agreement. In light of these goals, the results of the Copenhagen conference were disappointing. According to Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, the EU “did what it could” and has set a good example for the other partners both in terms of reducing emissions and committing finances. European partners should continue work towards a legally binding global agreement.² According to the Estonian government position paper for the European Council meeting of 25-26 March 2010, Estonia continues to support the EU’s plan to reduce emissions by 30 percent compared to 1990 levels in case other developed countries commit to comparable reductions and developing countries “contribute each according to their obligations and ability.”³ In the post-Copenhagen situation, the Estonian government believes that it is better to refrain from introducing new numerical targets. Instead, the EU should focus on explaining its position and communicating with all partners. Again, the European Commission should play a central role in these efforts.⁴

However, there appears to be a gap between the Estonian government’s rhetoric and real commitment to fighting climate change. Like many other post-communist countries, Estonia could easily meet Kyoto targets due to the collapse of Soviet-era heavy industry, and the changed structure of the economy enabled it to profit from selling emission quotas. Despite formally meeting the Kyoto targets, the Estonian economy is still very carbon-intensive and Estonia is among the biggest per capita polluters in Europe.⁵ In its recent report, the State Audit Office of Estonia found that the Estonian government has not set clear objectives in fighting climate change, lacks a solid action plan for coordinating the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, does not know how effective the emission reduction measures used so far have been, is not able to predict emission volumes in the future, and has not used the emissions trading system to provide incentives for enterprises to reduce pollution.⁶

While various environmentalist groups keep pushing for better policies, the general public does not appear to take the topic too seriously. Public discourse in Estonia focuses on the question of whether global warming really exists and whether it is due to human activity. Many people, including prominent politicians and opinion leaders, regard global warming either as a “matter of faith,” a “political game,” or a “profitable business.” Indeed, an opinion frequently encountered in the media is that Estonia would only benefit from warmer weather and improved conditions for agriculture and tourism.

The government argues that European countries, including Estonia, need to help developing countries cope with climate change – not least because of the various ways (immigration, violence, and terrorism) in which difficulties in developing countries affect Europe and Estonia. The government has not advanced clear visions on who should bear the costs of fighting climate change in developing countries, and seems content to leave this question for bigger powers to decide. Its own efforts focus on providing assistance to nations that have suffered in natural disasters (e.g., Haiti). Estonia continues to observe principles of sustainable development in its aid programmes targeting developing nations.

¹ Opening Remarks by Foreign Minister Urmas Paet at the conference Opportunities for Green Industry in Estonia, 20.05.2010, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/node/9488> (last access: 01.06.2010).

² Kristin Aasma: Kopenhaageni kliimakonverents: keskmise temperatuuri tõus jäägu alla 2 kraadi, Öhtuleht, 20.12.2009.

³ State Chancellery of Estonia: Informatsioon ja Eesti seisukohad Euroopa Ülemkogu 25. ja 26. märtsi 2010. a kohtumiseks, available at: http://www.riigikantselei.ee/failid/100318_VV_seisukohad_K.pdf (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ National Audit Office of Estonia: State’s efforts of reducing greenhouse gas emissions: Summary of audit results, 26.11.2009, available at: <http://www.riigikontroll.ee/tabid/215/Audit/2125/WorkerTab/Audit/WorkerId/49/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (last access: 01.06.2010).

⁶ Ibid.

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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?