

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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France
Mixed opinions on enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

 Beatrix Boonekamp*

Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the countries applying for EU membership “can breathe again”, underlines Libération.¹ The further enlargement of the European Union had been closely linked to the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty: French President Nicolas Sarkozy, when serving as President of the European Council, had made it very clear that, in a Union that could not even agree on adopting more functional institutions, the accession of additional countries could only make the situation worse. The adoption of the treaty was therefore a *sine qua non* condition for further enlargement.

Iceland and Croatia, 28th and 29th EU member states?

Two countries are now expected to join the Union during the upcoming years, Croatia and Iceland. Some observers have been underlining Iceland’s opportunism, arguing that the country had been ignoring the European Union for decades until the financial crisis finally allowed it to see the benefits it could find in the EU.² The fast accession process was, for a number of analysts, closely linked to the Icesave dossier; the rejection of the latter by 93 percent of the Icelandic population, in March 2010, led the same analysts to believe that it could undermine the country’s chances of a fast accession to the EU, and isolate it on the international scene.³ As previously mentioned, Croatia is expected to conclude the negotiation process soon, and to be part of the EU by 2012, at the latest. Its accession is strongly supported by the French government, which underlines the fact that it is important for the stabilisation of this part of Europe.

France has always been very supportive of the accession of the Balkan countries to the EU. In *Le Monde*, co-signed with his Italian homologue Franco Frattini, Foreign Affairs Minister Bernard Kouchner underlined, once again, his support for the accession of the Balkan countries, which *have vocation* to join the EU, as soon as they meet all the requirements.⁴ But most analysts are now stressing the fact that all further accession processes are very likely to be delayed: the European leaders now have “more urgent matters to focus on”. The Greek crisis is also very likely to have a negative impact, by making the accession criteria more demanding.⁵

Why keep refusing Turkey’s accession?

The question of Turkey’s accession has always been very controversial in France. French President Nicolas Sarkozy stands firmly against it, and took advantage of the French Presidency of the European Union to clearly reaffirm his position. He now advocates a privileged partnership, linking the European Union, Turkey and Russia, which would represent an alternative to its accession.⁶ Meanwhile, former French President Jacques Chirac underlined the “shared destiny” between the two countries, and the necessity to develop the tightest links possible.⁷ “Why keep refusing this accession?” asks Bernard Guetta from left-wing daily Libération, arguing that the latter would represent a good opportunity to prove to Muslim neighbour countries that the EU and Islam are not incompatible, and actually have a shared destiny. According to the economics daily *Les Echos*, “If Europe lacks the courage to propose a long-term strategic vision, the *Oriental temptation* will prevail and the country which we do not want *with* us now will be *against* us in the future. At which point, Europe will have the Turkey it deserves”.⁸

European Neighbourhood Policy: the Union for the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has enjoyed a lot of coverage in France, being one of Nicolas Sarkozy main projects during the French Presidency. The media have been underlining how difficult this project is, given the internal disagreements (a *string of mines* according to *Le Figaro*), and the lack of commitment of most heads of states;⁹ under this context, the activism and determination of two countries, France and Spain, is quite unanimously recognised, and contrasts with the clear lack of political will from the Southern countries. According to an analyst, the Arabic countries will not commit to the Union for the Mediterranean unless they see clear political and/or economical benefits, and this is far from being the case so far. The Socialist MEP in charge of the parliamentary report on the UfM,

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Vincent Peillon, has a more optimistic point of view though; he considers that the Union for the Mediterranean is actually managing to work effectively towards peace building in the region through concrete projects and realisations. He nevertheless argues that the European Union needs to demonstrate its strong commitment by putting money on the table during the Barcelona Summit that was to be held in June 2010.¹⁰ Finally, some observers criticise a certain lack of overall ambition. Economist Jean-Louis Guigou argues that, to be successful, the UfM cannot be the free trade zone proposed by José Manuel Barroso, but has to be a wider project including common social and environmental policies.¹¹

The Eastern Partnership has received a lot less coverage in France. It has been described as a mere copy of the Union for the Mediterranean.¹² Some analysts question the novelty of this partnership and the existence of real advantages for the beneficiary countries.¹³

¹ Quatremer, J.: 2020, L'Union des 27?, Libération, 30/12/2009.

² Reuters: Les pays bas lient l'adhésion de l'Iceland au plan Icesave, 06/03/2010.

³ Cafebabel: L'Islande rejette l'Icesave" et risque l'isolement, 08/03/2010, available at: www.cafebabel.fr (last access: 04/06/2010).

⁴ Kouchner, B.: Chaque Etat des Balkans a vocation a entrer dans l'UE, Le Monde, 13/03/2010.

⁵ Rupnik, J.: L'Union Européenne est un substitute d'Empire vis a vis des Balkans, Le Monde, 10/05/2010.

⁶ Libération: Nicolas Sarkozy n'ignore plus la Turquie, 21/04/2010.

⁷ Chirac, J.: UE – Turquie: un Destin partage, AFP, 11/05/2010.

⁸ Moisi, D.: La Turquie de nos mérites, Les Echos, 11/01/2010.

⁹ Le Figaro: L'Union pour la Méditerranée, en mal de soutiens, 10/02/2010.

¹⁰ Peillon, V.: L'union pour la méditerranée est sortie des limbes, 19/10/2010, available at: <http://www.vincent-peillon.fr> (last access: 04/06/2010).

¹¹ Guigou, J. L.: Pour un protectionnisme euro-méditerranéen, Les Echos, 20/04/2010.

¹² Holveck, F.: Vers un partenariat privilégié avec les six pays de l'ex-URSS, MCSinfo, Université Robert Schuman, Strasbourg, 12/03/2009.

¹³ Touteurope: UE-Partenariat oriental: quelle perspectives?, 15/12/2009, available at: www.touteurope.fr (last access: 04/06/2010).

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?