

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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Hungary

Major questions to be answered

Krisztina Vida*

Highly active President of the European Council coupled with weaker role of the rotating presidency

As regards his new position, Herman Van Rompuy has pledged to fully implement the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and to use his powers to the utmost possible. In the opinion of a high official at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,¹ Van Rompuy is absolutely acting according to his words. He is very active in representing the Union towards third countries and under his Presidency of the European Council, the role of the rotating presidency at the European Council level has significantly decreased. Van Rompuy is acting rather autonomously vis-à-vis the Council. Although there is cooperation with the actual presidency at both the Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) and Council levels, the President is preparing the conclusions of the European Council on his own, assisted, however, by the Secretary General of the Council. The conclusions themselves became shorter, more concise and more streamlined. Before finalising the text, the President takes up only those suggestions from the member states, which represent substantial change (no “stylistic” corrections are accepted).

As to the European Council meetings, the big change is that the foreign ministers do not take part in them, thus the circle is closer, restricted to the leaders of the member states. This meant an immediate weakening of the General Affairs Council, as the ministers cannot represent at the European Council level what they have discussed and adopted at the General Affairs Council level. This has resulted in a new phenomenon: the General Affairs Councils are often attended by the under secretaries for European or foreign affairs, instead of the ministers themselves. The ministers seem to be losing motivation, as they are aware that their direct influence on the final text of the conclusions is limited. As to the role of the actual presiding country at European Council level, it is also limited, due to the above-mentioned reasons.

The functioning of the High Representative needs more lubrication

As opposed to the President of the European Council, the position and functioning of the “double-hatted” High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy leaves more questions open. One of the main shortcomings is that, compared to her obligations, Catherine Ashton has too small of a cabinet. Another problem is that very often she has programmes in parallel, namely travelling abroad, as well as appearing at the Commission or before the European Parliament. In these cases, she would need a deputy High Representative, but this is not established by the Lisbon Treaty. Due to these organisational/institutional shortcomings, Ashton is not always able to fulfil all her obligations, despite her full commitment.

The rules on geographical balance still to be settled

The political agreement on the European External Action Service (EEAS) was welcomed by Hungary. The new office will be made up of officials from the Commission (one third), from the Council (one third) and from the member states (one third). Hungary supported this approach although an important aspect is still lacking, according to a high official of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.² This lacking aspect relates to the concrete details of the “geographical balance” and the way it should be implemented. Hungary is looking forward to the upcoming negotiations on this issue. Another open question is that of financing the EEAS and its diplomats. Furthermore, the status of European Commission delegations abroad should also be redefined upon full operation of the EEAS.

The rules on the ECI to guarantee equal rights to EU citizens

The European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) is a new, absolutely positive element of the Lisbon Treaty, equipping EU citizens with a tool of direct democracy. However, according to a high official of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,³ the detailed technical rules of such an initiative are still to be worked out and adopted. A major issue here is that the EU rules on the ECI should be fully compatible

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with the national rules on a plebiscite. When formulating the exact rules, the equal rights of EU citizens must be a guiding principle. From a political point of view, a fast decision on this would be welcome. Apparently, the first such initiative will be about “free Sundays”, an idea fully supported by the Christian churches in Hungary as well as by the ruling Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP).

¹ Interview done at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 5 May 2010.

² Interview done at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 5 May 2010.

³ Interview done at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 5 May 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?