

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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Iceland**A quest for speedy accession and inclusion of the North West European Region****Pia Hansson* and Baldur Thorhallsson[†]**

The EU has changed a great deal since it was established with only a few founding members. It has become a different Union. The Council of Europe (CoE) has 44 member states including Iceland. In recent years the EU is gradually becoming more similar to the CoE. This development is more positive than negative. It upholds this collective unity which promotes peace in the continent and greater balance in living standards within the Union. Also there seems to exist no well-founded reason for keeping the applicant European states outside the EU.¹ Today, Iceland finds itself negotiating for EU entry alongside a group of seven candidates and potential candidates from the Western Balkans. Iceland, not having experienced recent conflicts and political motives and circumstances, is very different from these other states.² The perception in Iceland is that Croatia will be granted membership before Iceland. Iceland is, however, already ahead of Macedonia, which before Iceland's application seemed to be next in line, and there is even more work remaining for the rest of the applicants. Therefore, Iceland would likely follow Croatia – if it is to join.³ Regardless of who wins the race in South-Eastern Europe, it seems only a coincidence that Iceland's application finds itself on the table for processing alongside those of three small-to-medium-sized Western Balkan states and with four more close behind in the queue. Iceland's existing relations with the Union are undoubtedly closer and on a more equal basis, thanks mainly to the country's membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) for the past 16 years and of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) since 1970.⁴ When Iceland applied for EU membership in July 2009, the local perception was indeed that, due to Iceland's EFTA membership and participation in the EEA agreement, the process would not have to be long. Although Iceland has experienced a total bank collapse and is going through a recession, Iceland's economic development and situation today still leaves Iceland in a good position to enter into negotiations. The process has, nevertheless, been longer and more complicated than what was initially expected.⁵

In general, Iceland is positive towards enlargement, as long as the countries fulfil the criteria set forth by the Union. The EU should maintain an open-door policy true to its origin. All countries that have applied should therefore become members, but may have to work hard to fulfil the criteria before this can happen. Membership in the future will probably occur on an individual basis though, not in groups like in 2004 and 2007. Understandably, the EU is more cautious at this point, because of the current economic crisis and the deteriorating situation in Greece. This can even be categorised as enlargement fatigue.⁶

The Icelandic government wholeheartedly supports initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership. Promoting democracy and good governance, economic reform and environmental issues are all issues that are seen as extremely important, and the EU should reach out to the neighbourhood, offering assistance and leadership in policy making and development. Such initiatives also offer EU member states the opportunity to provide leadership and guidance. International and interpersonal relations are strengthened by such initiatives. But it is not enough to present one more initiative; it needs to be followed through with the necessary political backing. It should never be thought of as a one-way street or a charity project; the EU can and should also gain from this both in experience and better understanding.⁷

As for the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), for the most part, the same applies. It should, however, be noted that there is concern that the UfM works well as a forum for dialogue on issues such as the environment, energy and civil protection, but has not been able to handle the issue of security which remains a concern. The Arab/Israeli conflict continues to paralyse all real efforts at increased cooperation around the Mediterranean Sea. This does not mean that an initiative such as the UfM should be abandoned, but it may be more successful if its limitations are clear from the beginning.⁸

That said, some Icelandic politicians, public officials and Europeanists are concerned that the north-west region of Europe, Iceland, Norway, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, is being overlooked and even sidelined as the EU attempts to reach out to the east and south. The north-western region

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consists of inhabitants who are, at present, relatively negative toward European integration and participation in the European project. A question has been raised whether the EU does not have the responsibility to reach out to this part of Europe in the name of European solidarity based on the European ideology. For instance, this could be done in the fields of fisheries, agriculture and rural and regional development. Hence, there is a call for “a comprehensive EU neighbouring policy” towards the North-West.⁹

¹ Telephone interview with a member of the Left-Green movement now in government.

² Alyson J. K. Bailes/Jóhanna María Þórdísardóttir: Iceland’s neighbours in the EU Entry Queue: Contrasts or Parallels in EU Enlargement to the North and the South-East, 2009, available at:

<http://stjornmalogstjornsysla.is/images/stories/fq2009h/alyson.pdf> (last access: 12 July 2010).

³ Telephone interview with a member of the Left-Green movement currently in government.

⁴ Alyson J. K. Bailes/Jóhanna María Þórdísardóttir: Iceland’s neighbours in the EU Entry Queue: Contrasts or Parallels in EU Enlargement to the North and the South-East 2009, available at:

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⁵ Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs from the office of EEA-agreement and European Affairs.

⁶ Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs from the office of Information Affairs.

⁷ Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs from the office of Information Affairs.

⁸ Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs from the office of Information Affairs.

⁹ Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs from the office of Information Affairs.

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?