

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**Disappointment in Copenhagen but prospects in the future****Pia Hansson* and Baldur Thorhallsson[†]**

The Copenhagen conference depicted a dilemma faced by the international community regarding necessary actions in the face of climate change. The Copenhagen Accord offered some results, but most Icelanders agree that the text fell short of what is needed. It is clear that there does not exist a consensus on what each state should do in this area and when. At the end of the conference, it was revealed, according to the negotiation offered by the states, that the atmospheric temperature would rise three degrees Celsius on average. Before the conference, the consensus was that the temperature should never rise more than two degrees Celsius on average.¹ For a small country like Iceland, sitting on the sidelines when policy and agreements are being made is not unusual. Some felt that the EU was on the sidelines as well and were disappointed. Negotiations in the run-up to the Copenhagen conference were characterised with scepticism from developing countries towards industrial countries. The hosts, the Danes, who steered the meetings, were never able to earn the trust from third world countries. This happened despite the fact that the EU and key states within the Union tried everything in their power to reach an agreement with the African states and other groups of third world countries in order for matters to be solved.²

The Copenhagen conference was an interesting diplomatic game and at best chaotic. Admitting failure, however, can be too expensive. The dialogue is there and it needs to continue, since the issue is too large to ignore. Any result can also be viewed as a positive result. A letter of intent was made after the conference although it is indeed a weak one.³ Effort was made by the United States, but the fact remains that they cannot be perceived as reliable in the matter, when they still have to prove that they can pass legislation on this issue on the home front. It should be noted, however, that President Obama's efforts show that the USA is under new leadership.⁴

The EU has set forth very ambitious goals which Iceland should follow. The EU should definitely not decrease their goals despite difficulties it might encounter but sharpen the main goals and actions. The EU's leadership in these matters has, however, taken a dent. After having saved the Kyoto agreement from falling through, the EU had originally taken its role as a leader in climate change issues seriously, but, at the Copenhagen conference, the United States and the other large industrial nations took the initiative, although that did not result in a binding agreement. To the general public in Iceland, the conference failed to produce any remarkable results, and news reports from the conference carried headlines of disappointment loud and clear.⁵ Interestingly, the leading current affairs television programme decided to tackle the issue of climate change with scepticism, offering a debate of opposing camps at the same time as the Copenhagen conference was underway in December. To local leading academics in the field, this was highly disappointing.⁶ The Minister for the Environment admitted the results were disappointing but pointed out that they could nonetheless be used as a guiding light and road map for the work ahead.⁷ Environmental groups were disappointed, but pointed out that, for such a complicated matter, it is understandable that the process is long and tiresome. The issue is too large to give up on though, and the United Nations needs to remain focused on climate change. The Copenhagen conference can be seen as highly successful in terms of provoking debate and raising awareness of the issue.⁸

Climate change is a global threat and should therefore be addressed globally. The only body that can address such a global issue is the United Nations, but the growing feeling of disillusion is understandable when no binding agreement has been accepted. The EU will most likely try to merge the Kyoto Protocol with the Copenhagen Accord now in an effort to keep the dialogue going. Iceland's position is in many ways clearer after the Copenhagen conference. Iceland has supported EU's prior efforts and the future holds more collaboration, whether Iceland joins the EU or not. Iceland wants to see a legally binding agreement. Iceland's possible membership in the EU does provide relief in the emissions of large industry that would then fall under the EU's regulations, making the issue easier to deal with locally. On the issue of financing mitigation and adaptation efforts, this could pose a sensitive problem to Iceland not having set aside finances to this end. At the same time the local recession would make such financial obligations burdensome for Iceland. Many developed countries speak very

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plainly about this – no money will go to developing countries unless they comply. This issue will be addressed in Mexico and reaching a binding agreement on this is not likely to occur at this point.⁹

¹ Árni Finnson: Loftslagsráðstefna Sameinuðu þjóðanna í Kaupmannahöfn – deilt um árangur, Tímarit Máls og Menningar, 2010 71(1), pages 36-49.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Telephone Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and a member of the Icelandic negotiating team, 20 May 2010.

⁵ Newspaper headlines in Morgunblaðið, 18 December 2009, available at:

http://www.mbl.is/mm/frettir/innlent/2009/12/18/samkomulagid_vonbrigdi/ (last access: 16 June 2010); Fréttablaðið, 21 December 2009, available at: http://epaper.visir.is/media/200912210000/pdf_online/1_16.pdf (last access: 16 June 2010).

⁶ Interview with a project manager at the Institute for Sustainable Studies at the University of Iceland, 20 May 2010.

⁷ Interview in Visir, 19 December 2010, available at: <http://www.visir.is/of-miklar-vaentingar-gerdar-til-radstefnunnar/article/2009503704947> (last access: 16 June 2010).

⁸ Árni Finnsson: Loftslagsráðstefna Sameinuðu þjóðanna í Kaupmannahöfn – deilt um árangur, Tímarit Máls og Menningar, 2010, 71(1), p. 36-49.

⁹ Telephone Interview with a government official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and a member of the Icelandic negotiating team, 20 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?