

EU-27 WATCH



No. 9
July 2010

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-27Watch.org

EU-27 Watch

Contributing partners are

Austrian Institute of International Affairs, Vienna
Bulgarian European Community Studies Association,
Sofia

Center for European Studies / Middle East Technical
University, Ankara

Centre d'études européennes de Sciences Po, Paris
Centre d'étude de la vie politique, Université libre de
Bruxelles

Centre d'études et de recherches européennes Robert
Schuman, Luxembourg

Centre of International Relations, Ljubljana

Cyprus Institute for Mediterranean, European and
International Studies, Nicosia

Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen

Elcano Royal Institute and UNED University, Madrid
European Institute of Romania, Bucharest

Federal Trust for Education and Research, London

Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki

Foundation for European Studies - European Institute,
Łódź

Greek Centre of European Studies and Research,
Athens

Institute of International Affairs and Centre for Small
State Studies at the University of Iceland, Reykjavik
Institute for International Relations, Zagreb

Institute for World Economics of the Hungarian
Academy of Sciences, Budapest

Institute for Strategic and International Studies, Lisbon

Institute of International and European Affairs, Dublin

Institute of International Relations, Prague

Institute of International Relations and Political
Science, Vilnius University

Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome

Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga

Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies,
University of Malta

Netherlands Institute of International Relations
'Clingendael', The Hague

Ohrid Institute for Economic Strategies and

International Affairs, Skopje

Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
(SIPRI)

University of Tartu

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.

The EU-27 Watch No. 9 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the *"Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung"*, and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.



Disclaimer

Institutes/authors are responsible for the content of their country reports. The publisher and editorial team cannot be held responsible for any errors, consequences arising from the use of information contained in the EU-27 Watch or its predecessors, or the content of external links on www.EU-27watch.org or in the EU-27 Watch. The content of the EU-27 Watch is protected under German copyright law. The articles of the EU-27 Watch can be printed, copied, and stored for personal, scientific, and educational use for free. Articles of the EU-27 Watch may not be used for commercial purposes. Any other reprint in other contexts is not allowed without prior permission from the publisher. For permission or any other question concerning the use of the EU-27 Watch please contact: info@EU-27watch.org.

Editorial Team

Publisher: Prof. Dr. Mathias Jopp
Executive Editor: Dr. Katrin Böttger
Managing Editor: Julian Plottka
Editorial Staff: Daniela Caterina, Gregory Kohler,
Christoph Kornes
Layout: Matthias Jäger

Contact: info@EU-27watch.org
www.EU-27watch.org

iep Institut für
Europäische Politik
Bundesallee 23
D-10717 Berlin
Tel.: +49/30/88.91.34-0
Fax: +49/30/88.91.34-99
E-mail: info@iep-berlin.de
Internet: www.iep-berlin.de

Italy**Divergent views over Van Rompuy and Ashton seem largely negative in Italy**

Jacopo Leone*

Since his appointment as the new President of the European Council in November 2009, Herman Van Rompuy has inspired sceptical comments and pessimistic analyses, both at the political level as well as in the Italian media coverage. Indeed only few voices, although highly respected, have appeared to reject this general negative opinion.

The Italian political leaders expressed common frustration on the appointment of Van Rompuy. Pierluigi Bersani, leader of the main opposition party, has spoken of a “low profile” personality, which symbolises a bad start for the EU after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.¹ More prudent in his statement has been the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who described the decision as “the only possible compromise.”²

Moreover, a deep scepticism over the political figure of Van Rompuy also characterises the comments in the Italian press and research community. The ‘opaque Flemish leader’ has often been judged as a minimalist choice, lacking the strong personal authority which is deemed necessary to effectively operate in a fragmented and confused EU.³ Van Rompuy’s nomination seemed, therefore, to suggest a lack of political ambition, the loss of a truly pro-European sentiment among national leaders, and the demise of any aspiration of global leadership by the EU.⁴

Despite this generally negative attitude, Mario Monti, former member of the European Commission, judged the appointment of Van Rompuy in a rather optimistic way. In particular, Monti believes President Van Rompuy to be the right man to further the construction of the European project, and to create political consensus and mediate between divergent national interests.⁵ As another respected commentator wrote, “the relatively low profile of Van Rompuy fits perfectly well with the wording of the Lisbon Treaty”,⁶ since the very limited role attributed to the President of the European Council focuses mainly on the creation of political synthesis and institutional continuity.⁷

Recent events seemed to mirror this divergence of views over President Van Rompuy. If, on the one hand, his speech at the College of Europe in Bruges (Belgium) received positive comments in the Italian press,⁸ his leadership has been considered, on the other hand, unconvincing in response to the current Greek economic crisis.⁹

However, the main problem behind these evaluations seems to remain the new institutional framework introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, which, by maintaining the rotating presidency system alongside the new President of the European Council, risks to create a paralysed EU in the exercise of its powers.¹⁰

In Italy, the reactions to the appointment of Catherine Ashton as the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy have been mainly negative. Indeed, the news that the Italian candidate, Massimo D’Alema from the Socialist Party and backed by the government for the position of High Representative, was defeated aroused pessimistic and frustrated comments. Romano Prodi, former President of the European Commission and former Italian Prime Minister, confessed to be shocked by the choice of Ashton, a decision he qualified as ‘mind-blowing’.¹¹ Giuliano Amato, a respected Italian political figure, suggested that a logic of compensation and self-serving national interests had prevailed, which would negatively influence the future of the European project.¹²

Unquestionably, the first months as High Representative have represented a troublesome period for Ashton. Probably due to the vast range of her duties, her performance has been widely criticised in the Italian public debate – in reference to, for example, her absence from Haiti after the earthquake, or her comment regarding the possibility of a common EU seat at the UN Security Council.¹³ However, on a different note rests Franco Frattini, current Italian Foreign Minister and former European Commissioner, who expressed on several occasions his support and appreciation for Ashton.¹⁴

Although the general view of Ashton remains sceptical, the post of High Representative in its “double-hat” design appears to present some institutional difficulties in itself. Indeed, the effort to create a

* Istituto Affari Internazionali.

“single voice” for EU external relations and a better coordination of policies ranging from development aid to commerce gives Ashton an almost unmanageable amount of responsibilities, and makes it often hard to address them successfully. As suggested, the High Representative faces an “heroic mission”,¹⁵ with the ambitious aim to achieve a political cohesion within a still fragmented European foreign and security policy. Moreover, a new institutional balance needs to be reached. That both Ashton and the President of the Commission José Manuel Barroso sent a message of condolence after the earthquake in Chile of February 2010 without previously consulting each other seems to represent, in a harmless way, the difficulties faced by the EU during the process of creating a coherent and coordinated voice.¹⁶

During the last months, the Italian debate on the establishment of a European External Action Service (EEAS) has been rather meagre. Probably due to the technical nature of this topic, the Italian press and media have only briefly covered its institutional progress, primarily highlighting the political difficulties inherent to the attainment of a shared EU position, which the High Representative Ashton has to ultimately facilitate.¹⁷

On the political side, the Italian Foreign Minister Frattini continues to reaffirm his support for Ashton and the creation of the EEAS, considered the main tool for a new European global identity.¹⁸

Nevertheless, what emerged within the Italian research community is a situation in which domestic interests compete with each other for those positions and resources which the new diplomatic body will introduce. As Sergio Romano, a well-known political analyst, wrote, only when the recruitment of the European diplomatic personnel will be open and public could we overcome the present fragmented and self-serving situation.¹⁹ Moreover, without a clear definition of its duties, the EEAS is likely to further an incoherent system of representation, which is ultimately subdued by national interests.²⁰

The concept of an EU diplomatic service, in its rationale and intended aims, is largely perceived in a favourable way. However, it is still unclear if the proposal pushed forward by Ashton on 25 March 2010 and partially modified on 26 April 2010 will be approved by all the European institutions involved, and will thus be able to avoid the risk of an internal competition, enhancing the efficacy of the EU external action.²¹

In Italy, the debate on the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) has registered little attention from either the press or civil society, remaining largely confined to the national political institutions. In particular, the committees of both the Senate (the upper chamber of the Italian parliament) and the Camera dei Deputati (the lower chamber) have analysed the issue extensively and with widespread interest.

The result is a series of recommendations, fairly technical and selective, on the ECI procedures and rules suggested by the European Commission in its proposal. A strong position is taken by Italian representatives, for example, regarding the question of how many member states need to be represented in a given ECI in order for it to be accepted. Although the Commission proposal set the limit to 1/3 of the member states, Italian Members of Parliament (MPs) repeatedly expressed their preference for a 1/4 threshold, in line with the position of the European Parliament.²² Moreover, the four-month period in which the Commission should examine the initiative is deemed too short, and a one-year period is instead suggested.²³

Overall, however, the creation of a system for ECI is evaluated mainly in a positive way. As Andrea Ronchi, the Italian Minister for European Affairs, has remarked, the ECI is one of the most important provisions included in the Lisbon Treaty, and even though it has been rather overlooked until now, Italy should dedicate considerable attention to its institutional definition.²⁴

¹ Quotidiano.net: UE, Van Rompuy presidente permanente, Esteri alla Ashton, D’Alema sconfitto, 19 November 2009, available at: http://quotidianonet.ilsole24ore.com/esteri/2009/11/19/262298-rompuy_presidente_permanente.shtml (last access: 15 April 2010).

² La Repubblica: UE, Berlusconi sulla bocciatura di D’Alema “Nomi scelti unico accordo possibile”, 21 November 2009, available at: <http://www.repubblica.it/2009/10/sezioni/esteri/ue-unione-europea/frattini-deluso-da-bocciatura/frattini-deluso-da-bocciatura.html> (last access: 15 April 2010).

³ Enrico Brivio: Un leader haiku per l’Europa, Il Sole24Ore, 20 November 2009, available at: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/dossier/Italia/2009/commenti-sole-24-ore/20-novembre-2009/haiku-leader-europa.shtml> (last access: 14 April 2010).

⁴ Gianni Riotta: Perché Van Rompuy non sarà Churchill, il Sole24Ore, 24 November 2009, available at: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/dossier/Italia/2009/commenti-sole-24-ore/24-novembre-2009/van-rompuy->

-
- [churchill.shtml](#) (last access: 14 April 2009); Sergio Romano: La UE non è solo basso profilo, Panorama, 30 November 2009, available at: <http://blog.panorama.it/opinioni/2009/11/30/romano-la-ue-non-e-solo-basso-profilo/> (last access: 14 April 2010).
- ⁵ Mario Monti: Un presidente per il consenso, Corriere della Sera, 22 November 2009, available at: http://www.corriere.it/editoriali/09_novembre_22/monti-consenso-presidente-ue_cd896412-d73e-11de-a7cd-00144f02aabc.shtml (last access: 15 April 2010).
- ⁶ Riccardo Perissich: EU President and High Representative: habemus papam, ISPI Commentary, 20 November 2009, available at: http://www.ispionline.it/documents/Commentary_Perissich_20%20nov%202009.pdf (last access: 15 April 2010).
- ⁷ Pietro Manzini: Un basso profilo utile all'Europa, La Voce, 24 November 2009, available at: <http://www.lavoce.info/articoli/pagina1001409.html> (last access: 15 April 2010).
- ⁸ Enrico Brivio: Van Rompuy al Collegio d'Europa. Un topolino che sa ruggire, Il Sole24Ore, 5 March 2010, available at: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnline4/dossier/Italia/2009/commenti-sole-24-ore/5-marzo-2010/ue-presidenza-belgio-vanrompuy-dicorso-collegio.shtml?uuid=0c551be0-2826-11df-800d-74241d6b774c&DocRulesView=Liberio> (last access: 15 April 2010).
- ⁹ Il Foglio: Tre presidenti un euro, 11 February 2010, available at: <http://rassegnastampa.mef.gov.it/mefnazionale/View.aspx?ID=2010021114927331-1> (last access: 15 April 2010).
- ¹⁰ Stefano Silvestri: L'Europa della quadriga, AffarInternazionali, 26 October 2009, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1284> (last access: 16 April 2010).
- ¹¹ Il Sole24Ore: Lo stupore di Prodi: "Ashton? Ma chi è?", 19 November 2009, available at: <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnline4/Mondo/2009/11/ashton-commento-prodi.shtml?uuid=1f128ce4-d53e-11de-b4c7-32ad3fd513a> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹² La Repubblica: Mr. Pesc, dura la stampa europea. "Una scelta di basso profilo", 20 November 2009, available at: <http://www.repubblica.it/2009/10/sezioni/esteri/ue-unione-europea/dalema-dayafter/dalema-dayafter.html> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹³ Andrea Bonanni: Ma che fa la ministra degli esteri Ue?, La Repubblica – Blog, 16 February 2010, available at: <http://bonanni.blogautore.repubblica.it/2010/02/16/ma-che-fa-la-ministra-degli-esteri-ue/> (last access: 19 April 2010); Corriere della Sera: Lady Europa sulla graticola. "Il seggio all'ONU? Non lo so", 12 January 2010, available at: <http://rassegnastampa.mef.gov.it/mefeconomica/View.aspx?ID=2010011214660804-2> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹⁴ Franco Frattini: Yemen: Convinto apprezzamento del Ministro Frattini per l'azione dell'Alto Rappresentante UE, Catherine Ashton, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 5 January 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Comunicati/2010/01/20100105_ConvintoApprezzamentoFrattini_Ashton (last access: 19 April 2010); ANSA: Ue: Frattini, Italia sostiene Ashton, 5 March 2010, available at: http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/topnews/2010/03/05/visualizza_new.html_1730283597.html (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹⁵ Raffaello Matarazzo: L'eroica missione del nuovo ministro degli esteri dell'Ue, AffarInternazionali, 20 November 2009, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1319> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹⁶ Affaritaliani: Allarme Ue, Mr. Pesc Ashton è inquietante, 6 March 2010, available at: http://www.affaritaliani.it/politica/allarme_ue_pesc_ashton020310.html (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹⁷ Il Riformista: Ashton lancia la 'mission impossible', 26 March 2010, available at: <http://stampanazionale.esteri.it/PDF/2010/2010-03-26/2010032615308762.pdf> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹⁸ Franco Frattini: Dichiarazione dei Ministri Frattini e Kouchner, Lellouche e Ronchi sulla realizzazione del SEAE, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 9 April 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Comunicati/2010/04/20100409_Frattini_Kouchner.htm?LANG=IT (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ¹⁹ Sergio Romano: Il servizio diplomatico, Corriere della Sera, 29 March 2010, available at: <http://www.corriere.it/romano/10-03-29/02.spm> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ²⁰ Il Foglio: Lady Ashton è già chiusa nella gabbia del servizio diplomatico europeo, 2 April 2010, available at: <http://rassegnastampa.mef.gov.it/mefeconomica/View.aspx?ID=2010040215365115-1> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ²¹ Raffaello Matarazzo: Braccio di ferro sul servizio diplomatico europeo, AffarInternazionali, 26 March 2010, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1424> (last access: 19 April 2010).
- ²² Commissione Affari Costituzionali: Allegato – Schema di risoluzione proposto dalla relatrice sull'atto comunitario n.61, Senato della Repubblica, 16 March 2010, available at: <http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/frame.jsp?tipodoc=SommComm&leg=16&id=469321> (last access: 20 April 2010).
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Audizione parlamentare, Audizione del ministro per le politiche europee Andrea Ronchi, Camera dei Deputati, 17 March 2010, available at: http://nuovo.camera.it/470?shadow_organo_parlamentare=1507&stenog=/dati/leg16/lavori/stencomm/0314/audiz2/2010/0317&pagina=s010 (last access: 20 April 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?