

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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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

 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

Lithuania**Unemployment, nuclear energy, and the Baltic Sea Strategy****Jurga Valančiūtė***

Unemployment has grown drastically

Lithuania has been deeply influenced by the current financial crisis. One of the most problematic consequences of the crisis is a significant increase in the level of unemployment. Several years ago, Lithuania did not face the problem of unemployment, as its level was very low, but according to the latest data provided by the Lithuanian Office of Statistics, the level of unemployment was as high as 13.7 percent at the end of 2009.¹ This means that Lithuania has the third highest unemployment level in the EU after Spain and Latvia. In this context, it is becoming harder for inexperienced and young people to find jobs and, in 2009, the unemployment level among the youth had reached 29.3 percent.² The Bank of Lithuania estimates that the level of unemployment might reach up to 16.7 percent this year.³

Closure of Ignalina nuclear power plant was not postponed

Implementing the provisions of the EU accession treaty, Lithuania closed the second block of the Ignalina nuclear power plant at the end of 2009. Ignalina was the major source of electricity since 1997, producing more than 80 percent of all electricity used in Lithuania. Lithuanian obligations to close the power plant encouraged various fuelled fears among Lithuanian society and politicians who urged not to close the power plant and made attempts to prolong its functioning. This also gave ground for abundant political speculation. However, the EU had a strict position on the issue and the Ignalina nuclear power plant stopped producing electricity on 31 December 2009. In this context, EU energy policy on electricity and gas interconnections with the rest of EU are of vital importance to Lithuania.

Lithuania congratulates the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Lithuanian officials favoured the adoption of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, as very important projects for Lithuania are included in this Strategy. Former Lithuanian Foreign Affairs Minister Vygaudas Usackas said that the Baltic Sea Strategy has a significant importance.⁴ Important projects, such as electricity and gas interconnections with other EU member states, are included in the Strategy, which will help reduce Lithuanian energy isolation, which is one of the most sensitive issues to Lithuania. Therefore, it is expected that the inclusion of these projects into the Strategy will foster their implementation.

¹ Data of Lithuanian Office of Statistics, Lithuanian Labour Exchange and Eurostat provide quite similar data. The new report by the Lithuanian Statistics Office on the level of unemployment in the first quarter of 2010 will be published on 25 May 2010.

² Verslo žinios: Unemployment during the last year has grown by almost 2.5 times (Nedarbas pernai išaugo beveik pustrėčio karto), 23 February 2010, available at: http://vz.lt/2/straipsnis/2010/02/23/Nedarbas_pernai_ishaugo_beveik_pustrrecio_karto2 (last access: 9 June 2010).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Foreign Affairs Minister Vygaudas Usackas: EU Baltic sea strategy: new possibilities and challenges (Taujėnų dvaras, Ukmergės raj), presentation, 13 November 2009, available at: <http://www.urm.lt/index.php?130737639> (last access: 9 June 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?