

EU-27 WATCH



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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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Luxembourg

Large member states stand in the way of Jean-Claude Juncker as first President of the European Council

Jean-Marie Majerus*

In Luxembourg, most politicians, as well as public opinion, were happy with Herman Van Rompuy's nomination as Belgian Prime Minister. He seemed to be the right man in the right place, able to give this neighbouring country the prospect of finding a viable compromise on how Walloons and Flemings could continue living together in peace and mutual understanding.

In the eyes of the Luxembourgish community, the natural candidate for the post of President of the European Council could not have been anybody other than Jean-Claude Juncker. However, in the weeks preceding the decisive Brussels Council, the international press revealed rumours and speculation announcing that Juncker would not be the first President of the European Council. During the decisive Brussels Summit in December 2009, Jean-Claude Juncker could have asked for a vote because "a large majority of delegations were ready to support my candidacy."¹ One major member state, however, was not keen to support him, but "my friend Van Rompuy did not meet any opposition at all."² Thus, in order not to risk a split in the Union because of his person, he decided to withdraw his candidacy and support his friend Van Rompuy. These rather sad events "left a bad souvenir, but no bitterness,"³ according to the Luxembourgish Prime Minister.

The Luxembourgish press condemned the way this matter was handled: they were particularly disappointed by the representatives of bigger countries, especially by the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy, who had de facto vetoed the nomination of Juncker, lost his last sympathies in the small neighbouring country. In the eyes of the Elysée, Juncker did not react appropriately during the financial crisis as President of the Euro group. Guy Kemp asked in the pro-socialist party newspaper *Tageblatt*: "Where was Angela Merkel?"⁴ Again, the "big countries" manoeuvred a small one out. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the European Parliament's Green leader and an outspoken Juncker fan, called "the decision historically inadequate"⁵ and was applauded from Luxembourg. Was Juncker not allowed to become the first President of the European Council because he likes to reveal uncomfortable facts in public and does not refrain from criticising politicians from bigger nations?

Jean-Claude Juncker wants to give Van Rompuy a fair chance. In Juncker's opinion, he is "a European by conviction: he knows the mechanisms of the Union by heart. He has great capacity to listen to different points of view."⁶ Juncker warns those "who predict that Van Rompuy could be easily manipulated like a puppet on a string."⁷ Are these compliments made by courtesy, by personal friendship or by simple political calculation?

Marcel Kieffer, a political analyst of the conservative Luxembourgish *Wort*, has neither high expectations of Herman Van Rompuy nor of Catherine Ashton. He still believes that the main impulses in the future will come from the rotating national presidencies, even if their role was changed by the Lisbon Treaty.⁸ He advises the Spanish Presidency to work closely with Van Rompuy in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and its follow-up programme.

Generally speaking, the political analysts from Luxembourg are keen to know what the real influence of Van Rompuy on day-to-day EU politics will be. There is a general fear that the influence of the smaller member states might be even more restricted, especially if the traditional Schuman method (*méthode communautaire*) is not applied in its classical way.

A journalist could not help confronting Van Rompuy with the ominous "European telephone question" at a press conference in Luxembourg City. Van Rompuy refused to answer, as he did not want to "fall into a trap built up by the media."⁹ During his short visit to Luxembourg, he underlined that he "was the EU representative on the international floor," even concerning the "security and defence"¹⁰ matter "[i]sn't this (Catherine Ashton's) job?"¹¹ This led the Luxembourgish press to ask the inevitable question, as was done by Danièle Fonck, who is working for the independent weekly *Le Jeudi*: "Who is in charge?"¹² "What are Mrs Ashton's duties and responsibilities?"¹³

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The Luxembourgish media were not happy with Van Rompuy's silence when the Greek problem was discussed at the Brussels February 2010 Summit. The "Belgian on the imaginary throne was too discrete when the Greek crisis was on top of the agenda."¹⁴

Most recently, Van Rompuy nevertheless received some applause in Luxembourg when he refused Merkel's idea to withdraw voting rights from Euro countries which do not respect the public debt criteria.¹⁵ As head of the task force, he might, according to a Luxembourgish diplomat, create a fait accompli by elaborating a reform program to be ready in October 2010.¹⁶

Juncker agrees that the fathers of the Lisbon Treaty – him being one of them – have "forgotten to speak of the cohabitation problems created by the treaty."¹⁷

The Commission still has the exclusive right to make preparations for the Council. The President will make the traditional rally of the capitals. "The choreography must be good, especially under the Spanish Presidency", Juncker says.¹⁸

Rotating presidencies are more important for smaller- and medium-sized member states than for the bigger ones. Before the Lisbon Treaty was institutionalised, the rotating presidency was a real showcase for these countries. They were able to play, for at least one semester, the most important role on the international and European diplomatic floor. But these countries – especially Luxembourg – are also well aware of the disadvantages of the rotating presidency: for the Luxembourgish national administration, rotating presidencies had always been a major tour de force. For the extra-European partners of the EU, the rotating presidencies were always confusing. Nevertheless, the Luxembourgish government and public opinion believe that the rotating presidencies will continue to play a role in European politics, especially when the country in charge has a strong European spirit.

As a matter of fact, Luxembourg has always been and continues being a very strong supporter of the European foreign affairs and security policy. On the day of Catherine Ashton's designation, the first question which came to mind, in Luxembourg as well as in many other member states, was: "Catherine who?" "I don't pronounce myself on Ashton as I don't know her",¹⁹ Jean-Claude Juncker said.

In fact, Catherine Ashton has to cope with the commissioners who are already in charge of different aspects of common foreign policy. How is she going to find her place?²⁰

More critical observers mind the unclear definition of her responsibilities at the top of a new big administration.²¹ The former Luxembourgish Foreign Affairs Secretary Paul Helminger, a liberal opposition Member of Parliament (MP), tries to explain why, in his eyes, a British woman was chosen: "The United Kingdom never really wanted a Common Foreign and Security Policy as long as it was not identical with its own foreign policy. By appointing an Englishwoman to this post, the European decision makers abandoned the implementation of such a policy."²² The political analyst from Tageblatt had the same point of view: "Catherine Ashton is not the convinced European she pretended to be when she was confronting the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) responsible for her confirmation as High Representative. She says she would prefer 'silent diplomacy'; could that mean 'no diplomacy at all'?"²³

The definition and implementation of a Common Foreign and Security Policy has been one of the cornerstones of Luxembourgish European policy since the seventies. Apart from the tiny Communist Party, no serious political or social relevant group in Luxembourg ever opposed a European foreign and security policy. However, the "Proposal for a Council Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service" could not pass without creating some fears. Luxembourg, as well as some other smaller member states, is afraid that this new organisation might exclude them from major decision making. The Luxembourgish MPs and political analysts prefer the traditional "Schuman method."²⁴

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) was explained to the Luxembourgish public by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Europaforum.lu.²⁵ Luxembourg's European Commissioner Viviane Reding, responsible for Justice and Civil Rights, made clear that not just any subject could be introduced by European citizens. She gave the example of a possible proposition asking for the reintroduction of the death penalty.²⁶

In a country with only 500,000 inhabitants, a European Citizens' Initiative, which needs at least 1,000,000 signatures to be validated, does not really produce enormous interest. Only one Luxembourgish newspaper found the EU Commission's proposal for a regulation on the Citizens' Initiative important enough to publish it.

¹ Jean-Claude Juncker: Je ne veux pas porter le chapeau du désaccord franco-allemand, Les Echos, 27 January 2010.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Guy Kemp: Mittelmäßige Ansprüche, Tageblatt, 3 December 2009.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jean-Claude Juncker: Je ne veux pas porter le chapeau du désaccord franco-allemand, Les Echos, 27 January 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Marcel Kieffer: Erste Früchte, Luxemburger Wort, 13 December 2009.

⁹ Bertrand Slezak: Tout le monde raccroche, Le Quotidien, 5 February 2010.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Danièle Fonck: Mais qui est censé diriger l'Europe?, Le Jeudi, 4 February 2010.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hartmut Hausmann: Griechenland und die Konsequenzen, Journal, 7 May 2010.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Marianne Truttman: Gipfel der Eurostaaten, Luxemburger Wort, 8 May 2010.

¹⁷ Jean-Claude Juncker: Je ne veux pas porter le chapeau du désaccord franco-allemand, Les Echos, 27 January 2010.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hartmut Hausmann: In einem Boot, Journal, 10 December 2009.

²¹ Bertrand Slezak: On n'y voit pas plus clair, Le Quotidien, 10 March 2010.

²² Paul Helminger in an interview with the author on 2 December 2009.

²³ Guy Kemp: Mittelmäßige Ansprüche, Tageblatt, 3 December 2009.

²⁴ Guy Kemp: Klarheit schaffen, Tageblatt, 30 December 2009.

²⁵ Europaforum: L'initiative citoyenneté européenne donne aux citoyens de nouvelles possibilités d'influer sur les politiques européennes, 31 March 2010.

²⁶ Tageblatt: EU leitet Europäische Bürgerinitiative ein, 1 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?