

EU-27 WATCH

No. 9
July 2010

ISSN 1610-6458

www.EU-27Watch.org

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.

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.



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Slovakia**Close scrutiny of rotating presidency in light of Slovakia's turn in 2016**Vladimír Bilčík

Since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in December 2009, Slovakia's representatives have been assessing the practical changes in the EU's institutional architecture rather sporadically. Slovakia's politicians were consumed with the domestic agenda while campaigning before the country's parliamentary elections on 12 June 2010. EU institutional issues did not figure prominently in Slovakia's political debates in the months before the elections. Rather, the salient topics included questions about managing the economic crisis, including, for instance, intensive debates about the financial situation in Greece. Interest in EU institutional reform was largely confined to Slovakia's diplomats and foreign policy-makers, especially those who are present in Brussels either at the country's Permanent Representation or in other institutions such as the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Slovakia will take over the EU presidency in 2016, so planning and preparations for this task are in embryonic stages. However, Slovakia's diplomats are keenly watching the changes in the work and responsibility of the rotating presidency with the introduction of the post of the new President of the European Council held by Herman Van Rompuy. As one senior Slovak diplomat observed, apart from fundamental changes to the field of foreign and security policy, the rotating presidency has kept its important functions in all major policy fields. Hence, preparations for Slovakia's Presidency will have to begin early – perhaps in 2011 – in order to prepare the country's administrative structures for this challenge.

While it is still too early to make any comprehensive assessment of the work of Herman Van Rompuy, one Slovak Member of the European Parliament (MEP) stated, “[V]an Rompuy is proving [to be] a very good manager.”² This positive statement contrasts somewhat with questions about the work and responsibilities of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton. Slovakia's representatives have been keenly watching the developments regarding the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), whose shape and mandate are going to provide us more clues with respect to Ashton's role within the European Commission and her relationship with the Council of the European Union. According to Ivan Korčok, head of Slovakia's Permanent Representation to the EU, Slovakia wants to preserve the Council of the European Union as the main source of EU foreign policy. Korčok argues that the task of the EEAS is to function as an executive service – not as an institution or political organ – in order to serve the High Representative in the implementation of foreign policy.³

In February 2010, Slovakia, together with partners from Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, circulated an informal paper in Brussels in which the four Visegrad countries (V4) argued that “[t]he eventual lack of [member states'] involvement in shaping and implementing policies could lead to the loss of their interest in EU foreign policy and could even result in a widening gap between EU and national policies.”⁴ According to this paper, Slovakia, together with its Visegrad neighbours, considers “it necessary to ensure an adequate geographical balance and a meaningful presence of nationals from all EU member states in order to ensure that the service could draw from a wide variety of diplomatic culture and experience.” Specifically, Slovakia and the other V4 countries emphasised that geographical balance “should be incorporated in the staff regulation as a binding principle [...] and] requires regular monitoring through [...] e.g., yearly reports.” It is worth noting that also Austria, the Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia broadly allied themselves with this position in early March 2010 before the publication of the official “Proposal for a Council Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service”⁵ on 25 March 2010.⁶

In contrast to the future of the EEAS, the proposal defining the rules and procedures for the European Citizens' Initiative has received little notice in Slovakia. The notable exceptions are the position of Maroš Šefčovič, Slovakia's nominee and current Vice-President of the European Commission, who is responsible for coming up with these rules. Also, Slovakia's MEP Monika Flašíková-Beňová generally welcomed the initiative in a public speech, calling it a breakthrough in European democracy. However,

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she also warned against its misuse by lobbyists and organised interests. Hence, she called for some strict rules that would ensure the initiative's administratively and financially simple implementation.⁷

More broadly, the launch of the Lisbon Treaty perhaps most acutely reopened the domestic debate on the future of EU policy-making in Slovakia. In April 2010 at an annual conference on Slovakia's foreign policy, several politicians called for more effective coordination and leadership in the formation and articulation of Slovakia's preferences in the EU. Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič suggested during the conference that Slovakia's foreign ministry should get a new name – Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. He also called for an audit of EU policy-making across Slovakia's ministries in order to identify the country's strengths and weaknesses. State Secretary Diana Štrofová also underlined the need for a greater coordinating role of the foreign ministry in EU affairs, whereas MEP Eduard Kukan called for stronger links between the European Parliament and national parliaments, as both institutions have gained new powers thanks to the Lisbon Treaty.⁸

¹ Interview with a senior diplomat, Slovakia's Permanent Representation to the EU, Brussels, 6 May 2010.

² Interview with a member of the European Parliament, Brussels, 5 May 2010.

³ Euractiv.sk: Ivan Korčok: Východná Európa žiada férové zastúpenie v Európskej zahraničnej službe, 25 March 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.sk/obrana-a-bezpecnost/interview/vychodna-europa-ziada-ferove-zastupenie-v-europskej-zahranicnej-sluzbe-014799> (last access: 30 June 2010).

⁴ A. Rettman: New EU States Make Bid for more Diplomatic Clout, EUObserver, 10 March 2010, available at: <http://euobserver.com/9/29651> (last access: 29 June 2010).

⁵ Proposal for a Council Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service, 25 March 2010, available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/docs/eeas_draft_decision_250310_en.pdf (last access: 30 March 2010).

⁶ A. Rettman: New EU States Make Bid for more Diplomatic Clout, EUObserver, 10 March 2010, available at: <http://euobserver.com/9/29651> (last access: 29 June 2010).

⁷ Speech by MEP Monika Flašíková-Beňová at the conference "Wake up Brussels: How a Million People Can Change Brussels", Brussels, 15 April 2010, available at: <http://monikaflasikovabenova.sk/sk/aktivita/detail/prejav-na-konferencii-o-europskej-obcianskej-iniciative> (last access: 29 June 2010).

⁸ Euractiv.cz: Slovensko bilancuje svoju zahraničnú politiku, 12 April 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.sk/obrana-a-bezpecnost/clanok/slovensko-bilancuje-svoju-zahranicnu-politiku-014900> (last access: 29 June 2010).

Slovakia**Enlargement favoured but not at any price**Vladimír Bilčík

Historically, Slovakia has been a strong supporter of enlargement, though in recent years the country's position has become more nuanced. Most consistently, Slovakia's politicians have supported Croatia's bid to enter the European Union. Shortly after Slovakia's accession to the EU, the country was unhappy with the initial Council's decision to postpone the opening of accession talks with Croatia beyond March 2004. The then Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda was a vocal advocate and one of the driving forces of Croatia's swift incorporation into the Union. Slovakia's diplomacy thus continued to push for a re-examination of the Council's decision and was happy to welcome the compromise solution whereby both Croatia and Turkey officially began their respective accession talks on 3 October (or the early hours of 4 October) 2005. In the aftermath of the launch of official talks with the two countries, Prime Minister Dzurinda stated during his press conference that Slovakia would offer Croatia cooperation in negotiations on the various chapters of the acquis. At the same time, the Prime Minister said that Slovakia would try to see both Ukraine and Serbia and Montenegro enter the same path of European integration.¹

Today, Slovakia is still in favour of enlargement, but not at any price and not to all flanks of Europe. Turkey has always been a specific case, as Slovakia's former Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan highlighted by saying that the negotiations with Ankara "will be demanding and very, very long."² But even apart from Turkey, support for enlargement has somewhat waned. On an official visit to Germany on 3 November 2005, the then Slovak Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda stated rather surprisingly that the absorption capacity of the European Union had its limits and that the EU needed a "pause" in its further enlargement.³ The government of Prime Minister Robert Fico (2006-2010) continued to support Croatia's accession process as well as the ambitions to join the EU articulated by other Western Balkan countries. It also had a more open attitude to Turkey's difficult accession process and endorsed the application of Iceland. Realistically, Slovakia's politicians expect Croatia to join the EU in the near future. They also hope for advancements in the accession process of other countries in the Western Balkans, especially Serbia and Montenegro, and are keen on stable developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Macedonia. Slovakia has the least intensive bilateral relations with Albania and, moreover, it is among the EU member states that do not recognise the independent state of Kosovo.

At the same time, Slovakia's politicians have been less enthusiastic about Ukraine's EU aspirations. Today, nobody in Slovakia openly ponders Ukraine's chances to join the EU. Although, to an important extent, this has more to do with the wasted domestic political opportunity offered by the Orange Revolution to Ukraine, Slovak-Ukrainian relations have also suffered from bilateral conflicts during the gas crisis of 2009 and over the state of the border regime along the Schengen border between Slovakia and Ukraine. Thus, Slovakia is a good case of a more nuanced attitude during the launching of the Eastern Partnership Initiative by Poland and Sweden in June 2008 and the subsequent elaboration of the Eastern Partnership by the European Commission in December 2008. The experience with the gas crisis when Russia stopped its deliveries of natural gas due to a conflict with Ukraine has made Slovakia's diplomacy more lukewarm to Ukraine's ambitions to ultimately achieve both EU and NATO membership. Most Slovak governing politicians and the Slovak public blamed Ukraine for the crisis in deliveries of natural gas.⁴ In a public radio discussion, the political director general of the Foreign Ministry, Igor Slobodník, questioned whether "the strategic culture of this country [Ukraine] has reached the state when it could be a reliable and responsible ally in this moment in 2009 and the answer is unclear."⁵ While Slovakia's official position vis-à-vis Ukraine has not changed and Slovakia actively supports Kiev's ambitions to work more closely with the EU and NATO (for example, Slovakia's embassy in Kiev serves as the contact point for NATO),⁶ Slobodník underlined that Slovakia would be more critical in its evaluation of Ukraine's ability to digest Slovakia's technical assistance. In short, Slovakia is likely to be more demanding in relation to Ukraine since Ukraine's credibility has suffered as a consequence of the recent gas crisis.

Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, Slovakia's diplomacy recently showed its keen interest in engaging with Moldova's pro-reform government. Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák visited

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Chişinău on 7 May 2010 and underlined Slovakia's support for domestic changes in Moldova by announcing Slovakia's contribution to the modernisation of Moldova's TV station Tele Radio Moldova and by underlining broader opportunities for Slovakia's bilateral engagement through new projects of official development assistance.⁷ Slovakia does not have any vocal or specific preferences with respect to the Union for the Mediterranean.

¹ Slovenská Tlačová Agentúra (SITA): Ano Turecku a Chorvatsku posilni bezpečnosť v Európe, 4 October 2005.

² Tlačová agentúra Slovenskej republiky (TASR): SR presadzuje rokovania s Chorvatskom ešte dnes, turecká delegácia na ceste, 3 October 2005.

³ SITA: Dzurinda: EU potrebuje pri rozširovaní pauzu, 3 November 2005.

⁴ SITA: Slováci dávajú krízu za vinu Ukrajine, 8 February 2009.

⁵ See Slovak Radio: Sobotné dialógy, 7 March 2009, available at: <http://www.slovakradio.sk/> (last access: 30 June 2010).

⁶ NATO: Allied Contact Points (01.01.2009-31.12.2010), 2 April 2010, available at: http://www.nato.int/structur/oip/all-co_p.pdf (last access: 30 June 2010).

⁷ Webnoviny.sk: Zo Slovak Aid stotisíc eur na moldavskú televíziu, 7 May 2010, available at: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/zo-slovak-aid-stotisic-eur-na-moldavsk/130296-clanok.html> (last access: 29 June 2010).

Slovakia**A stabilising factor of Slovakia's financial sector got into crisis**Vladimír Bilčík

Despite initial estimates in late 2008 that did not expect very considerable influence of the financial crisis on Slovakia's economy, Slovakia recorded a deep dip in its economic performance in 2009. In addition, the Euro, which brought comparable stability to Slovakia's financial sector with the finalisation of Slovakia's Eurozone entry, was suddenly in a crisis caused by the dire economic and financial situation in Greece. In 2009, Slovakia followed the path of other Eurozone countries when it introduced the unlimited deposit guarantee immediately after the proposal by the European Commission. Although several possibilities were discussed as alternatives to the unlimited deposit guarantee, the overpowering explanation for the unlimited deposit guarantee were the similar reactions of other EU countries and thus an attempt at sustaining Slovakia's competitive edge.¹

In 2010, Slovakia reacted with a lot more caution to proposals which were to deal with the economic crisis. With its parliamentary elections held on 12 June 2010, Slovakia's government, led by Prime Minister Fico, agreed to the framework decision on the finance package for Greece, but left the final stamp of approval on the country's bilateral loan to Slovakia's new parliament. However, at least three of the four political parties that are to form Slovakia's new government and hold new parliamentary majority have either rejected or been sceptical toward the adoption of the package. These include the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ-DS) of Slovakia's newly designated Prime Minister Iveta Radičová and two new parties (the liberal Sloboda a Solidarita, Freedom and Solidarity – SAS, and the new Hungarian party Most-Híd – Bridge). Their arguments were mainly twofold: that such loan would undermine the already unhealthy state of public finance in Slovakia and that it is irresponsible to lend more money to the notoriously irresponsible Greek state (especially articulated by Freedom and Solidarity). Only the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), the fourth party of the expected coalition, has been willing to consider supporting the finance package for Greece. Hence, Slovakia's support for its bilateral loan to Greece in the context of the finance package for Greece is questionable and at the moment it does not look likely that Slovakia will lend money to Greece, though once the winners of the parliamentary elections take over their governmental responsibilities, they may also reconsider their initially firm positions.

Similarly, the outgoing Prime Minister Robert Fico articulated his support for the creation of the European Stabilisation Mechanism, but he is leaving the binding decision to the parties of the new governing coalition. The point is that Slovakia's signature is necessary in order to activate this new stability mechanism and both in the run-up to and right after the parliamentary elections on 12 June 2010 the majority of the winning parties (SDKÚ-DS, SAS and Bridge) rejected the proposed European Stabilisation Mechanism. Only the KDH indicated lukewarm support for the new mechanism, though the parties of the new government have been less willing to comment on their positions toward the stability mechanism since elections took place, arguing that they need more time to study the details and implications for Slovakia. In the latter half of June 2010, it looked a bit more likely that Slovakia would ultimately sign up to the new European Stabilisation Mechanism, though it might not disperse its bilateral loan to Greece.²

In Slovakia, the main lesson of the current crisis for the Stability and Growth Pact is a shared call to become serious and consequential about the existing rules. Also, Slovakia in principal accepted the proposed role of the European Commission, which puts it in control of the member states' national budgets. The State Secretary of the Ministry of Finance Peter Kažimír even welcomed this new role for the European Commission, though he also suggested that the Commission would have to undergo reform in order to take up this controlling function effectively.³ There was little discussion of the Europe 2020 Strategy in Slovakia, though two points are worth stressing. Slovakia's representatives called for the replacement of the term "poverty" with the word "cohesion", since, according to Eurostat numbers, Slovakia has the fourth lowest level of poverty in the EU, yet wages and social standards are lower than in most other EU member states. Moreover, the eradication of poverty should be one of the by-products of the Europe 2020 Strategy whose main goal should be enhancement of economic growth.⁴ Second, it is a long-term strategy whose language is not as extravagant as that of the Lisbon Strategy, but whose overall goals are hardly realistic from Slovakia's current perspective.

· Slovak Foreign Policy Association.

¹ SME: Garancia sú na papieri. Banky sú zdravé, 9 January 2009.

² See Euractiv.sk: Slovensko zatiaľ nemá jasné stanovisko k pôžičke Grécku, 17 June 2010, available at: <http://www.euractiv.sk/buducnost-eu/clanok/slovensko-zatial-nema-jasne-stanovisko-k-pozicke-grecku-015338> (last access: 29 June 2010).

³ Euractiv.sk: Peter Kažimír: Kontrola rozpočtov nie je ohrozením suverenity, available at: <http://www.euractiv.sk/ekonomika-a-euro/interview/kontrola-rozpocetov-nie-je-ohrozenim-suverenity-015131> (last access: 29 June 2010).

⁴ Euractiv.sk: Ivan Korčok: Východná Európa žiada férové zastúpenie v Európskej zahraničnej službe, available at: <http://www.euractiv.sk/obrana-a-bezpecnost/interview/vychodna-europa-ziada-ferove-zastupenie-v-europskej-zahranicnej-sluzbe-014799> (last access: 29 June 2010).

Slovakia

Slovakia's support of the EU goals meets little public attention

Vladimír Bilčík

There has not been any real public debate on global climate negotiations following the results of the climate conference in Copenhagen. Slovakia has focused on other public policy challenges and in 2010 Prime Minister Fico's government even decided to abolish the Ministry of Environment and merge it with the Ministry of Agriculture. The forthcoming coalition government, led by Prime Minister Iveta Radičová, already indicated that it would preserve the Ministry of Environment.

During the negotiations in Copenhagen, Slovakia followed the EU mandate for negotiations and strongly endorsed the EU's red lines. Slovakia also pledged about 9 million Euros toward financing mitigation and adaptation efforts in developing countries.¹

¹ Euractiv.sk: Helena Princová: V Kodani vládne "rozpačitá atmosféra", 15 December 2009, available at: <http://www.euractiv.sk/zivotne-prostredie/interview/helena-princova-v-kodani-vladne-rozpacita-atmosfera-014151> (last access: 29 June 2010).

Slovakia**The parliamentary elections in June 2010**Vladimír Bilčík

Much of Slovakia's domestic debate in recent months has been dominated by the parliamentary elections held on 12 June 2010. The result of the elections has brought about a change in government. While SMER-Social Democracy (SMER-SD), the party of the outgoing Prime Minister Robert Fico, won the election by a decisive margin of 34.79 percent of the vote, it was not able to recreate its current coalition, since the Slovak National Party (SNS) received only 5.07 percent of the total vote and the People's Party – Movement for Democratic Slovakia (ĽS-HZDS) failed to enter parliament altogether. At the same time, Robert Fico was not able to create a coalition government with any other political party since the remaining four centre-right parties that entered parliament decided to form a coalition government. The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ-DS) received 15.42 percent of the vote and its electoral leader Iveta Radičová is in line to be Slovakia's first female Prime Minister. SDKÚ-DS coalition partner will include the liberal Freedom and Solidarity (SAS) with 12.14 percent of the vote, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) with 8.52 percent and the new multiethnic Hungarian dominated party Most-Híd (Bridge) with 8.12 percent. The new coalition will control 79 seats out of the total 150 seats in the new parliament. The coalition, composed of four political parties, will be internally fragile and face solid opposition in parliament, as well as difficult challenges in trying economic and social times, but it has the potential to last the full electoral term of four years, as Slovakia's politics are now used to managing difficult and unstable coalitions. Much will depend on the skills of the designated Prime Minister Iveta Radičová in this case.

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?