

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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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,

· [Slovak Foreign Policy Association](#).

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).

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?