

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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United Kingdom**European policy of the new British government**

Brendan Donnelly*

The most important current development in British policy towards the European Union is the agreement of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties to form a coalition government after the British general election of 6 May 2010.¹ European policy formed an important element of the coalition agreement and the relevant section of the agreement will set the terms of British policy within and towards the European Union over the life of the coalition, which the partners hope will be five years. As the senior partner of the coalition, the Conservative Party has seen much of its own European policy incorporated into the coalition's political programme, but the Liberal Democrats have also seen some of their own ideas reflected in the document.

Conservative policies of the coalition

Britain will not join the Euro in the five years of the coalition government, nor will it make any preparations for doing so. The coalition will not sign during its period in office any treaty allowing further "transfer of sovereignty" to the European Union. It will introduce a "Referendum Bill" requiring that any future "transfers of sovereignty" to the Union will be the subject of a specific referendum. Any applications in future of the "passerelle" clauses of the Lisbon Treaty will be the subject of a full British parliamentary procedure of legislation, and not merely formal endorsement, as has been the case for much European legislation in the past.

Liberal Democrat contributions to the coalition's programme

A number of undertakings of the Conservative manifesto on European issues figure in notably more restricted form in the coalition programme. In that manifesto, the Conservative Party had promised to seek to repatriate powers relating to social and employment policy; to introduce a "Sovereignty Bill" that would define more precisely the United Kingdom's legal position within the European Union; to review the impact of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; and to ensure that European legislation did not impinge upon British criminal law. All these undertakings have been significantly watered down in the coalition agreement, to such an extent that it may be doubted whether any of them will become reality, a definite consequence of pressure on the Conservative Party by its coalition partner. The agreement also envisages willingness for the British government to decide on a "case by case" basis whether to opt into new internal security measures proposed by the European Commission, another significant concession by the Conservative Party to the Liberal Democrats.

Comment

It is widely believed that David Cameron is not sorry to be able to use the coalition with the Liberal Democrats as an excuse to abandon some of the more radical Eurosceptic policies promised in the Conservative Party's manifesto. This belief is reinforced by his striking willingness to refrain from appointing as Minister for Europe the party's spokesman in opposition on European questions, Mark Francois, a prominent Eurosceptic who played a leading role in the withdrawal of the Conservative Members of Parliament from the European People's Party group at the European Parliament. The Minister for Europe will be instead David Lidington, a former special advisor to Douglas Hurd when the latter was British Foreign Secretary in the 1990s. Conservative policy towards the European Union over the next five years will undoubtedly be more conciliatory in tone and even in substance than it would have been if the Conservative Party were in government on its own.

Nevertheless, the election of 2010 marks an important milestone in the process of semi-detachment of the United Kingdom from the European Union. The decisions neither to join the Euro in this legislative period, nor to prepare to do so over the next five years; to reject any British participation in the deepening of sovereignty-sharing over the next five years; and the legacy to future governments of a binding and constricting Referendum Bill – all these are significant and cumulatively unmistakable moves of retreat for the United Kingdom from any aspiration to be treated as a full member of the European Union. In the same way that David Cameron's willingness to soften his party's

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Euroscepticism in the coalition says much about his long-term conception for the Conservative Party's future positioning in British politics, so the willingness of the Liberal Democrats to join a government with a strong underlying Eurosceptic agenda says much about the movement of that party from its traditional position as the most outspokenly pro-European party in the United Kingdom. It may well be that the Liberal Democrats see no incongruity between the traditional pro-European position of their party and a willingness for the United Kingdom to remain outside the Euro for seven years at least. If that is so, that fact of itself says much about the state of the European debate in the United Kingdom in 2010 and how much the United Kingdom's understanding of its role in the European Union has changed over the past fifteen years.

¹ Coalition agreement, May 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?