


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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Belgium**European leadership needs to avoid disappointing results in the future**

Nathalie Brack*

The climate conference in Copenhagen: a disappointment for all actors

All actors in Belgium were deeply disappointed by the results of the climate conference in Copenhagen. After so much work, high expectations and intense negotiations, both the climate organisations and the political parties hoped to have a binding agreement at the end of the conference.¹ The main Belgian climate movement claimed that the agreed text is weak and vague, without any commitment, due to the uncooperative attitude of China and the USA, but also to a lack of leadership from Europe.² For the main political parties in Belgium, the conference was a missed opportunity. They all declared to be deeply disappointed. The French-speaking Greens and the Christian-Democrats insisted on the importance of staying mobilised, whereas the Socialists stressed the lack of solidarity between the North and the South and between industrialised and developing countries.³ For the Prime Minister, Yves Leterme, and the Minister for Climate and Energy Policy, Paul Magnette, these weak results are mainly due to the attitude of China, which did not want to negotiate or help finance anything. But the USA is also to blame: the Belgian Prime Minister declared being deceived by the US propositions to reduce their CO₂ emissions by only 4 percent by 2020. The strategy of the EU, on the other hand, was completely supported by Belgium. Indeed, the country fully agreed with the unilateral commitment of the EU to reduce its emissions by 20 percent by 2020 and supports the position that the EU cannot be the only actor to set such an ambitious target.⁴

A crucial leadership role for the EU in future negotiations within the UNFCCC

Although disappointed, all actors stressed the crucial role of the EU, both internally and at the international level. Indeed, they all argued that the EU should continue to be ambitious in its own targets, and that climate change should remain a top priority on the agenda for the coming years. The national climate movements would even like the EU to commit itself to decreasing its CO₂ emissions by 40 percent by 2020. But, at the political level, the actors claimed that the EU should keep its commitment of 20 percent and could eventually decrease its emissions by 30 percent, if other international actors also commit themselves to more efforts in terms of climate policy.⁵

At the international level, Belgian actors and, more specifically, the Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (Open Vld) declared that the EU should play a leading role, give a new impulse to the international negotiations and make sure a binding agreement is reached during the next climate conference at the end of 2010. Belgian actors are confident that a global agreement with the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the best strategy to fight climate change, but some complementary measures could also be taken. The Belgian Minister for Climate and Energy Policy declared, in that respect, that the EU should maybe consider levying CO₂ taxes on countries that are not willing to cooperate in fighting climate change.⁶

¹ La Libre Belgique, 14 December 2009, available at: www.lalibre.be (last access: 9 May 2010); De Standaard, 16 December 2009, available at: www.standaard.be (last access: 6 May 2010).

² La Libre Belgique, 19 December 2009, available at: www.lalibre.be (last access: 9 May 2010); De Morgen, 19 December 2009, available at: www.demorgen.be (last access: 8 May 2010).

³ Le Soir, 19 December 2009, available at: www.lesoir.be (last access: 8 May 2010); La Libre Belgique, 19 December 2009, available at: www.lalibre.be (last access: 9 May 2010); Ecolo press release, 19 December 2009; cdH (centre démocrate humaniste, i.e. French Speaking Christian Democrats), press release, 19 December 2009.

⁴ La Libre Belgique, 16 December 2009, available at: www.lalibre.be (last access: 9 May 2010); Le Soir, 10 December 2009, available at: www.lesoir.be (last access: 8 May 2010); De Standaard, 10 December 2009, available at: www.standaard.be (last access: 6 May 2010).

⁵ Le Soir, 18 December 2009, available at: www.lesoir.be (last access: 8 May 2010).

⁶ De Morgen, 19 December 2009, available at: www.demorgen.be (last access: 8 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?