

# 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](http://www.EU-27Watch.org).

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**Netherlands****The Netherlands: “firm but fair” towards new EU member states**

Simone Wolters\*

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The Netherlands' position is lukewarm towards further EU enlargement. Many political parties hold sceptical views towards a possible accession of new member states. All political parties have clear standpoints regarding the possible accession of certain countries or regions to the EU. During last year's elections for the European Parliament and in the upcoming national elections the possible accession of Turkey to the EU is a point of discussion, with the Party for Freedom (PVV) being particularly vocal about its opposition to Turkish EU membership. Almost all political parties state specific standpoints on EU enlargement on their websites and a majority of these websites report on possible enlargement with certain countries. Regarding a possible EU enlargement, some political parties raise the issue of the EU's absorption capacity and the necessity to increase this absorption capacity before new countries can enter the Union.<sup>1</sup>

The countries of the Western Balkan are a special case. The Netherlands sees cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) as a condition for entry into the EU. Foreign Minister Verhagen stated furthermore that the Netherlands would be firm but fair regarding the Copenhagen criteria, in the sense that countries that want to access the EU have to fulfil these criteria as well as implement the *acquis*.<sup>2</sup>

*The “Icesave case”*

Dutch public opinion and media are critical towards Iceland's application for EU membership. The prime reason is the bankruptcy of Iceland's banking sector, which affected Dutch consumers and local authorities with savings on Icelandic banks. The popular Icesave bank may be seen as an example. Initially, the Dutch government, which had agreed on a repayment scheme with the Icelandic government, compensated Dutch victims of Icesave's bankruptcy. However, in March 2010, the Icelandic people voted against the agreement to pay back compensation loans to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in a referendum. This has had a negative effect on relations between Iceland and the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

Foreign Minister Verhagen has made two considerations regarding the application for EU membership by Iceland. Firstly, without the Icesave discussion there would not have been a discussion about Iceland's application for EU membership. Secondly, if Iceland wants to become an EU member, the country should apply the *acquis communautaire* like every other candidate state. Part of the duties that arise from the *acquis* are the duties regarding the European Economic Area (EEA) of which Iceland is a member. The compliance with the directive on deposit-guarantee schemes is part of the duties of the EEA. At this moment, the Netherlands is waiting for Iceland to return to the negotiation table. The Netherlands is prepared to talk about the provisions under which Iceland will be able to fulfil its duties. Some parties state that accession talks could create a framework and be used as additional instruments to call Iceland to order and accept its duties according to the *acquis* in a European context.

The Dutch government stated that it is absolutely out of the question that Iceland will join the EU without fulfilling the whole *acquis communautaire*, including the duties based on the deposit-guarantee scheme.<sup>4</sup> The best way for Iceland to join the EU is to show the ability to meet its commitments regarding the deposit-guarantee scheme and to agree to the reimbursement of the loans of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom regarding the Icesave dispute.<sup>5</sup>

*Special emphasis on the Western Balkan*

The Netherlands perceives considerable pressure to accept the Balkan states as EU members.<sup>6</sup> Regarding a possible accession of the Balkans, the Minister of Foreign Affairs does not mention dates. Rather, fulfilment of the criteria will be needed. He also opposes EU enlargement in groups. Every country should be judged on its own merits.<sup>7</sup>

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According to Minister Verhagen, Serbia is working seriously on the reforms needed for accession. This is clearly marked in the progress report of the Commission. In his opinion, Serbia has the most professional government of all countries in the Western Balkans. Serbia has an actual modernisation agenda and the capacity to execute these modernisations. The Dutch government considers complete cooperation with the ICTY as an important condition for possible accession.

The Dutch government is concerned about the increasing nationalistic rhetoric and political tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to Minister Verhagen, the Dayton Treaty brought peace, but the state structure and the Dayton constitution are making the country ungovernable and dysfunctional. At the same time, the patience of the international community is wearing thin. The political leaders have to take more responsibility: "We have to urge them and convince the parties that mutual cooperation is the only option. However, already promising Bosnia that it will one day be able to join the NATO or the EU could have an adverse effect."<sup>8</sup>

#### *Turkey important during elections*

Political parties in the Netherlands are very critical towards a possible entry of Turkey into the EU and possible accession was even considered an important discussion topic during the 2009 elections for the European Parliament. In political debates during election time, right-wing PVV has been especially opposed to Turkish accession to the EU. Other parties except for the Greens and Liberal Democrats (GroenLinks and D66), are critical on their websites and in their election programmes of an eventual accession of Turkey to the EU. On a possible accession of Turkey, Minister Verhagen stated that Turkey could have an important bridging function and could contribute to a dialogue between cultures instead of a "clash of civilisations". According to the Netherlands, the reform process in Turkey has been delayed in the last few years. The speed of these reforms should be accelerated. According to Minister Verhagen, Turkey should be aware of the fact that the negotiations are an open-ended process and Turkey has to make a move. The Dutch goal remains that accession talks are directed at accession, without the outcome being fixed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the websites of the different political parties, available at: [www.cda.nl](http://www.cda.nl); [www.pvda.nl](http://www.pvda.nl); [www.vvd.nl](http://www.vvd.nl); [www.d66.nl](http://www.d66.nl); [www.groenlinks.nl](http://www.groenlinks.nl); [www.Sp.nl](http://www.Sp.nl); [www.pvv.nl](http://www.pvv.nl); [www.cu.nl](http://www.cu.nl); [www.sgp.nl](http://www.sgp.nl) (last access: 22 June 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Eerste Kamer: Algemene Europese beschouwingen, 20 April 2010, 26-1117.

<sup>3</sup> Melle Garschagen: Bevolking IJsland wijst Icesave-akkoord af, NRC Handelsblad, 6 March 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Tweede Kamer: vergaderjaar 2009-2010, 21 501-02, nr. 958, 14-17.

<sup>5</sup> Tweede Kamer: Vergaderjaar 2009-2010, 23 987, nr. 107, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Eerste Kamer: Algemene Europese beschouwingen, 20 April 2010, 26-1081.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 26-1117.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 20 April 2010, 26-1118.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## 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?