

# **EU-27 WATCH**



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# 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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**Sweden****Sweden in favour of enlargements and co-initiator of the Eastern Partnership**

Gunilla Herolf\*

The Swedish government is strongly in favour of the continued enlargement of the EU and sought to bring the process of enlargement forward as much as possible during its Presidency in the latter half of 2009. The Western Balkan countries are seen to be the closest to accession, albeit some are further ahead than others. Icelandic talks are hoped to be initiated soon as well.

For the first country in line, Croatia, Sweden acted to facilitate the agreement to take the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia to a court of arbitration. Nine out of 35 Croatian negotiation chapters were closed during autumn 2009. Furthermore, Iceland submitted its application for EU membership in July 2009 and Serbia did the same in December 2009. An important step in the process of integration leading to membership is visa-free travelling. In July 2009, citizens of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, effective from 19 December 2009, were allowed to travel freely in most of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Bosnia and Herzegovina has fallen behind the other countries in the Western Balkans. Carl Bildt, in an interview, described how he had warned Bosnia and Herzegovina that if they did not get their act together speeding up reforms, other countries would move ahead of them in visa liberalisation and then again in the membership application process. Still, Bosnia did not do so and the country was consequently not included among those to receive visa liberalisation. As the foreign minister sees it, Bosnia and Herzegovina risks falling a number of years behind. One factor that makes it even more risky is the upcoming parliamentary election scheduled for October 2010. Elections are by nature divisive in every country, but, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they are divisive along ethnic lines, which makes the situation worse. This is, however, a problem that the Bosnians must be able to solve themselves: "The EU is a union of sovereign democracies, not protectorates. Bosnian leaders need to demonstrate that they are a country and they can only do so by working among themselves. All in all, the EU has gotten the Balkans moving forward and Bosnia should be able to move forward as well."<sup>2</sup>

Carl Bildt sees the South Caucasus region as having a European perspective; however, in his mind, it is at this stage too early to say whether this will ever lead to membership. Georgia is considerably ahead of the other two South Caucasian countries, but it is not at EU standard. It has also been handling economic issues relatively well, but, in the words of the Foreign Minister, one should not underestimate the economic difficulties ahead in the economy. The Abkhazia and South Ossetia problems will take time to resolve, Bildt believes. The EU will stay firmly committed to Georgia's territorial integrity, but we will have to wait "for the constellation of stars to change in some sort of way" for a full solution to be achieved. In the meantime, Georgia should concentrate on democratic and economic reforms towards Europeanisation. This would also, he thinks, provide the best possible grounds for the solution of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia problems.<sup>3</sup>

Azerbaijan and Armenia will also need to be involved, as the EU has no wish to create divisions in the area. Association Agreements with all three countries are therefore now on the agenda, according to Bildt. The hope is that these agreements would create incentives for the countries to move forward with the necessary economic and political reforms. In addition, it could also, hopefully, create an incentive for the resolution of regional disputes. All three countries would clearly have much to gain from working together, also in economic terms.<sup>4</sup>

Sweden is also in favour of Turkish membership. During the Swedish Presidency, negotiations with the EU were opened on 21 December 2009 on the chapter of environment. According to newspapers, it took place only after strong pressure by Carl Bildt.<sup>5</sup>

Sweden, however, sees Turkish membership as an issue for the future, after considerable reforms have been made in Turkey towards fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria. Carl Bildt expressed the Swedish view in the following way in the annual foreign policy declaration:

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"We welcome the continued democratic transition in Turkey. We view arrests of democratically elected politicians with concern and see the country's reforms – with their increased human rights protection – as a development of very great significance for the future. Although much remains to be achieved, not least a new and modern constitution with greater protection for political rights, we are convinced that the European Union will be both more dynamic economically and stronger politically with Turkey as a member. This would show even more clearly that our European cooperation can bridge the antagonisms that in times past characterised our continent's history, and continue to characterise parts of our world."<sup>6</sup>

Sweden has given Turkey some praise but also serious criticism for policies undertaken during recent times, the criticism directed at certain acts by the political leadership, the Turkish Constitutional Court and the Turkish Army. Carl Bildt saw it, for example, as disturbing that the vote to outlaw the Kurdish Social Democratic Party was taken by unanimity within the constitutional court. The Kurdish issue is seen as the most critical one in the modernisation and Europeanisation of Turkey. Cyprus is another issue, which, although not formally connected to the Turkish accession process, is seen as very critical for it. Reaching an agreement is in both Turkey's and Greece's interests and the essential requirement is now seen to be leadership in Turkey and Greece.<sup>7</sup>

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), being originally a Swedish-Polish proposal launched in 2008 and accepted by the EU in May 2009, continues to be a strong Swedish interest. The EaP is considered important for the continued good cooperation with and integration of the six countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The original proposal was, however, watered down in order to be accepted by the EU: two of the most important elements – visa free travelling and free trade areas – were no longer included. The former met opposition based on the fear of illegal workers and criminal elements taking advantage of it. The Swedish efforts during its Presidency were therefore limited to making visa processes simpler and less bureaucratic. The latter was seen by some countries as leading to too much competition for their own agricultural products, and its introduction was therefore postponed to a future stage of the EaP. Another difference was in the perception of the EaP and related to timing: after the Georgia conflict of August 2008, many countries came to interpret the EaP as a kind of bulwark against Russia, which increased support for it, but was far from the original idea of the Polish-Swedish proposal.

In the annual foreign policy declaration, the Minister for Foreign Affairs declared that, apart from the important steps taken during the Swedish Presidency for the implementation of the EaP, the government will also contribute to its further development during 2010 in order to promote reforms and EU integration among these countries. According to Carl Bildt, "funding of necessary reforms in our partner countries, simpler opportunities for travel and work to and within the EU, trade liberalisation and a strengthened role for civil society are all priority areas."<sup>8</sup>

Foreign Minister Carl Bildt has brought up the visa issue as regards Ukraine in the EU. This was done in connection with the Spanish proposal for visa-free regulation as concerns Russia. Bildt did not object to this, but argued that there has to be a regional approach to the whole set of problems regarding visa-free regulations. For example, we should have approximately the same approach towards the east as we have towards the Balkans. As concerns the Balkans, we have put up criteria for visa-free travelling, saying to them that if they comply with these criteria they will get visa free travelling. Sweden argues that this should also concern countries like Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and, theoretically, also Belarus. This will probably ultimately be the European policy too but not yet. Right now, Bildt argues that this is a politicised issue. Russia has a better arrangement than Ukraine, in spite of the fact that EU citizens are not required to have visas when visiting Ukraine, whereas the difficulties for EU citizens visiting Russia have increased during the last few years. The Swedish claim is that this situation should be harmonised.<sup>9</sup>

In May 2010, Carl Bildt acted together with the Polish Foreign Minister to gather a number of EU foreign ministers and the Ukrainian Foreign Minister to a meeting to learn more about how the Ukrainian government sees its relationship with the EU.<sup>10</sup>

The Union for the Mediterranean as it looks today is considered an important part of the EU's broad Neighbourhood Policy. The version first launched by France was criticised in Sweden as in several other countries, but, in the present version anchored within the EU, it is seen as having a positive impact. In the words of Carl Bildt: "Cooperation with partner countries around the Mediterranean is multifaceted and of strategic importance for the European Union. It also means better opportunities for

strong European commitment within areas that are important to Sweden, such as human rights, democracy, gender equality, trade, investment and the environment.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Union @ United Nations: Croatia and Slovenia agreed on border issue – EU closer to enlargement, 4 November 2009, available at: [http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article\\_9199\\_en.htm](http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_9199_en.htm) (last access: 16 June 2010); EurActiv: Balkan visa deal hailed as ‘giant step’ for Macedonia, 16 July 2009, available at: [www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/balkan-eu-visa-deal-hailed-giant-step-macedonia/article-184185](http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/balkan-eu-visa-deal-hailed-giant-step-macedonia/article-184185) (last access: 8 July 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Carl Bildt: Intervju med Carl Bildt in Turkish Policy Quarterly [Interview with Carl Bildt in Turkish Policy Quarterly], 14 December 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Dagens Nyheter, 12 December 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs: Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Government Offices of Sweden, 17 February 2010, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Bildt: Intervju med Carl Bildt in Turkish Policy Quarterly [Interview with Carl Bildt in Turkish Policy Quarterly], 14 December 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs: Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Government Offices of Sweden, 17 February 2010, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Committee on EU Affairs, 7 May 2010, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs: Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs, Government Offices of Sweden, 17 February 2010, p. 6.

## 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?