

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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Finland**On biased negotiations, Balkan stereotypes and Arctic potential**

Tuulia Nieminen, Johanna Nykänen and Aaretti Siitonen*

During the reporting period, a conflict between the official policy of Finland and popular sentiment in the country towards EU enlargement could be detected. The government held that enlargement benefited Finland politically and economically, and lay at the core of its EU policy. More specifically, “Finland supports the membership negotiations of Turkey and Croatia and the Western Balkans’ closer proximity to the EU.”¹ At the same time, according to a Eurobarometer survey conducted in autumn 2009, a majority (55 percent) of Finns were against enlargement of the EU in the coming years. Although two out of five (40 percent) were in favour of enlargement, Finns are somewhat more reserved on this than EU citizens on average. According to the survey, the cautiousness of Finns can be explained by the fact that a great majority feel that the EU has grown too quickly. However, judging from the Finnish press coverage, a more realistic explanation might be that, apart from Iceland, the candidate countries remain distant and unknown to Finns, and this causes uncertainty and some reservations. Also, ministerial level visits concentrated on Finland’s neighbouring area, with even the Prime Minister’s office admitting that the Mediterranean region and some new member states were being neglected.²

Iceland’s EU membership was largely perceived as an open-and-shut affair, and, as such, separate from other current and awaiting applications. Indeed, comparisons with Bulgaria and Greece were made to argue that the EU criteria for membership favours some states over others; Iceland, the daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat wrote in its main editorial, already implements EU legislation better than, for example, the aforementioned member states.³ Iceland was expected to become a member of the EU in the next enlargement round, notwithstanding its economic turmoil and the Icesave dispute with the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Foreign Minister Stubb believed that Croatia is already almost at the finishing line. He also envisaged that membership negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could be opened this year. Referring to Turkey, Stubb strongly emphasised that the EU must treat all applicants equally and keep its promises.⁴

Reporting on the EU prospects of the Balkan candidate countries fluctuated between informing the readers about the largely unknown countries and reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes of the region being a “powder keg”, where, in the words of Aamulehti journalist Veikko Vuorikoski, “the burden of history prevents the countries from becoming fully-fledged members of the European family.”⁵ Indeed, reporting tended to lean towards the negative, with Serbia only brought up to praise the EU for forcing the Serbian parliament to publicly condemn Srebrenica and to suggest that visa freedom for Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians has caused a wave of Albanians to arrive in the EU.⁶ Turkey’s role as a significant energy supplier to the EU was mentioned, as was Moldova’s frustration with its slow progress towards EU membership.⁷

Partly overlapping with the debate on the prospective member states is the discussion on Finland’s potential to become a flag bearer in the EU’s Arctic policy, which has gained prominence. At the end of 2009, the parliamentary foreign affairs committee held a session on the relations between Finland and the Arctic region, concluding that it is important for Finland to profile itself as an Arctic and Northern state in order to reap all the political and economic benefits that the region has to offer. This sentiment is shared by researchers.⁸ In a newspaper column, Social Democrat Member of the European Parliament Liisa Jaakonsaari emphasised that environmental and security issues, together with the living conditions of indigenous people, must be taken fully into account when planning Finland’s policies towards the Arctic.⁹

¹ Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland: EU enlargement, available at: <http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?nodeid=15624&contentlan=1&culture=fi-FI> (last access: 19 May 2010).

² Suomenmaa: Suomalaisministereitä eivät kiinnosta vierailut Välimeren maissa, 17 December 2010.

³ Helsingin Sanomat: Icesave-kiista pois Islannin EU-tieltä, 26 February 2010.

⁴ Turun Sanomat: Kroatian kanssa lähestytään maaliviivaa – Turkin EU-jäsenyydelle entistä tiukemmat ehdot, 9 December 2010.

⁵ Aamulehti: Enemmän kuin pientä laitton tarvetta, 12 February 2010.

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⁶ Helsingin Sanomat: Serbia lähetti viestin Brysseliin, 2 April 2010; Helsingin Sanomat: Viisumivapaus aiheutti albaanien vyöryn EU:hun, 3 March 2010.

⁷ Helsingin Sanomat: Turkki haluaa energiamahdiksi, 2 April 2010; Turun Sanomat: Moldova turhautui EU-tien hitauteen, 6 April 2010.

⁸ Lotta Numminen: Jäämeren suojeleminen vaatii uutta hallintatapaa, Helsingin Sanomat, 6 April 2010.

⁹ Kaleva: Aukaiseeko Ashton arktisen aarrearkun, 2 March 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?