


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**Public attitudes on enlargement mixed**

Brendan Donnelly*

Enlargement and related questions for the future of the European Union are rarely discussed at a popular level in the United Kingdom. To the extent that they are, public attitudes are mixed, with concern about competition for jobs from Eastern European workers gaining salience. At the political and official level, the question of the Union's enlargement is one of much greater interest, not least because it has traditionally been regarded by British political circles as a policy which would undermine Franco-German leadership within the European Union and act as a brake on the deepening of political integration. Both these goals have seen desirable aspirations to successive British governments of recent decades.

The next round of enlargement

The British government expects Croatia to be the next country to join the European Union, possibly with Iceland.¹ The British government supports Croatia's candidature, but it is not yet clear whether British willingness to support Icelandic entry to the Union is dependent upon a settlement of outstanding financial issues between the two countries. British depositors who regard themselves as having been badly treated by the Icelandic banks could well form a powerful political lobby arguing against Icelandic membership before their claims have been satisfactorily settled. The accession of Croatia is unlikely to provoke any great interest or controversy in the United Kingdom, except in the unlikely event of a referendum being held on the subject. It is almost inconceivable that any British government could win any referendum on any European topic in the foreseeable future, with the possible exception of a referendum about wholesale British withdrawal from the European Union, in which the government campaigned against withdrawal.

Future enlargement

For the same reasons as weighed with its predecessors, the new British government is likely to regard Turkish accession to the Union as an important goal of policy.² This view will be reinforced by a general belief among the United Kingdom's political classes that Turkey would be stabilised as a secular democracy, playing a constructive role in the Middle East, if it were anchored in the European Union. British public opinion on the subject of Turkish accession to the European Union remains largely untested. It should certainly not be assumed that non-elite opinion in the United Kingdom would be favourable to Turkish accession if the question ever became a pressing one. The accession of other potential candidate countries, for instance from the Western Balkans, is likely to remain of only marginal interest to the British government in comparison with the Turkish candidature.

The Union's neighbours

The new British government is likely to seek good relations between the European Union and its neighbours such as the Ukraine, without encouraging the view that membership of the Union for such countries is a realistic possibility in current or foreseeable circumstances.

Neighbourhood policy and the Mediterranean Union

Neither the European Neighbourhood Policy nor the Union for the Mediterranean play any discernible part in public or political discourse on the European Union in the United Kingdom.

¹ Conservative General Election Manifesto 2010.

² 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?