


# EU-27 WATCH



**No. 9**  
July 2010

ISSN 1610-6458

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

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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).

The EU-27 Watch No. 9 receives significant funding from the **Otto Wolff-Foundation, Cologne**, in the framework of the *"Dialog Europa der Otto Wolff-Stiftung"*, and financial support from the **European Commission**. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

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**Austria****Presidential elections in Austria**

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In the reporting period, the presidential elections of 25 April 2010 were the major issue dominating domestic politics and related debate. Apart from the incumbent, Heinz Fischer, a Social Democrat running as an independent candidate, Barbara Rosenkranz from the Freedom Party and Rudolf Gehring from a small party called the Christian Party of Austria (CPÖ) ran for the office. However, given Heinz Fischer's popularity, combined with the ideological affiliation and comparatively unglamorous careers of his challengers, there existed no doubts that Fischer was going to win. Thus, the election campaign lacked any excitement. Nevertheless, the personality of Barbara Rosenkranz and the general attitude adopted by the People's Party during the election campaign caused some controversies.

The candidate of the far-right Freedom Party, Barbara Rosenkranz, was to put the prohibition law banning Nazi ideology and penalising any attempt to glorify or play down Nazi crimes in question.<sup>1</sup> This prompted severe criticism and her eligibility for the office of the president was challenged. Moreover, the publisher of Austria's best-selling tabloid *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, Hans Dichand, who had previously announced his support for Rosenkranz, now demanded that she should publicly denounce National Socialism. Upon this, Rosenkranz signed an affidavit saying she condemned Nazi crimes and ideology. In the end, Rosenkranz only got about 15 percent of the vote.

As for the People's Party, given the aforementioned popularity of Heinz Fischer and the prospect of him being re-elected in the end, the ÖVP did not nominate a candidate. At the same time, despite the controversies surrounding Rosenkranz, People's Party officials refrained from endorsing the candidacy of Heinz Fischer, who is a former Social Democratic Parliament Speaker and Minister. Instead, prominent ÖVP politicians such as the leader of the parliamentary group, Karlheinz Kopf, openly declared that they would participate in the elections but only submit a blank ballot.<sup>2</sup> This was, of course, severely criticised by the Social Democratic Party.

The controversies surrounding the personality of Barbara Rosenkranz, the stance adopted by the People's Party and the expectation that Heinz Fischer would be re-elected anyway all added to discussions on the rationale behind the office of the president and contributed to a very low voter turnout (54 percent). Heinz Fischer and Barbara Rosenkranz respectively won 79.33 percent and 15.24 percent of the vote, while Rudolf Gehring captured 5.43 percent.

Apart from the issues raised in the questionnaire and the abovementioned presidential elections, the disruptions in the air traffic caused by the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull Volcano in Iceland, as well as the explosion of an offshore oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico causing the spilling of millions of tons of oil into the sea were also very salient in the reporting period.

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<sup>1</sup> Der Standard, 3 March 2010; AustrianTimes.at: Rosenkranz 'condemns Nazi crimes', 8 March 2010, available at: [http://www.austriantimes.at/news/General\\_News/2010-03-08/21366/Rosenkranz\\_%27condemns\\_Nazi\\_crimes%27](http://www.austriantimes.at/news/General_News/2010-03-08/21366/Rosenkranz_%27condemns_Nazi_crimes%27) (last access: 22 May 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Der Standard, 29 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?