

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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Ireland**Enlarging Ireland**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The government's stated position is that "the accession process provides strong encouragement for political and economic reform and that future enlargement will help to promote stability, security and prosperity in Europe."¹ While the accession of ten new member states in 2004 was greeted with great fanfare and celebration in Ireland, there is also a keen awareness that enlargement creates greater competition for foreign investment, which has been a key driver of Irish economic growth in recent years.² The fact that the newer member states are closer to the main EU markets and have lower labour costs has already damaged Irish interests as major multinationals shift their manufacturing operations from Ireland to Poland and elsewhere.³ This awareness is somewhat balanced by the knowledge that Ireland benefited greatly from the labour and skills pool of the new member states during its recent boom and that further eastward expansion provides an opportunity to diversify its trade patterns in an enlarged European single market. But, in a climate of economic recession and renewed emigration, a degree of scepticism about the benefits of further enlargement is likely to remain.

Croatian accession is likely to prove unproblematic from an Irish perspective. However, key issues – such as the ability of Albania, Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro to meet the accession requirements, the status of Kosovo, the ongoing name dispute between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and unresolved tensions between Cyprus and Turkey – represent obstacles which must be overcome before further eastern expansion is likely to be wholeheartedly welcomed from an Irish perspective. Assuming a resolution of the name dispute, Macedonian accession will probably pass with little comment from Irish sources. Turkish membership, for the same reasons that are familiar across Europe, might prove a harder sell, though the Minister for Foreign Affairs describes Ireland's approach to Turkey's candidacy as "supportive". He also notes that there are "potential gains to the single market and to trade through the accession of a country of Turkey's size" and that "[t]he Union's reach and influence in the Middle East and Central Asia could be enhanced through Turkish accession".⁴ The prospect of Turkish accession was raised in a negative light during the two Lisbon referendums, but it is not clear what effect, if any, this negative campaigning had on voting patterns.

Perhaps because of Ireland's geographic location in the north-western corner of Europe, European Neighbourhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership have not gained much traction in the public discourse. However, an increasing awareness of the importance of Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhood, particularly in terms of energy security, is beginning to raise the profile of these initiatives. Strong bilateral relationships with Moldova and Georgia also play a significant role in terms of perceptions of developments in frozen conflicts.

There is much general sympathy in Ireland for Iceland's difficulties and in bilateral contacts the Irish government has told the government of Iceland that it is supportive of its application for EU membership.⁵

Because Ireland has had, on balance, a generally positive experience with migration from Eastern Europe, and with the integration of communities of "New Irish", there is little objection in principle to European enlargement to encompass many of the former Balkan and Baltic states. However, what will be looked for, especially in the wake of the Greek debt crisis with its contagion effects for Ireland, is solid evidence of each candidate country's fiscal solvency and political stability.

The next Irish general election must take place by 2012 at the latest. It is difficult to say if immigration will become an issue in that contest, but, as has been the case elsewhere in Europe, we can anticipate that, at some stage, the issue will become more politicised, with consequent effects for how the prospect of further enlargement is viewed. However, as many European immigrants have returned home in response to the Irish recession, the potential negative employment effects of immigration have been muted up to now.

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¹ Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 15 December 2009. Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-12-15.1541.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

² Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement – Ireland Leading the Way, available at: www.dfa.ie/home/index.aspx?id=28462 (last access: 10 May 2010).

³ See for example this statement from Dell: Dell to Migrate Manufacturing Operations from Ireland to Poland and Partners by Early 2010, available at: http://www.dell.com/content/topics/global.aspx/corp/pressoffice/en/2009/2009_01_08_rr_000?c=us&l=en (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁴ Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 30 March 2010. Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2010-03-30.696.0> (last access: 10 May 2010).

⁵ Dáil written answers: Tuesday, 22 September 2009. Department of Foreign Affairs: EU Enlargement, available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-09-22.1244.0> (last access: 10 May 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?