

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**Copenhagen to Cancun**

Shane Fitzgerald*

The general view in Ireland was that both the organisation and the outcome of the Copenhagen climate change conference was unsatisfactory. Frank McDonald of The Irish Times, among other Irish journalists, described the huge conference venue as “bedlam”.¹ The Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, expressed disappointment at the outcome, stating that “[t]he substance of the European Union’s [offers] was robustly put, but we couldn’t get the commitment of others.” He added that “we did not achieve everything we wanted, but the reality is that this is as much as can be advanced at this stage.”² The Minister for the Environment, John Gormley (Green Party), described the Copenhagen Accord itself as “underwhelming”, stating that its only advantage was that it “keeps the process alive” until the next climate change conference in Cancun in December 2010. Officials from the Minister for the Environment’s office speaking in confidence lamented the inability of the EU to present a united front at negotiations and expressed deep disappointment at the outcome. Irish charities and NGOs also expressed their dissatisfaction, with some blaming the EU’s failure to offer a 30 percent emissions reduction for the collapse of the talks. Finally, the mood among the general public varied between frustration and bemusement.

Analysis of the outcome by Joseph Curtin, climate policy specialist at the Institute of International and European Affairs, reported widely by the Irish media, identified the naivety of the EU’s approach to negotiations, the inability to effectively marshal and use all instruments at its disposal, the failure to build strategic alliances, and the lack of a central EU negotiator as key causes of the bloc’s poor performance at what was supposed to be the venue of a major display of European solidarity, vision and purpose.³

Irish attitudes

Few concrete indicators exist but anecdotal evidence and media commentary suggest that climate change scepticism and indifference may be on the rise in Ireland. Doubts about the science, already exacerbated by the recent scandals of data manipulation and misrepresentation at the University of Essex Climate Research Unit and the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, have been compounded by the “evidence” of an unusually icy winter, which has served to embolden the rhetoric of climate change sceptics.⁴

On a more positive note, after years in which Ireland lagged behind continental partners when it came to environmental awareness and policy, the current government – a coalition between the dominant party of Irish politics (the centre-right Fianna Fail) and a much smaller Green Party – is trying to prove itself in this arena, and is doing so very much by reference to its European partners. A recent renegotiation of the programme for government resulted in considerable concessions to the Green Party’s agenda and the Irish government was vocal even before Copenhagen in supporting a revision of the agreed 2020 mission’s reduction target from 20 percent to 30 percent. From an Irish perspective, the EU’s own climate change policy is generally seen as adequate, though there are of course vast differences of opinion between, for example, the environmental and the business lobbies.

One area where these two lobbies often overlap, and indeed align with government policy priorities, is in that of renewable energy. The Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Eamon Ryan (Green Party), believes that Ireland can become a renewables powerhouse in the post-2020 period by intensively developing its wind and wave resources, and could ultimately be in a position to export electricity to Europe.⁵

There is already a lot of commercial activity in this area. One example is an agreement recently signed between the Energia electricity supplier and the US-based Ocean Energy Systems, whose wave energy converter (WEC) is currently being developed off the west coast of Ireland.⁶ Ambitious plans also exist in tidal⁷ and wind⁸ energy. What these proposals for transforming Ireland’s energy infrastructure have in common is that they all depend heavily on the existence of a next generation European electricity grid connecting the continent’s electricity suppliers and consumers much more

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efficiently than has been the case until now. Irish interests will be keen to maintain a policy focus on this goal at the EU level.⁹

Joseph Curtin (of the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland) argues for the idea that the EU should introduce a border adjustment tariff for countries which are failing to meet emissions targets. While a risk of tit-for-tat responses leading to trade protectionism does exist, such a move could prove extremely powerful as a negotiating tactic in talks with third parties over a comprehensive climate agreement. It would also demonstrate clearly that the EU is capable of transforming its economic clout into real political capital.

Ultimately, a global agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) should be the objective of these negotiations. However, so-called “mini-lateral” negotiations (between the EU, the USA, Japan and the BASIC bloc of China, India, South Africa and Brazil in particular) may offer more promise initially as they are not beset by the same procedural obstacles as UN negotiations.

The failure of Copenhagen is read in Ireland as a failure of *EU* diplomacy first and foremost. More creative avenues may now have to be found. Progress made at fora such as the G20, for example, might later be presented to UNFCCC for approval. In some cases (e.g., China’s alliances with G77) partners in strategic alliances at Copenhagen which opposed the EU seemed to have little in common. The EU needs to learn from such manoeuvres by cultivating bilateral relationships with a variety of developed and developing country partners. It must also prioritise the mainstreaming of climate change objectives into its external policy instruments such as its aid, trade and energy programmes.

The Minister for the Environment has said that developing countries argued “strongly” in Copenhagen that they should not be denied development due to global climate change mitigation measures and that Ireland is willing to play its role in contributing to EU financing commitments as required. Although he personally has confirmed that he wishes Ireland’s contribution to be “additional” to existing aid commitments, the government has yet to officially confirm that this will be the case. At a time of severe budgetary tightening and uncertainty, this is a central issue for many of the Irish development and environmental NGOs active in this area.

¹ Irish Times: Climate talks venue becomes hothouse as key debate looms, 14 December 2009, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2009/12/14/1224260654343.html?via=rel> (last access: 18 May 2010).

² Reported in the Guardian: Copenhagen: The last-ditch drama that saved the deal from collapse, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/dec/20/copenhagen-climate-global-warming> (last access: 18 May 2010).

³ Joseph Curtin: 2010. The Copenhagen Conference: How Should the EU Respond?, available at: <http://www.iiea.com/publications/the-copenhagen-conference-how-should-the-eu-respond> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁴ See for example Frank Mc Donald: Europe must lead the way against climate scepticism, Irish Times, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/03/04/1224265557823.html> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See for example siliconrepublic.com: Green Tech. Energia takes on Ireland’s wave power, 10 May 2010, available at: <http://www.siliconrepublic.com/news/article/16152/green-tech/energia-takes-on-irelands-wave-power> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁷ See for example siliconrepublic.com: Green Tech. OpenHydro to deploy 200MW tidal energy farm off Scotland, 16 March 2010, available at: <http://www.siliconrepublic.com/news/article/15589/green-tech/openhydro-to-deploy-200mw-tidal-energy-farm-off-scotland> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁸ See the Spirit of Ireland Website, available at: <http://www.spiritofireland.org/index.php> (last access: 18 May 2010).

⁹ See for example this presentation by Eddie O’Connor, of Mainstream Renewable Power, to the IIEA, available at: <http://www.iiea.com/events/the-european-supergird> (last access: 18 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?