

EU-27 WATCH



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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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Italy**Inclusive attitude towards possible new members**

Jacopo Leone*

In the Italian debate, it is common opinion that Croatia and Macedonia are the best candidates to enter the EU in the next enlargement round. In this regard, comments are usually positive. Indeed, the national political establishment has traditionally supported the access of the Balkan countries to the EU. In the words of Italian Foreign Minister Frattini, Croatia and Macedonia have both overcome several obstacles, and it seems legitimate to imagine Zagreb in the EU in the course of 2011.¹ The same opinion is expressed by the research community, which noticed how the recent election of Ivo Josipović as Croatian President substantially increased the odds of the country joining the EU.²

The case of Macedonia appears more problematic. The Italian government is striving to push Brussels to open negotiations as soon as possible, leaving aside the thorny debate with Greece over the name of the former Yugoslav Republic.³

The forthcoming European membership of both Croatia and Macedonia are thus considered with favour by the Italian political parties and public opinion. As reported in the National Strategic Concept of the Ministry of Defense, the reason is mainly geostrategic.⁴ This approach is therefore likely to remain consistent in the near future, concerning the whole Balkan area.

The inclusive attitude towards possible new European member states is maintained by Italy also in regard of other, more problematic, candidates. Montenegro, Albania and Serbia are all examples of this state of affairs. Although there are still concerns about their political/economic performance, the Italian government and the Foreign Minister Frattini have demanded a rapid solution concerning their admission requests, raising their chances to join the EU significantly.⁵

The case of Kosovo appears, however, to be more complex. Diplomatic divisions over its fresh independence still persist in Europe, and a solution seems improbable in the short term.⁶ Nevertheless, Frattini recently stated that Kosovo has a European future, acknowledging at the same time the need for a more balanced rule of law system in the country.⁷ The same position is also maintained on the European future of Serbia, for which Prime Minister Berlusconi hoped a rapid admission into the EU.⁸

Interestingly enough, however, the last available Eurobarometer shows that the Italian public, thinking that the EU has enlarged too rapidly in recent years, remains against new enlargement rounds.⁹

In addition, it is important to underline here the Italian position regarding the controversial candidature of Turkey. Although the issue remains divisive at the national political level, the government recently restated its support to an eventual entrance of Turkey into the EU.¹⁰

The Mediterranean Sea is an important geostrategic region for Italy. This interest was recently restated when Foreign Minister Frattini called, in an article appearing in one of the most important national newspapers, for the creation of an economic community in the Mediterranean, able to mirror the European project and further the creation of future common values and political stability.¹¹ Therefore, Italian support for the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) seems rather natural. Even if the project is going through a phase of deep reflection, the Italian government renewed during a meeting with the French President Sarkozy its support for the UfM and its will to working for the successful implementation of its activities.¹²

Uneasiness towards the poor results of the initiative has been expressed by the President of the Italian Republic Giorgio Napolitano, who highlighted that its unexpressed potentialities continue to prevail over tangible results.¹³ Moreover, the Italian research community also expressed scepticism, noting how the UfM continues to exist only on paper, far away from the goal included in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of the creation of a free-trade area in the Mediterranean.¹⁴ The upcoming conference in Barcelona, scheduled for June 2010, will probably give more information regarding

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these difficulties and the future of the UfM, although the usual contrasts between Israel and Arab countries risk to frustrate any potential improvement.

On the other hand, less interest has been expressed on the Eastern Partnership. Indeed, the subject has been somewhat sidelined by the Italian press and public debate, and few declarations have been made by the Foreign Minister Frattini. During a meeting with his Moldavian counterpart, Frattini reaffirmed Italy's great interest in the Eastern Partnership, hoping to transform this cooperation tool through several association agreements with the Caucasian countries, which had been previously done with Moldova and Ukraine.¹⁵ The same position had been maintained before in regard of Belarus.¹⁶

For its part, some members of the Italian research community preferred to highlight the weak influence the Eastern Partnership has on several latent conflicts in its geographical area. In this regard, the foundation of a stronger cooperation between Brussels and Moscow is ultimately suggested as a possible way forward. The role for Italy is to favour this complicated political dialogue with Russia, and assess whether the role of non-governmental actors within the Eastern Partnership is possible.¹⁷

¹ Franco Frattini: Intervento del Ministro Franco Frattini all'International Desk Forum sugli "Scenari di sviluppo dell'Area Adriatico-Balcanica", Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8 March 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interventi/2010/03/20100308_InternationalDesk.htm (last access: 21 April 2010).

² Giovanna Casa: La Croazia più vicina all'UE dopo la vittoria di Josipovic, AffarInternazionali, 13 January 2010, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1363> (last access: 21 April 2010).

³ Franco Frattini: Intervento del Ministro Franco Frattini all'International Desk Forum su gli "Scenari di sviluppo dell'Area Adriatico-Balcanica", Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8 March 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interventi/2010/03/20100308_InternationalDesk.htm (last access: 21 April 2010).

⁴ Il Concetto Strategico del Capo di Stato Maggiore della Difesa, Ministero della Difesa, available at: <http://www.difesa.it/NR/rdonlyres/7CF00FEA-D74E-4533-B3ED-9CCCD8B79E89/0/libroconcettostrategico.pdf> (last access: 21 April 2010).

⁵ Franco Frattini: Intervento del Ministro Franco Frattini all'International Desk Forum su gli "Scenari di sviluppo dell'Area Adriatico-Balcanica", Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8 March 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interventi/2010/03/20100308_InternationalDesk.htm (last access: 21 April 2010); Michele Comelli/Raffaello Matarazzo: L'Unione Europea ed il ruolo dell'Italia, in: Gianni Bonvicini/Alessandro Colombo (eds.): La politica estera italiana, Il Mulino 2010, p. 107.

⁶ Pietro Paolo Proto: La tormentata strada del Kosovo verso l'UE, AffarInternazionali, 16 February 2010, available at: <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1394> (last access: 21 April 2010).

⁷ ASCA: La Croazia nell'UE entro il 2011, 8 March 2010, available at: http://www.asca.it/news-BALCANI_FRATTINI_LA_CROAZIA_NELL_UE_ENTRO_IL_2011-899905-ORA-.html (last access: 21 April 2010).

⁸ Il Foglio: L'Europa si apre alla Serbia e la Serbia si apre all'Europa, 18 December 2009, available at: <http://www.ilfoglio.it/soloqui/4077> (last access: 21 April 2010).

⁹ Eurobarometro: Rapporto Nazionale Italia, Eurobarometro n.72, Autumn 2009, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_it_nat.pdf (last access: 4 May 2010).

¹⁰ La Stampa: La UE resta scettica sull'adesione, 23 February 2010, available at: http://archivio.lastampa.it/LaStampaArchivio/main/History/tmpl_viewObj.jsp?objid=10220436 (last access: 21 April 2010).

¹¹ Franco Frattini: Mediterraneo e svolte: serve un authority, Corriere della Sera, 5 February 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interviste/2010/02/20100205_FrattiniTrieste.htm?LANG=IT (last access: 22 April 2010).

¹² Ministero degli Affari Esteri: Vertice Italo-Francese, 9 April 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Approfondimenti/2010/04/20100409_Vertice_ItaliaFrancia.htm (last access: 22 April 2010).

¹³ L'Unione Sarda: Mediterraneo, Napolitano: l'Europa deve fare di più, 26 January 2010, available at: <http://unionesarda.ilssole24ore.com/Articoli/Articolo/165428> (last access: 22 April 2010).

¹⁴ Aspen Institute: Back to the fertile crescent, 6 March 2010, available at: http://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspen/?q=ev/AspenEuropeanDialogue_10 (last access: 22 April 2010).

¹⁵ Il Piccolo: Frattini-Leanca 'Moldova a un passo dall'UE', 26 February 2010, available at: http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interviste/2010/02/20100226_MoldovaaunpassodallUE.htm (last access: 22 April 2010).

¹⁶ Il Messaggero: Nella UE ci può essere posto anche per la Bielorussia, 29 September 2009, available at: http://www.esteri.gov.it/MAE/Templates/IntervIntervTemplate.aspx?NRMODE=Published&NRNODEGUID=%7B773A0E29-DD83-46C6-B7D7-6B037B5362DD%7D&NRORIGINALURL=%2FMAE%2FIT%2FSala_Stampa%2FArchivioNotizie%2FInterviste%2F2009%2F09%2F20090929_Frattini_Bielorussia.htm&NRCACHEHINT=Guest (last access: 22 April 2010).

¹⁷ Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale: Il Partenariato Orientale dell'UE tra debolezze e potenzialità, Senato della Repubblica, December 2009, available at: http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Approfondimento_%20Partenariato%20Orientale.pdf (last access: 4 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?