

EU-27 WATCH

No. 9
July 2010

ISSN 1610-6458

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.

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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Slovakia**Enlargement favoured but not at any price**Vladimír Bilčík

Historically, Slovakia has been a strong supporter of enlargement, though in recent years the country's position has become more nuanced. Most consistently, Slovakia's politicians have supported Croatia's bid to enter the European Union. Shortly after Slovakia's accession to the EU, the country was unhappy with the initial Council's decision to postpone the opening of accession talks with Croatia beyond March 2004. The then Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda was a vocal advocate and one of the driving forces of Croatia's swift incorporation into the Union. Slovakia's diplomacy thus continued to push for a re-examination of the Council's decision and was happy to welcome the compromise solution whereby both Croatia and Turkey officially began their respective accession talks on 3 October (or the early hours of 4 October) 2005. In the aftermath of the launch of official talks with the two countries, Prime Minister Dzurinda stated during his press conference that Slovakia would offer Croatia cooperation in negotiations on the various chapters of the acquis. At the same time, the Prime Minister said that Slovakia would try to see both Ukraine and Serbia and Montenegro enter the same path of European integration.¹

Today, Slovakia is still in favour of enlargement, but not at any price and not to all flanks of Europe. Turkey has always been a specific case, as Slovakia's former Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan highlighted by saying that the negotiations with Ankara "will be demanding and very, very long."² But even apart from Turkey, support for enlargement has somewhat waned. On an official visit to Germany on 3 November 2005, the then Slovak Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda stated rather surprisingly that the absorption capacity of the European Union had its limits and that the EU needed a "pause" in its further enlargement.³ The government of Prime Minister Robert Fico (2006-2010) continued to support Croatia's accession process as well as the ambitions to join the EU articulated by other Western Balkan countries. It also had a more open attitude to Turkey's difficult accession process and endorsed the application of Iceland. Realistically, Slovakia's politicians expect Croatia to join the EU in the near future. They also hope for advancements in the accession process of other countries in the Western Balkans, especially Serbia and Montenegro, and are keen on stable developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Macedonia. Slovakia has the least intensive bilateral relations with Albania and, moreover, it is among the EU member states that do not recognise the independent state of Kosovo.

At the same time, Slovakia's politicians have been less enthusiastic about Ukraine's EU aspirations. Today, nobody in Slovakia openly ponders Ukraine's chances to join the EU. Although, to an important extent, this has more to do with the wasted domestic political opportunity offered by the Orange Revolution to Ukraine, Slovak-Ukrainian relations have also suffered from bilateral conflicts during the gas crisis of 2009 and over the state of the border regime along the Schengen border between Slovakia and Ukraine. Thus, Slovakia is a good case of a more nuanced attitude during the launching of the Eastern Partnership Initiative by Poland and Sweden in June 2008 and the subsequent elaboration of the Eastern Partnership by the European Commission in December 2008. The experience with the gas crisis when Russia stopped its deliveries of natural gas due to a conflict with Ukraine has made Slovakia's diplomacy more lukewarm to Ukraine's ambitions to ultimately achieve both EU and NATO membership. Most Slovak governing politicians and the Slovak public blamed Ukraine for the crisis in deliveries of natural gas.⁴ In a public radio discussion, the political director general of the Foreign Ministry, Igor Slobodník, questioned whether "the strategic culture of this country [Ukraine] has reached the state when it could be a reliable and responsible ally in this moment in 2009 and the answer is unclear."⁵ While Slovakia's official position vis-à-vis Ukraine has not changed and Slovakia actively supports Kiev's ambitions to work more closely with the EU and NATO (for example, Slovakia's embassy in Kiev serves as the contact point for NATO),⁶ Slobodník underlined that Slovakia would be more critical in its evaluation of Ukraine's ability to digest Slovakia's technical assistance. In short, Slovakia is likely to be more demanding in relation to Ukraine since Ukraine's credibility has suffered as a consequence of the recent gas crisis.

Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, Slovakia's diplomacy recently showed its keen interest in engaging with Moldova's pro-reform government. Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák visited

· [Slovak Foreign Policy Association](#).

Chişinău on 7 May 2010 and underlined Slovakia's support for domestic changes in Moldova by announcing Slovakia's contribution to the modernisation of Moldova's TV station Tele Radio Moldova and by underlining broader opportunities for Slovakia's bilateral engagement through new projects of official development assistance.⁷ Slovakia does not have any vocal or specific preferences with respect to the Union for the Mediterranean.

¹ Slovenská Tlačová Agentúra (SITA): Ano Turecku a Chorvatsku posilni bezpečnosť v Európe, 4 October 2005.

² Tlačová agentúra Slovenskej republiky (TASR): SR presadzuje rokovania s Chorvatskom ešte dnes, turecká delegácia na ceste, 3 October 2005.

³ SITA: Dzurinda: EU potrebuje pri rozširovaní pauzu, 3 November 2005.

⁴ SITA: Slováci dávajú krízu za vinu Ukrajine, 8 February 2009.

⁵ See Slovak Radio: Sobotné dialógy, 7 March 2009, available at: <http://www.slovakradio.sk/> (last access: 30 June 2010).

⁶ NATO: Allied Contact Points (01.01.2009-31.12.2010), 2 April 2010, available at: http://www.nato.int/structur/oip/all-co_p.pdf (last access: 30 June 2010).

⁷ Webnoviny.sk: Zo Slovak Aid stotisíc eur na moldavskú televíziu, 7 May 2010, available at: <http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/zo-slovak-aid-stotisic-eur-na-moldavsk/130296-clanok.html> (last access: 29 June 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?