

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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Slovenia**General support with selective criticism for new EU officials****Maja Cimerman and Jure Požgan**

Good relations with Van Rompuy restored

The President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, visited Slovenia on 1 December 2009, the day when the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force. On that occasion, the Slovenian Prime Minister (PM) Borut Pahor expressed his conviction that Herman Van Rompuy will “cope with the task” and will be able to “slowly slowly” build a new European institution. During the press conference with Herman Van Rompuy, the Slovenian Prime Minister also explained that he first endorsed the former British PM Tony Blair for the position of the new President of the European Council, because he believed that the European Union needed a leader with a strong political personality who will empower this new EU post. However, with European countries predominantly supporting Herman Van Rompuy, Slovenia backed the Belgian candidate as well. Borut Pahor also emphasised the importance of having a person with a sense for social dialogue and social questions leading the European Council.¹

In March 2010, Herman Van Rompuy was invited to attend the Western Balkan conference organised jointly by Slovenia and Croatia. His presence was deemed necessary for the recognition of the importance of the conference. When Van Rompuy announced that he would not be attending the conference because of the absence of the President of the Republic of Serbia, this was seen as a “slap in the face” for the organisers by the media. Although the Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor explicitly stressed that Slovenia “will not judge anyone who does not attend the conference”, Zijad Bećirović, the director of the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies, commented that Van Rompuy’s abstention sent a clear message that there was no point in organising and attending the conference.²

A few days after the conference, the Slovenian PM visited the President of the European Council in Brussels, where, at the press conference, he admitted there was some resentment between them concerning Van Rompuy’s absence at the Western Balkan conference, but that they “have managed to restore the previous trust.”³

As for the changing role of the rotating presidency, there is no official statement by the government of the Republic of Slovenia and there are no comments made regarding it by the interested public.

Support for Catherine Ashton

Despite expressing some disagreement with Catherine Ashton’s vision of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Samuel Žbogar, announced full support for the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in mid-March 2010. He characterised her work as “passionate with an understanding of the responsibility to build this new function she is the first to hold.”⁴

The support for Ashton was also expressed by one of the Slovenian Members of European Parliament (MEP), Zoran Thaler, who is a member of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in the European Parliament. Thaler assessed Catherine Ashton after her first address to the European Parliament as “promising”, describing her as a “determined, moderate and principal leader.” On the same occasion, another Slovenian central left MEP, Ivo Vajgl (member of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – ALDE), somewhat criticised Ashton, assuming that she would give more consideration to the member states than the European Parliament in her work.⁵

As for her role as the Vice-President of the European Commission, Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Samuel Žbogar commented upon it in the context of the EEAS and will be discussed below.

Concerns about equal representation in the EEAS

Slovenia supports the political agreement on the structure of the EEAS reached on 26 April 2010 in Luxembourg. Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Samuel Žbogar actively engaged in the debates about the structure and role of the EEAS by emphasising the importance of adequate representation of smaller member states. Concerned that the interests of the smaller countries will not be recognised in the EEAS, Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Samuel Žbogar, along with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Lithuania, Latvia and Cyprus, sent a letter to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton urging her to bear in mind the “geographical balance and adequate representation of all EU members” when setting up the new European diplomatic service.⁶ Before the meeting of the EU ministers of foreign affairs in Cordoba in March 2010, Samuel Žbogar spoke of a “feeling among member states that the European Commission wants to take over the EEAS.” According to Žbogar, the perception is that the European Commission is filling the diplomatic posts even before the European diplomatic service is fully established, and is creating unnecessary tensions between itself and the member states. He also pointed to the idea of Catherine Ashton “sitting on two chairs” concerning her double role.⁷

Furthermore, Žbogar also expressed the necessity that the member states positively accept the EEAS and feel represented in it, as “national embassies will be under the auspices of the diplomatic service.”⁸ Unofficially, Slovenia applied to lead delegations in Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Beijing.⁹

European Citizens' Initiative

The government of the Republic of Slovenia welcomes the institution of the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and sees its importance in giving the citizens greater decision-making powers within the EU. Concerning the admissibility criterion, the position of the government of the Republic of Slovenia is that it is necessary to decide on the admissibility of the initiative before its registration. Accordingly, every initiative should be checked whether its purpose does not oppose the values of the EU and whether the EU has jurisdiction over the matter of the initiative. In the view of the Slovenian government, it is especially important to ensure a transparent financing of the ECI in order to prevent potential abuses. In this respect, additional legislation is necessary and should prevent public financing of the ECI in order to strengthen the independence of the Initiative and the role of the citizens.¹⁰

On the other hand, Sabina Kajnč, a Slovenian academic, expressed doubts regarding the democratic character of the ECI. She stressed that there are currently too many checks installed in the institution of the Initiative so that it is highly unlikely to expect the ECI to be invoked on many occasions.¹¹

¹ Slovenian Press Agency (STA): Pahor: pomemben dan v zgodovini Evrope (Pahor: An important day in the history of Europe), 1 December 2009, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1454712&q=HERMAN+VAN+ROMPUY> (last access: 16 May 2010).

² Dnevnik: Konferenca o zahodnem Balkanu v okrnjeni zasedbi (Western Balkan Conference in a truncated composition), 20 March 2010, available at: <http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/svet/1042346357> (last access: 16 May 2010).

³ STA: Van Rompuy in Pahor zgladila odnose (Van Rompuy and Pahor restored their relationship), 26 March 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1496064&q=HERMAN+VAN+ROMPUY> (last access: 16 May 2010).

⁴ STA: Zunanji ministri EU Ashtonovi izrekli vso podporo (EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs expressed their full support to Ashton), 6 March 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1488217&q=CATHER+ASHTON> (last access: 17 May 2010).

⁵ STA: Ashtonova na prvem kvizu Evropskega parlamenta v defenzivi (Ashton defensive at her first European Parliament quiz), 2 December 2009, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1455197&q=CATHER+ASHTON> (last access: 17 May 2010).

⁶ STA: Slovenija in še tri države Ashtonovo pozivajo k geografskemu ravnovesju v diplomatski službi EU (Slovenia and three more countries call on Ashton to geographically balance European Diplomatic Service), 5 March 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1487830&q=EEAS> (last access: 18 March 2010).

⁷ STA: Žbogar: Občutek je, da si hoče komisija prisvojiti novo zunanjo službo EU (Žbogar: There is a feeling the Commission wants to take over the new EU foreign service), 5 March 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1487976&q=EEAS> (last access: 18 March 2010).

⁸ STA: Žbogar: 800-članska diplomatska služba EU absolutno premajhna (Žbogar: 800-member EU diplomatic service absolutely too small), 22 March 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1494165&q=EEAS> (last access: 19 March 2010).

⁹ STA: Veliki konkurenca za mesta v evropski diplomatski službi (Great competition for spots in European Diplomatic Service), 11 May 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1511470&q=EVROPS+DIPL+SLU%C5%BDB> (last access: 18 May 2010).

¹⁰ Government of the Republic of Slovenia: Stališče vlade o Evropski zakonodajni pobudi (Government position on European Citizens' Initiative), 6 May 2010, available at: www2.gov.si/upv/vladnagrada-08.nsf/.../FILE/BESEDILO.RTF (last access: 18 May 2010).

¹¹ STA: V EU konec institucionalnih razprav, zdaj čas za dejanja (EU ends institutional discussions, time for action), 30 December 2010, available at: <http://www.sta.si/vest.php?s=s&id=1462206&q=KAJN%C4%8C> (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?