

# 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](http://www.EU-27Watch.org).

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## Belgium

### A priority of low salience

Nathalie Brack\*

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Although enlargement is one of the five priorities of the Belgian Presidency, it was not much discussed during the reporting period. During its Presidency, Belgium intends to be an “honest broker”, i.e., by trying to find a consensus on enlargement and by trying to accelerate the rhythm of domestic reforms within candidate countries in matters such as democracy and peace.<sup>1</sup>

In general, the position of Belgium is that each candidate should respect the EU criteria and all should be treated equitably on the basis of their own merits by the EU institutions.

The next enlargement round is expected to be composed of Croatia and Iceland. The former is considered as having made good progress in terms of implementing the *acquis communautaire* and the latter already respects all the political criteria, but faces an economic crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning the other candidate countries, the Belgian Prime Minister declared that the Balkans' future resides in the European Union and that all those countries should, in the long run, enter the EU. He argued that for Serbia it would be a long run process, especially because it first has to solve the issue of Kosovo's recognition. He promised that Belgium would try to find a consensus by the end of 2010 to grant Montenegro the status of candidate country, but stressed that it is very important, for Montenegro but also for Albania, to implement important reforms and respect the conditions for EU adhesion. He also insisted on the importance, for the stability and integration of the Balkans, that Kosovo one day become a member of the EU, although, for the above-mentioned countries, it would take time and no timeline was set.<sup>3</sup>

Belgium will encourage the pursuit of the reforms in Turkey but all candidates should meet the required criteria in terms of *acquis communautaire*, good governance and human rights. If this proves to be impossible, a *sui generis* form of collaboration will be necessary.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, as far as the Eastern Partnership is concerned, Belgium stressed its importance in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Secretary of State for European Affairs, Olivier Chastel, highlighted the large potential of this partnership both for the European Union and the partner countries (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia), and declared that Belgium is ready to envisage offering help or expertise in specific domains in order to ensure a successful implementation of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Report on the priorities of the Belgian EU Presidency, Senate and House of Representatives, 17 March 2010, doc. n° 4-1606/6 (Sénat).

<sup>2</sup> De Morgen, 24 February 2010, available at: [www.demorgen.be](http://www.demorgen.be) (last access: 8 May 2010).

<sup>3</sup> De Standaard, 17 February 2010, available at: [www.standaard.be](http://www.standaard.be) (last access: 6 May 2010); De Morgen, 21 December 2009; De Morgen, 16 February 2010; De Morgen, 9 March 2010, all available at: [www.demorgen.be](http://www.demorgen.be) (last access: 8 May 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Report on the priorities of the Belgian EU Presidency, Senate and House of Representatives, 17 March 2010, doc. n° 4-1606/6 (Sénat); De Morgen, 21 December 2009, available at: [www.demorgen.be](http://www.demorgen.be) (last access: 8 May 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Chastel réaffirme la position de la Belgique à propos du partenariat oriental, press release, 2 March 2010, available at: <http://diplomatie.belgium.be> (last access: 20 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?