

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

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**Finland****Plates are more important than presidents or high representatives**

Tuulia Nieminen, Johanna Nykänen and Aaretti Siitonen\*

The Finnish public discussion following the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty quickly became dominated by a somewhat overblown debate on the country's representation in the European Council – whether it would be the Prime Minister or the President. This heated debate, dubbed the “plate debacle”,<sup>1</sup> continued for months, until it became apparent that the Prime Minister would in the future, by default, act as the country's representative. Also, the weight of the Finnish Commissioner's portfolio was seen as an important question. Serious media discussion on the President of the European Council and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was conspicuous in its absence after it became apparent that the incumbents were neither Finns nor otherwise well-known. There were a number of dissenting voices calling for the media to move their attention from domestic matters to the EU, “the most important political arena for Finland”, but they were limited to expert commentary.<sup>2</sup>

The Finnish expert discussion on the top posts was typically conducted from the point of view of observers rather than active participants, with the notable exception of Foreign Minister Stubb. He positioned himself as a staunch defender of Catherine Ashton. He self-deprecatingly used the memorable comparison “Snow White and the twenty-seven Dwarfs” to describe the relationship of Ashton and the 27 foreign ministers.<sup>3</sup> Also, Stubb organised an unofficial meeting of a limited number of EU foreign ministers, the Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu and Catherine Ashton at Saariselkä in Finnish Lapland. This was seen as an attempt to smooth the road for the High Representative in her interpersonal dealings with the foreign ministers, as well as to facilitate Stubb's own future collaboration with his peers.

The “Spirit of Saariselkä”, as the prevailing mood of the conference became known, was described as one of ease, personal contacts and informality, which are, according to the press, the defining characteristics of Finland's present attitude towards handling EU foreign affairs.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Stubb did not succeed in getting representatives from all the EU member states led to some criticism. Also, the Eurosceptic party, the True Finns, criticised the event for not promoting Finland's Arctic expertise.<sup>5</sup>

Other commentators on Ashton's role and performance, including Finnish Members of European Parliament (MEP), tended to be understanding of the challenges faced by her and more inclined to postpone an opinion on her performance until a reasonable amount of time had passed.<sup>6</sup> Green MEP Satu Hassi compared the criticism directed at Ashton to workplace bullying.<sup>7</sup>

The High Representative's position has been described as being nigh on impossible: “the most difficult job in the world” according to Stubb.<sup>8</sup> The question of who represents the EU in foreign policy was, furthermore, seen as problematic due to both the European Council's and European Commission's presidents, as well as, to some extent, the rotating presidency, maintaining a role in foreign policy. The anecdote about Kissinger's phone number has been repeated to no end in Finland, but the metaphor of the EU's partners now not needing one phone number, but the number to the switchboard, in order to direct them to the relevant actor, has also been put forward and is emblematic of the expert discussion on the, as of yet, embryonic division of roles between the main actors.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, commenting on the new leadership of the EU, then Prime Minister Vanhanen pointed out that the EU has now become more “political”, with the role of the European Council strengthened at the detriment of the rotating presidency in particular. This view was shared by other major commentators. As to the rotating presidency's future, it was juxtaposed with the European Council's heightened influence. If the Council succeeds in offering meaningful leadership, the rotating presidency will become insignificant, and the question of the member states' subsequent role in leading the Union becomes relevant.<sup>10</sup> In relation to this, the Spanish Presidency has been described as a thankless assignment.<sup>11</sup> The increased role of the European Council was also seen as diminishing the role of the community method, or, alternatively, as constituting a balancing act, with the Commission pulled in two directions, by the European Parliament on the one hand and the Council

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\* Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

on the other. Yet this thought has not quite caught on with the mainstream press, which still tends to focus on what they are already familiar with – Barroso and his Commission.

Questions arose as to whether Van Rompuy's image of being a "grey mouse" was merely a clever facade. There was a sense of careful respect towards Van Rompuy's handling of his duties, especially vis-a-vis Barroso.<sup>12</sup> The same initially applied to economic governance, where the question of European Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs Olli Rehn having had his initiative usurped by Van Rompuy was raised with the metaphor: "Did the mouse steal Rehn's piece of cheese?" This changed considerably with the advent of the Greek crisis, however, with Rehn stealing the Finnish limelight. In the less serious press, Van Rompuy was dismissed as a "daffy duck president", with mentions of his Haiku collections, but little else.<sup>13</sup>

Very little was written on the European Citizens' Initiative. Reporting was descriptive in nature and the few comments merely practical (e.g., a time limit of six months for the Commission to react to an initiative suggested by the European Movement in Finland).<sup>14</sup> Some criticism was levelled at the difficulty of the procedure, with the Commission encouraged to facilitate the practical implementation of it.<sup>15</sup> As an interesting detail, a Finnish equivalent was suggested during the constitutional reform process, with Justice Minister Brax pointing out that an EU level precedent already existed.<sup>16</sup>

Reporting and discussion of the European External Action Service (EEAS) was characterised by a sense of waiting, with an emphasis on the power struggle within Brussels, as well as between the member states, and impatience towards the EU's inward-looking procrastination, when it should be taking a more active role in the world.<sup>17</sup>

The service was described as being about twice the size of Finland's own Foreign Ministry, and Foreign Minister Stubb expressed the wish for one or two heads of delegation to be Finns. Furthermore, it is hoped that between 15 and 30 Finns will be placed in other duties within the service.<sup>18</sup> After the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty, he supported the idea of using national foreign ministers as the High Representative's deputies, an idea further espoused at the Saariselkä gathering. Moreover, Stubb criticised the way that João Vale de Almeida was appointed to represent the EU in Washington.<sup>19</sup>

The received wisdom during the reporting period was that the EEAS, if strong, effective and with global reach, would be a boon for a small country like Finland. Offering synergy benefits, it was, nevertheless, not seen as replacing but rather complementing Finland's own network of embassies.<sup>20</sup>

The True Finns were the most vocal critics of the service, dismissing it out of hand as an unnecessary institution which would further enhance the EU's federalist trappings.<sup>21</sup> Doubts were also raised as to the renationalisation of EU foreign policies with the creation of the service. The most contentious issue in this regard was the service's effects on development aid.<sup>22</sup> More widely, the question of how the set-up of the service would affect the so-far normative, rules-based and predictable nature of the EU's foreign policy was raised.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The plate debacle was in the public discussion connected to the work of the Taxell committee, the objective of which was a revision of the Finnish constitution. The committee's work was factually unrelated to EU matters, but the fact that it aimed to define the President's foreign policy powers made the question of EU representation symbolic.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Kaleva: Suomen tärkein poliittinen areena on EU, 3 December 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Helsingin Sanomat: Arvostelijat käyttävät EU:n uutta ulkoministeriä, 26 January 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Lapin kansa: Spirit of Saariselkä koostuu hangista, huumorista ja hyvistä keskusteluista, 14 March 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Lapin kansa: Saariselkä sai satikutia, 15 March 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Anneli Jäätteenmäki: Euroopan mahdollomin tehtävä, Suomenmaa, 19 March 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Turun Sanomat: Europarlamentin ulkopoliittisesta täysistunnosta Ashtonin piinapenkki, 11 March 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Helsingin Sanomat: Ashton lupaa Suomelle tukevan edustuksen EU:n ulkoministeriöön, 13 March 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Tuomas Forsberg: Saiko EU nyt puhelinnumeron?, Aamulehti, 11 February 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Teija Tiilikainen: Eurooppa-neuvosto nousee vallan huipulle, Helsingin Sanomat, 2 February 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Turun Sanomat: Espanja EU-puheenjohtajana uuden tilanteen edessä, 3 February 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Helsingin Sanomat: EU:n harmaa hiiri kasvattaa lihaksia, 2 April 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Iltalehti: Hullu maailma, 30 April 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Aamulehti: Euroopan unionin kansalaiset saavat vihdoin aloiteoikeuden, 19 March 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Helsingin Sanomat: EU:n uusi kansalaisaloite vaatii taitoa ja rahaa, 1 April 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Suomenmaa: Kansalaisaloitteen mahdollisuus perustuslakiin, 11 February 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Aamulehti: EU puhelinvastaajan varassa?, 13 March 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Stubb/Pertti Torstila: Vahva ulkomaanverkko on Suomen etu, Aamulehti, 25 February 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Helsingin sanomat: EU:n lähettiläsnimitys suututtaa jäsenmaita, 23 February 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Aamulehti: Mustalla päin punaista, 8 February 2010.

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<sup>21</sup> Lapin kansa: Saariselkä sai satikutia, 15 March 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Aamulehti: Ashton haluaa kehitysavun ohjat käsiinsä, 26 March 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Finnish Institute of International Affairs: Rewriting the ground rules of European diplomacy, Briefing Paper 57, 31 March 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?