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# EU-25/27 WATCH

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# EU-25/27 Watch

## On the Project

The enlarged EU of 27 members is in a process of reshaping its constitutional and political order, of continuing membership talks with candidate countries and taking on new obligations in international politics. This project sheds light on key issues and challenges of European integration. Institutes from all 27 EU member states as well as from Croatia and Turkey participate in this survey. The aim is to give a full comparative picture of debates on European integration and current developments in European politics in each of these countries.

This report is supplement to *EU-25/27 Watch* No. 5 (September 2007). It was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in April 2007. The issue No. 5 of *EU-25/27 Watch* and all other issues of *EU-25/27 Watch* are available on the homepage of EU-CONSENT ([www.eu-consent.net](http://www.eu-consent.net)) and on the internet sites of most of the contributing institutes.

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## **Chronology of main events** (between January and June 2007)

- 1 January** Accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU.  
Germany takes over the EU-presidency for the first half of 2007.  
Germany takes over the G8-presidency until 31 December 2007.  
Slovenia introduces the Euro.
- 7 January** Russian pipeline monopolist Transneft interrupts oil supplies to Western Europe over Russian-Belarus energy conflict.
- 16 January** The European Parliament elects Hans-Gert Pöttering, EPP, as its new President.
- 18 January** EU-presidency – OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna.
- 26 January** On the initiative of the Spanish and Luxembourg governments the “Friends of the Constitution” meet in Madrid. Representatives of the 18 member states that have already ratified the Constitutional Treaty plus representatives from Ireland and Portugal back the current text and warn of minimalist solutions.
- 30 January** ECOFIN Meeting in Brussels. Finance ministers agree to end the excessive debt procedure against France begun in 2003.
- 9-11 February** 43<sup>rd</sup> Munich Conference on Security Policy: Global Crisis – Global Responsibilities.
- 15-16 February** Justice and Home Affairs Council. Home affairs ministers reach a political consensus on integration of the Prüm Treaty (Schengen III) into the European legal order.
- 20 February** Environment Council, Brussels. EU environment ministers agree on the international goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2020.
- 8-9 March** A European Council is held in Brussels. EU-27 agree on binding targets for greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy by 2020. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions shall be reduced by 30 percent (compared with 1990 levels) and renewables shall cover for 20 percent of the overall energy consumption.
- 18 March** Finnish Parliamentary elections. Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen, as party leader of the Centre Party, forms a new government with Centre Party, National Coalition, the Greens and Swedish People's Party. Vanhanen's second Cabinet takes office on 19 April 2007.
- 19 March** EU Troika headed by Foreign Minister Steinmeier (presidency) and Secretary of State, Rice, discuss latest preparations for EU/US summit to be held on 30 April in Washington D.C. Further issues: anti-missile bases in Poland and the Czech Republic, transatlantic cooperation in energy technologies.
- 24-25 March** Informal meeting of the Heads of State and Government in Berlin. Fiftieth Anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. Berlin Declaration.
- April – May** “Bronze Soldier” affair in Estonia. Diplomatic relations between Tallinn and Moscow are tense after the relocation of a Soviet war monument. Enduring riots force the Estonian embassy in Moscow to close temporarily. Estonian servers become objective for massive cyber attacks.

- 4 April** Meeting of Home Affairs Ministers of the European Union, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, Berlin. Main Issues: counter-terrorism, border management, Afghanistan.
- 17 April** Commissioner Olli Rehn welcomes the multi-annual reform programme (2007-2013) that intends to prepare Turkey for EU accession. Yet, he rejects the Turkish demand to set a fixed date for accession.
- Romanian President Basescu accused of violating the constitution and suspended by parliament. The Constitutional Court finds no evidence for a violation of the constitution.
- 30 April** The EU-US Summit is held in Washington, D.C. Chancellor Merkel, President of the Commission Barroso and President Bush sign the 'Open Skies' agreement on transatlantic air transport. It is also agreed to develop closer economic relations during the next few years.
- 6 May** Nicolas Sarkozy is elected President of the French Republic.
- 18 May** EU-Russia-Summit, Samara: EU Troika headed by Chancellor Merkel. No substantial progress on the opening of negotiations on a new partnership agreement. Disagreement on: embargo on Polish agricultural products, interruptions of Lithuanian energy supply (Druzhba oil pipeline), Estonian "Bronze Soldier Crisis", and human rights issues.
- 20 May** A referendum is held on the impeachment proceedings of the Romanian President. A majority of 74 percent of the electorate votes in favour of Basescu.
- 29 May** French President Sarkozy announces his intent to start off a debate on EU external borders during the European Council in December 2007.
- 5 June** EU – Japan Summit, Berlin. Angela Merkel and Shinzo Abe agree on climate policy and adopt a joint action plan on intellectual property.
- ECOFIN ends the excessive deficit procedures against Germany.
- 6-8 June** G8 Meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany. Global warming: non-binding communiqué formulating the goal to halve global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050.
- 21-23 June** A European Council is held in Brussels. Agreement on a mandate for an Intergovernmental Conference to draft a Reform Treaty largely based on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe; Heads of States and Governments agree on Cyprus and Malta to adopt the Euro on 1 January 2008.
- 26 June** Fourth meeting of the Accession Conference at ministerial level with Croatia in Brussels. Decision to open six new chapters for membership negotiations.
- Third meeting of the Accession Conference at ministerial level with Turkey in Brussels. Decision to open two new chapters for membership negotiations.
- 27 June** Gordon Brown becomes Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.
- 1 July** Portugal takes over the EU-presidency for the second half of 2007.

# 1

## Future of the EU

- **To agree on a roadmap for dealing with the continuation of the reform process was one of the priorities of the German Presidency. In this regard, what are the reactions to the conclusions of the European Council in June 2007? How is success/failure explained?**
- **How was the Berlin Declaration received in your country (involvement of member states, media impact etc.)? Did it meet your expectations?**
- **What is the general evaluation of other achievements, failures or weaknesses of the German Presidency?**

## Belgium

Generally, Germany is seen in Belgium as an important EU partner, likely to revive European integration. The German Presidency was considered a real success and was supported by Belgium.<sup>1</sup> The large majority of the political elite and economic actors showed enthusiasm for the new compromise, saving the reform process from immobility and launching the EU into a new schedule, as it now has the necessary basis to work efficiently. The conclusions of the June Council were thus seen as a success, a fundamental step to giving better instruments and a new face to the EU.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Belgian Position*

During the June Council, Belgium repeated its determination to preserve the main elements of the Constitutional Treaty and its concerns were heard. Jen-Luc Dehaene explicitly explained the Belgian position: “the content of the Constitution is the basis on which the EU can build its future in the context of a globalized world”<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, the mandate mentions, among other elements, the fusion of the pillars and the unique legal personality of the EU; the establishment of a stable presidency for the European Council; the reduction of the Commission’s size; and the binding nature of the Charter of fundamental rights<sup>4</sup>. Belgium was thus satisfied with the Council and the German Presidency: the mandate for the future reform of the treaty corresponded to the Belgian expectations.

Prime Minister Verhofstadt reacted positively to the conclusions of the European Council, declaring himself satisfied with the fact that the essential elements of the Constitutional Treaty had been saved in the new consensus, although a simplification of the text could not be achieved. Having always been against the

idea of a mini Treaty<sup>5</sup>, instead of which he proposed to deepen integration, Mr. Verhofstadt was nevertheless relieved with the achievements of the new text: i.e. the confirmation of the primacy of the European law on the national level, the improvement of the rules for closer cooperation, and the progress made in the field of the European foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

### *Public Opinion and Discourse*

Concerning the vision of public opinion, it should be noted that Belgium has always been a very Europhile country. This is confirmed by the results of the Eurobarometer: 82% of Belgians support the adoption of an EU constitution, i.e. the highest rate of support recorded in the whole EU. Moreover, 73% of Belgians are optimistic regarding the future of the EU (EU average of 69%) and 73% trust the EU (against the 57% EU average).<sup>7</sup> The press coverage of the European Council was relatively extensive. Before and during the Council, it was rather pessimistic, insisting on the potential obstacles and on the diversity of vision among officials.<sup>8</sup> The intransigence of Poland was mentioned in many newspapers as it was perceived as a brake to integration and as a potential obstacle to the Council.<sup>9</sup> Some countries such as Poland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands were perceived as too demanding and their positions were presented as contrary to Belgian interests.<sup>10</sup>

### *Explaining the Success*

The success of the Council was mainly explained by two elements. First, the newspapers insisted on the remarkable work and determination of the German Presidency and in particular, of Chancellor Angela Merkel. Although her method was sometimes perceived as confusing and too intergovernmental<sup>11</sup>, her firmness and her

<sup>1</sup> Debate on the priorities of the German Presidency, January-June 2007, Senate and House of Representatives, doc. 51 2938/001 (Chambre).

<sup>2</sup> For the reactions of the CD&V concerning the Summit see: [Hwww.cdenv.be](http://www.cdenv.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008). Furthermore see the following websites: La Libre Belgique, [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008); Le soir, [Hwww.lesoir.be](http://www.lesoir.be)H; Federation of Enterprises in Belgium, [Hhttp://www.vbo-feb.be/index.html?lang=fr&lang=en](http://www.vbo-feb.be/index.html?lang=fr&lang=en)H (last access: 15/07/2008); De Standaard, 13/06/07, 05/06/07, 23/06/07, [Hwww.destandaard.be](http://www.destandaard.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>3</sup> De Standaard, 14/06/07, available under: [Hwww.destandaard.be](http://www.destandaard.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>4</sup> Interview with a civil servant from the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development cooperation.

<sup>5</sup> De Standaard, 20/04/2007, available under: [Hwww.destandaard.be](http://www.destandaard.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>6</sup> La Libre Belgique, 26/02/2007, [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>7</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 67, April-May 2007, available under: [Hhttp://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67\\_fr.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67_fr.htm)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>8</sup> La Libre Belgique, 15/06/07, 20/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>9</sup> La Libre Belgique, 21/06/07, 22/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>10</sup> De Standaard, 19/06/07, 21/06/07, available under: [Hwww.destandaard.be](http://www.destandaard.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>11</sup> La Libre Belgique, 28/05/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).



results were praised.<sup>12</sup> The second element was the determination of Belgian officials, and particularly of Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. Indeed, the Netherlands wanted to reinforce the role of national parliaments, giving them the right to block a European proposal. The Prime Minister, known as a European hardliner, fought against this proposition: the original Protocol on the role of national parliaments was considered sufficient by Belgium and the right of initiative from the Commission as well as the supremacy of European law should be preserved at all costs.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Belgium was a member of what was called the 'front of refusal' composed of seven countries with Belgium among them. This Europhile group refused any step backward on integration, even on the symbolic level. They refused to limit the legal scope of the Charter of fundamental rights and they claimed that "problematic" countries benefited from too much attention compared to others.<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Verhofstadt noted that the group should be a counterweight to those who seek a minimalist solution and that the voices of the countries that didn't ratify the Constitutional Treaty were too often heard.<sup>15</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel De Gucht noted that during the Council, the defenders of Europe could feel lonely.<sup>16</sup>

So, the conclusions of the June Council were warmly welcomed in Belgium and this success was explained by the determination and excellent performance of two personalities: Angela Merkel and Guy Verhofstadt.

*The Berlin Declaration<sup>17</sup>: a good start for a new constitutional process*

For the Belgian government, it was necessary to preserve as much of the content of the Constitution as possible as it constituted a balanced and global compromise. Belgium was thus extremely satisfied with the Berlin

Declaration.<sup>18</sup> The Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt declared that a short declaration was enough but that it should contain references to the monetary union and the Euro as well as the constitutional process. A more in-depth integration should be the main objective of the EU and the government explicitly hoped that the Berlin Declaration would relaunch the constitutional process.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is essential for Belgium to insist on the achievements of the European process, to repeat the fundamental values at the basis of the integration and to increase public awareness of new challenges for the EU.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, the Prime Minister Verhofstadt was really pleased that the timing was so tight and insisted that if in future negotiations, some countries ask to remove some elements, others should be added, particularly in the fields of defence and good governance in socio-economic matters.<sup>21</sup>

The media and public opinion considered the Berlin Declaration as an ambitious and voluntary text.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>12</sup> La Libre Belgique, 22/05/07, 29/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>13</sup> De Standaard, 14/06/07, 19/06/07, 05/07/07, 25/06/07, available under: [Hwww.destandaard.be](http://www.destandaard.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>14</sup> La Libre Belgique, 21/06/07, 23/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>15</sup> EurActiv, 15/02/2007, available under: [Hwww.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>16</sup> De Standaard, 23/06/07, available under: [Hwww.destandaard.be](http://www.destandaard.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>17</sup> Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a civil servant from the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development cooperation.

<sup>19</sup> See the Debate at the House of Representatives and the Senate concerning the March Summit on 29/03/2007 under: [Hhttp://www.senate.be/www/?Mlval=/index\\_senate&MENUID=12410&LANG=fr](http://www.senate.be/www/?Mlval=/index_senate&MENUID=12410&LANG=fr)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>20</sup> Plenary session of the Senate: Question from Philippe Mahoux (socialist) on the Berlin Declaration, 01/03/07, n° 3-1425, in: Sénat de Belgique, Annales, 3-205, p. 34, available under: [Hhttp://www.senate.be/www/?Mlval=/index\\_senate&MENUID=24400&LANG=fr](http://www.senate.be/www/?Mlval=/index_senate&MENUID=24400&LANG=fr)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>21</sup> La Libre Belgique, 26/03/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>22</sup> La Libre Belgique, 26/03/2007, 23/03/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

# 2

## Climate Change/Energy

- **Looking at the conclusions of the EU spring summit and the results of the G8 summit in Heiligendamm (June 2007), which points and considerations are most important for your country?**
- **Is there a follow-up in terms of discourse, initiatives and concrete policies?**

## Belgium

Generally speaking, Belgium attaches a great importance to the questions related to energy and climate change. It wishes to have ambitious and binding objectives at the EU level so that Europe can play a leading role at the global level. It supports the approach of the Commission and supported the German Presidency in its ambition for the EU to take the lead for the post-Kyoto process.<sup>23</sup>

Belgium was globally satisfied with the Spring Summit conclusions and Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt declared that Belgium would not face major problems with the European objectives. He also noted that he put pressure on energy and climate change so that the objectives per countries would take into account the current national effort and the abilities of each EU member state. Moreover, he was pleased that thanks to his efforts, the question of efficiency was mentioned in the text.<sup>24</sup> However Belgium could face some problems with meeting the objectives concerning renewable energy and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Indeed, the country currently has a low percentage of renewable energy and too high of a goal would be difficult to reach.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the VLD (center-right party) stressed that the conclusions attached too much importance to biofuels at the expense of other sources.<sup>26</sup>

### *Public Discourse*

The press coverage was relatively limited concerning energy and climate change. But it stressed the success of the Spring Summit. The G8 results were considered as mixed: on the one hand, the European ambitions had to be decreased,<sup>27</sup> and the energy issue, including a potential future agreement with Russia, was a failure because of the veto of Poland.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Angela Merkel

was praised because she managed to convince President Bush to take into consideration the issue of global warming, which was seen as an important achievement.<sup>29</sup>

### *Public Opinion*

Despite the limited press coverage on EU energy policy, public opinion is very positive towards EU actions on energy and climate change. Indeed, 75% of Belgian people think the EU is in a better position to take decisions to protect the environment and 72% of Belgians judge the EU more competent to decide on energy issues. Finally, 89% of Belgians consider that the EU should urgently put new policies in place to fight against global warming.<sup>30</sup>

### *Expectations*

So, the evaluation of the Spring Summit and the G8 Summit was globally positive but several expectations emerged: concrete and rapid results are expected from the European level, allowing Belgium to establish initiatives and political measures at the national and regional levels.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with a diplomat from the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development cooperation.

<sup>24</sup> For the debate at the House of Representatives concerning the Spring Summit on 29/03/07 see: [Hwww.senate.be](http://www.senate.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>25</sup> Interview with a diplomat from the Belgian Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development cooperation.

<sup>26</sup> For the debate at the House of Representatives concerning the Spring Summit on 29/03/07 see: [Hwww.senate.be](http://www.senate.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>27</sup> La Libre, 06/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>28</sup> La Libre, 28/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

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<sup>29</sup> La Libre, 28/06/07, available under: [Hwww.lalibre.be](http://www.lalibre.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>30</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 67, April-May 2007.

# 3

## Security Cultures

*Member states' military forces are engaged in peace keeping, conflict resolution and post-crisis management from Afghanistan to Bosnia/Herzegovina and the Congo. At the same time the EU is trying to strengthen its civil-military capacities and coordination (e.g. European battle groups, European Defence Agency, European Rapid Reaction Force, European Union Institute for Security Studies). The EU is widely expected to play an increasingly larger role. According to Eurobarometer polls large majorities of citizens in the member states support a high profile of the EU in CFSP and ESDP.*

- **Please outline basic features of the security culture in your country and how this relates to new challenges and demands from within the EU, NATO, the UN etc. (humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, role of combat forces in crisis management, interventions on humanitarian grounds).**
- **Analyse your country's vision of the role of armed forces, as it is rooted in history and society.**
- **Please give special attention to public opinion, discourses of political elite and also the security community.**

## Belgium

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Belgium has considered the role of its army in a European context, which itself has to be related to the international role of NATO and the UN. Indeed, since 1991, Belgium has taken the EU as a framework to establish its own positions. Moreover, it has been pleading for a reinforced role of the European Union in Security and Defence matters and is in favour of an in-depth military integration. Being a defender of an extended role of the European military force in the world, the active role of the EU, with 10 ongoing operations in 2007 is thus completely supported by the Belgian government but also by the Belgian public opinion.<sup>31</sup> Such a development in military and defence policy is considered as a positive factor contributing to relaunch the European construction. However, it should be noted that although Belgium gives priority to the EU, it refuses any ESDP development that could be contradictory to NATO.<sup>32</sup>

### Security Culture

This multilateral approach is rooted in history: there is a strong consensus in favour of an effective and institutionalized multilateralism. A long tradition of international cooperation can be observed since the end of the Cold War. For example, the navies of Belgium and the Netherlands now have a completely integrated Operations Office with a binational headquarters. This cooperation with such an in-depth integration is a unique case in the world.<sup>33</sup>

### Latest Developments

As far as reform is concerned, an evolution can be observed since the 1990s. Indeed, since the beginning of that decade, Belgium took several decisions: the compulsory military service was abrogated; the defence budget was limited by creating a unique structure of command to meet the EMU criteria; the focus was increasingly put on conflict prevention; and the country constantly contributed to the peace-keeping missions of the EU and

NATO.<sup>34</sup> Belgian diplomacy also tries to influence the international agenda, particularly through the concept of moral diplomacy: respect for Human rights, good governance and the fight against impunity.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, a last element is worth mentioning. A shift in the Belgian vision of the role of the army occurred in the late 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. Indeed, Belgium officials focused more and more on conflict prevention and humanitarian intervention.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in 2000, B-FAST (Belgian First Aid and Support Team) was created as a rapid intervention structure to send emergency team in countries that had suffered from natural disasters. B-FAST also works closely with the EU and more particularly with "EU-FAST", a similar concept developed at the European level under the impetus of Belgium.<sup>37</sup> This structure was helpful in a number of recent cases and developed its specificities over time (Salvador, 2001; Iran, 2002, 2003/2004; Thailand and Indonesia, 2005).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Egmont working paper, «Le contribution belge à la PESD», No. 14, June 2007.

<sup>32</sup> See: [Hwww.operationspaix.net/Belgique](http://www.operationspaix.net/Belgique)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>33</sup> Egmont working paper, «Le contribution belge à la PESD», No. 14, June 2007.

<sup>34</sup> See: [Hwww.opérationspaix.net/Belgique](http://www.opérationspaix.net/Belgique)H (last access: 15/07/2008); [Hwww.diplobel.be](http://www.diplobel.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>35</sup> See: [Hwww.operationspaix.net/Belgique](http://www.operationspaix.net/Belgique)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>36</sup> Debate at the House of Representatives concerning the European Council of 16-17 october 2003, 30/10/03, n°51 313/1 (chambre).

<sup>37</sup> See:

[Hhttp://www.diplomatie.be/Bfast/BfastEn/default.asp?id=28&mnu=28](http://www.diplomatie.be/Bfast/BfastEn/default.asp?id=28&mnu=28)H (last access: 23/07/2008);

[Hhttp://www.sabinedebethune.be/index.php?id=vraag&nid=1044&sn=Sabine%20de%20Bethune](http://www.sabinedebethune.be/index.php?id=vraag&nid=1044&sn=Sabine%20de%20Bethune)H (last access: 15/07/2008);

[Hhttp://www.mil.be/vox/subject/index.asp?LAN=fr&ID=517&MENU=689&PAGE=2](http://www.mil.be/vox/subject/index.asp?LAN=fr&ID=517&MENU=689&PAGE=2)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

<sup>38</sup> See: [Hwww.diplomatie.be](http://www.diplomatie.be)H (last access: 15/07/2008); [Hhttp://www.mil.be/vox/subject/index.asp?LAN=fr&ID=517&MENU=689&PAGE=2](http://www.mil.be/vox/subject/index.asp?LAN=fr&ID=517&MENU=689&PAGE=2)H (last access: 15/07/2008).

# 4

## Unemployment, labour markets and the future of the welfare states

*Although some countries do better than others, unemployment is still high across the EU, fear of social decline is spreading and ever larger proportions of the population live under precarious conditions.*

- **Please draw a picture of the state of discourse on these issues in your country and give facts and figures on basic trends.**
- **Are there other issues that play a crucial role in this discourse (immigration, globalisation, education etc.)?**
- **Which measures and strategies are taken by government and other actors?**

## Belgium

Generally, the performance of the Belgian economy was positive at the beginning of the year – mainly during the first half. The growth of the consumption expenses were quite high in the first semester of 2007 and reached a rate of +0.7%. In the same way, the indicators of consumer confidence remained high.

### Figures

The labour market stayed vigorous in the beginning of 2007. 58.000 jobs were created in 2006 and 16.000 were already generated during the first half of 2007. This is mainly due to the health sector and several collective services (3.300 units during the first half of 2007), and to the sector of the self-employed workers and the sector of the construction (respectively 2.000 and 3.000 jobs). The situation of the industrial sector is remarkable in the sense that, for almost the first time since 2001, it stopped losing jobs and began to stabilize. For the rest of 2007 and for 2008, the IRES<sup>39</sup> still envisages an important creation of jobs.<sup>40</sup> National Bank of Belgium surveys confirm that company leaders positively perceive the employment perspectives in the forthcoming months.<sup>41</sup>

This general improvement in the conditions of the labour market is confirmed by unemployment figures. The unemployment fell to 8.0% during the first semester of 2007 (Eurostat definition), compared to 8.3% in 2006 and 8.5% in 2005. This decrease in unemployment is witnessed in all categories of the unemployed and in all the three regions. However, huge structural differences still remain and no convergence has been noticed as figures for 2007 indicate unemployment rates of 17.5% in Brussels, 4.5% in Flanders and 10.68% in Wallonia.

Concerning the self-employed workers, it should be noticed that the observed increase in the number of workers is mainly due to the arrival of new EU members (mainly from Poland, Romania or Bulgaria) in this sector. In

the other sectors, the amount of workers from these new countries is restricted by the Belgian government – as some other EU-15 countries decided in 2006 to limit the direct access for these workers to paid employment for a period extended for two more years. A work licence can be acquired by the people coming from these countries on a yearly basis. In 2007, 39.000 licences have been delivered and among them 26.000 for Polish and Romanian citizens.

### Measures

The employment of older workers is an important issue in Belgium. In 2006, almost one out of three persons aged between 50 to 64 years has left the labour market. In order to prepare the demographic for the shock of the ageing population, the federal government, in collaboration with social partners, adopted a “solidarity pact between generations”<sup>42</sup>. This pact intends to set a framework to encourage the maintaining or the return of workers at the end of their career. One of the central points of this pact concerns a more restricted access to the early retirement system.

<sup>39</sup> Institut de recherches économiques et sociales at the Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve.

<sup>40</sup> Vincent Bodard/AnneDefourny/Hélène Latzer/Phillipe Ledent/Guy Legros/Vincent Scourneau: Perspectives économiques 2007-2008, in: Regards économiques 53/2007.

<sup>41</sup> BNB – National Bank of Belgium: Projections économiques pour la Belgique – Printemps 2007, Press release, 14/06/2007.

<sup>42</sup> BNB – National Bank of Belgium: Rapport 2007. Evolutions économiques et financières, 2008.



## Presentation of EU-CONSENT

# WIDER EUROPE, DEEPER INTEGRATION?

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EU-CONSENT is a network of excellence for joint research and teaching which stretches across Europe.

EU-CONSENT explicitly addresses questions related to the **mutually reinforcing effects of EU deepening and widening** by analysing the integration process to date and developing visions and scenarios for the future of the European Union. The thematic focal points of the network are organised in five thematic "Work Packages":

1. **Theories and Sets of Expectations** (responsible: B. Laffan/W. Wessels)
2. **Institutions and Political Actors** (responsible: E. Best)
3. **Democracy, Legitimacy and Identities** (responsible: M. Karasinska-Fendler)
4. **Economic and Social Policies for an Expanding Europe** (responsible: I. Begg)
5. **Political and Security Aspects of the EU's External Relations** (responsible: G. Bonvicini)

The network involves 52 institutional partners, including 27 universities, approximately 200 researchers and 80 young researchers from 22 EU member states and three candidate countries. The project started working in June 2005 and is scheduled until May 2009.

The results of the network's activities will be incorporated in the following **special EU-CONSENT products**:

- **EU-25/27 Watch**, an analysis of national debates on EU matters in all 27 member states as well as two candidate countries (responsible: B. Lippert).
- **WEB-CONSENT**, the project's website at [www.eu-consent.net](http://www.eu-consent.net), containing all relevant information and announcements (responsible: M. Cricorian).
- **EDEIOS Online School**, presenting a core curriculum of conventional and virtual study units on EU deepening and widening (responsible: A. Faber).
- **a PhD Centre of Excellence**, consisting of integrating activities for young researchers such as six summer/winter PhD schools (responsible: A. Agh).
- **an E-Library**, containing resources and papers available online as well as literature lists for all thematic focal points of the project (responsible: A. Faber/M. Cricorian).

