



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Record of roundtable discussion on EU Enlargement in Prague, 6 June 2014

On 6 June 2014 HMA Jan Thompson hosted a working lunch attended by representatives from thinktanks, non-governmental organisations, academia and government, to discuss EU Enlargement.

Enlargement a success?

1. Enlargement had successfully assisted current Member States' paths from dictatorship and post-Communism. The decision by Member States to confer candidate status, then membership, on an enlargement country came from political decisions, not technical ones. This was an acceptable reality. But it underlined the importance of making the accession process robust, predictable and fair.
2. If Enlargement was measured by degree of political union, it was faring poorly; if assessed by economic union, it was doing better. ERASMUS and other programmes, and the impact of structural and cohesion funds, were a greater success story than Enlargement.
3. Widening of the EU had inhibited the EU's focus on integration and internal economic issues.
4. Some waves of accession had been more successful than others. Important lessons had been learned from Romania and Bulgaria, neither of which was ready to join the EU. Rule of Law issues endured with these two countries. Poor Bulgarian implementation of the energy aquis had become a bilateral irritant for the Czech Republic. Comparable Rule of Law challenges to those faced by Romania and Bulgaria prevailed in the Western Balkans.

Trends in Enlargement:

5. One participant remarked that, to date, Member States had been driven by economic motivations for enlargement; now political ones were coming into play, because of Ukraine. Some countries, such as Estonia, wanted to join the Eurozone out of political, not economic, motivation.
6. The degree of support of a MS for enlargement could depend on that country's attitude to integration – because of the notion that you cannot deepen if you widen.
7. Enlargement had led to new groupings of Member States within the EU, for instance those in and outside the Eurozone, or between those keen on deeper integration or a looser federation. Polarisation was both a consequence of this and an increasing risk.
8. There was a huge difference between the accessions of 2004 and 2007, on the one hand, and current accession negotiations, on the other. The former were successful in not having bilateral issues, whereas now these issues constantly rear their head in negotiations (indeed the process encouraged it). While reconciliation between Serbia and Kosovo could so far be judged an EU success, it was much harder to resolve disputes between a candidate country and an existing Member States (eg. Cyprus/Turkey, Greece/Macedonia, Slovenia/Croatia). A “regatta principle”, whereby Western Balkans countries accede one-by-one, could encourage more of this. It had been a mistake to admit Cyprus without its settlement with Turkey resolved.

Czech reflections on its EU membership:

9. Economically, the Czech Republic was doing better through enlargement, though the public perceived it had lost out on agriculture. When the Czech Republic acceded, its primary goal was not economic (indeed, countries get good enough economic dividends through Association Agreements) but Schengen membership and a unified legal framework and institutions. There was also a notion that with EU membership it had taken a ‘civilisational step’.
10. The Eurozone was creating a Union within a Union: new Member States were finding upon accession that they were still not part of the EU's inner core. EU Membership was seen in two parts: becoming an EU Member, and becoming part of the Eurozone.

11. The Czechs had learned, particularly through their temporary derogation on the Euro, that it was better to negotiate within rather than with the EU.
12. The Czech public was apathetic on EU politics. Low Czech turnout in the recent European elections can be attributed to a number of reasons: perceptions that the EU Parliament (as opposed to the Commission) does not matter; recent presidential elections in the Czech Republic, EU experts being underrepresented in the Czech government, low media coverage. Some thought the gap between Brussels and Prague as the significant one; others thought the gap between government (in Brussels and Prague) and civil society including the public.
13. Enlargement had led to notable patterns of influence within the EU. The UK, for example, had gained influence within the EU through getting smaller states as allies, for instance as evidenced by Chirac's comments in 2003 about New Member States missing an opportunity to keep quiet over Iraq evidenced. The Czech Republic, for example, had found influence in the EU on trade (by forming alliances with Scandinavians) and on energy (by allying with Poland).

Challenges/future:

14. Given the unavoidable politics in at its crucial junctures, the accession process itself should be more predictable and inspire more trust. Linked to this, the focus on transitional controls for Free Movement of Workers had undermined the credibility of the EU offer to potential member states, so effective external communications were key.
15. The EU should not enlarge for the sake of enlarging. One participant thought that donating €15b to Ukraine was irresponsible. Before further Enlargement, the EU needed to agree on what it meant by political union – more competences for the EU or the Eurozone, for instance. The end result of enlargement could be territorial, pertain to energy resources, or refer to a Community of States. Lack of articulation this goal might stem from a failure of EU leadership.
16. One participant thought that further Enlargement, including Iceland, might be too far now. A more pressing question was how the EU could enlarge and at the same time become more effective.

17. The EU would be incomplete without Balkan membership, when Member States agree the conditions are met.