



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Phone interview with Prof. Dr. Florian Bieber, Director, Centre for Southeast European Studies, University of Graz, Austria, 6 June 2014

1. A Foreign Office official spoke to Prof. Dr. Florian Bieber on 6 June. The focus of the discussion was the relationship between EU Enlargement and security and stability issues both within, and in the neighbourhood of the EU.

Security and stability issues within the EU and its neighbourhood

2. Prof. Dr. Bieber began by noting that the security challenges faced by newly acceded and candidate countries were varied, though domestic instability and regional tension was a common theme. The recent crisis in the Ukraine was an atypical form of instability in which a major power had intervened in the domestic affairs of a neighbour and was overshadowing the more common causes of instability which can be found in, for example, the Balkans.
3. While many of the issues that affected security and stability in the Balkans and Baltic states has subsided since their peak in the 1990s, the issues themselves have not been decisively resolved (for example, the status of Hungarian minorities). In Prof. Dr. Bieber's opinion, The EU has had a key role in providing the necessary political framework to avoid a further escalation of tensions which, if the EU was not present, could boil over into more serious instability.

How the EU deals with security and stability issues in new or aspirant Member States

4. An example of how the EU has helped lessen tension and encourage social and political reform in candidate countries is apparent in a general increase in the number of ethnic minorities now included in coalition governments in the Balkans. This inclusiveness is driven, in part, through EU encouragement. Progress, however, is not uniform and, in some Baltic states, citizenship rights have not been granted to some minorities who have resided there for many years. In such instances, the EU can still act as an honest broker to highlight and reduce tensions.
5. In Prof. Dr. Bieber's view, the EU is most effective at dealing with security and stability issues in candidate countries when accession is a tangible and realistic goal. By clearly affirming that a candidate country can accede to the EU if certain benchmarks are met, governments in those countries can be compelled to make improvements to security and stability issues through more constructive engagement with neighbours (such as the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue), or more inclusive policies to resolve domestic concerns. The

political prestige the EU can offer through Trade Agreements and Stabilisation Association Agreements are also tangible attractions which accession countries are keen to secure.

6. However, when the prospect of accession is a decade or more away, this incentive is not nearly as effective at prompting reform. Enthusiasm for the EU has declined in Turkey due to the continuing uncertainty surrounding their prospects of membership.

External security threats to an enlarged EU

7. Should Turkey become a member of the EU, more external security issues would, by necessity, be pushed up the EU's agenda; such an enlarged EU would have borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran, and further political effort would be needed to help address these sources of instability on the borders. In such an instance, a wider EU agenda might compete against the national agenda of Turkey, and there may be greater difficulty in securing an EU common position.

EU Enlargement Process: Room for improvement

8. Prof. Dr. Bieber felt that one of the main drawbacks to the current enlargement process was the ease with which bilateral politics between countries could undermine the process, holding up membership prospects indefinitely. For instance, the ongoing Macedonia naming dispute means Macedonia's accession efforts are not held up by lack of reform, but by a bilateral disagreement with Greece. An informal mechanism that operated outside of the EU to address these political disputes and resolve them was required. EU political leaders also had a responsibility to clearly articulate the drawbacks, should aspirant countries be denied the option of joining. It was important, for instance, that Serbia was given sufficient incentive to join, as well as political support from the rest of the EU. The alternative could see Serbia moving closer to Russia, which may have its own consequences to the EU's security and stability prospects. In Prof. Dr. Bieber's view, there was often a self-interest case which was more compelling than the argument of EU altruism.
9. Finally, Prof. Dr. Bieber commented on the clear separation of the EU's enlargement process and external considerations such as the geographical/political neighbourhood of candidate or aspirant countries. Fears that the EU's Eastern Partnership strategy was a factor contributing to the current Ukraine crisis were misplaced. Rather, the clear separation of enlargement and wider politics demonstrated a sincerity in the process which was a great strength. A clear deal on the table for Ukraine was now necessary in order to show where its future – within the EU – might lie.