



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Record of meeting with Andrew Duff, former MEP, April 2014

Mr Duff believed that enlargement had been a driving force for EU integration, including for the UK. Its dynamic had fashioned the EU's evolution both directly and culturally.

In foreign policy terms, enlargement had been the EU's single most effective tool that had been employed systematically and successfully over the last 30 years. It was impossible to conceive that a 'closed EU' would be in the UK's interests. Enlargement was thought by the UK to widen but not necessarily deepen the EU. UK support for Turkey, for example, has been seen by some as a means to slow the pace of integration.

The 1973 enlargement has paradoxically proven to be the least successful for the EU by admitting a number of troublesome Member States. The 1981 and 1986 enlargements by contrast have proven to be great successes. In 2004, however, admitting Cyprus before a settlement proved to be a great mistake. Athens threatened to block all other applicants and we – including UK interests - are now living with the consequences (blocking Turkey, EU/NATO cooperation).

The EU has sought to learn lessons from previous enlargements – especially from 2007. The threshold for accession has increased, there is correctly now much greater caution, and quality-control has been strengthened. Following Romania and Bulgaria, where endemic corruption has been the issue, the Commission is now correctly putting much greater emphasis on Chapters 23 and 24. These are now rightly elevated to first place in negotiations.

EU pre-accession programmes have been effective and the EU can be proud of them. IPA has made a real contribution to economic and social development in Turkey, for example. Some funds may have been misspent here or there but this should not detract from the big picture. As well as sticks, the EU must offer accession countries carrots to reform too. The capacity required of accession countries to take on the burdens of membership is very great and they need assistance to achieve it. States need to be fully-functioning to cope with the obligations of membership and the EU has proved itself very effective at assisting with state building – as was shown in particular with the post-communist states after 1989.

Looking ahead, the EU needs to find a way to ensure that respect for the Copenhagen Criteria is maintained post-accession. This pressure should not suddenly cease upon accession. Hungary is a recent case in point. The Commission's proposals need to be examined carefully by the new European Parliament and Council. Such a process could permit a form of "reverse thrust" of membership momentum if a Member State is not respecting the EU's values, principles and constitutional order. With respect to Bulgaria and Romania, there is also a need to assess the impact of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) imposed by the Commission mainly with an eye to driving out corruption.

The western Balkans countries are unlikely to make much progress in the next 5 years. Accession is a long game requiring a lot of hard work. The UK should main its strong support for enlargement – but soberly, not naively or glibly. In particular, the EU needs cast-iron certainty that accession countries can function as new Member States before borders are opened to them.

Facile promises to the Eastern Partnership countries regarding their potential future EU membership should be avoided. Their membership, if it ever happens, will be a very major challenge.

Turkey's accession cannot go forward on the traditional basis. The EU needs to find an alternative for Turkey within the EU but short of full membership – a 'privileged partnership' outside the EU will not succeed. Such a solution would suit Turkey too. (Mr Duff pointed to his writings on this issue in "Fundamental Law", published by the Spinelli Group / Bertelman's Stiftung).

In sum, it is very much in the UK's interest that enlargement continues to be a driving force behind integration – but through a properly robust and thorough process. The 'fully in / fully out' model needs to be loosened, with more creative solutions and relationships for the countries to the EU's south and east.