

## **BALANCE OF COMPETENCES FOREIGN POLICY REPORT: RECORD OF MEETING WITH GRAHAM WATSON MEP, 28 FEBRUARY 2013**

The Foreign Policy Report team met Sir Graham Watson Liberal Democrat MEP for the South-West of England, on 28 February 2013. Mr Watson agreed that the following record could be submitted as evidence for the Foreign Policy Report.

### Added value (or not) of the EU to the UK - General Points

- It was “unimaginable that a major governing party of an important Member State could even consider leaving the EU”.
- If “the UK were a member of the Euro and Schengen we would benefit far more from the European Union than we currently do”.
- The UK leads CFSP
- The US had made it very clear it wanted the EU to tackle problems in its own neighbourhood. The EU had had some successes.

### Where the EU adds value (or not) for the UK in foreign policy

- The Ivory Coast. The EU had achieved remarkable success in mobilising the Africans themselves to promote democracy.
- Mali was arguably at the opposite end of the spectrum. The EU had failed to trouble-shoot even though the writing had long been on the wall and the French had been forced to intervene. The EU had followed.
- Defence. There was a general problem of lack of solidarity on defence in Europe which was coupled with levels of defence spending which were too low.
- The EU collectively spent half what the US did on defence but had only one tenth of US fire power. This was because of lack of harmonisation of defence systems and equipment. More should be done to rectify this.
- Defence Procurement. The UK had been remarkably successful in defence procurement at EU level but had blocked progress by resisting setting up the EDA and a fully fledged procurement policy.
- Defence cooperation at EU level had clear benefits for the UK. Sir Watson had Westland Helicopters in his constituency. It had merged with Augusta, an Italian Helicopter manufacturer, in 2000 to form a competitive alliance. Europe also had Eurocopter – a French-led group. This meant that the EU was preserving competition in the market, and getting defence capability whilst also creating jobs for European – including British - citizens.
- The British public did not realise that the EU had mobilised more than 20 civilian or military missions in the world. The mission in Aceh for example had been exemplary. Three missions were operating in the Congo. There was a military mission in Kosovo run by the Danes in which the UK was not participating at all. These missions represented good value for money for the British taxpayer.

- When EU Foreign Ministers had signed off a 500-strong mission to Mali at the last Foreign Affairs Council they had done something that no Member State could do on its own given the current resource climate.
- Working through the EU established a culture of cooperation which created a presumption that where one Member State was militarily engaged, others would support. In Iraq, for example, the Germans had provided logistical support.
- Sanctions were another area where there was clear value in working through the EU. We simply could not have the same impact nationally.
- The Middle East Peace Process. The Ashton/Clinton relationship had given the EU greater leverage on the MEPP. This had helped get the US to pressure the Israelis over releasing Palestinian tax revenues.
- Arab Spring. The EU had made a lot of promises it had then been unable to fulfil, notably on economic support. The funds promised to Tunisia, for example, had not been disbursed. For its part the EP had developed a new programme – the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights – with a budget of 3-4meuros. This was being used to help civil society in North Africa.
- Individual Member States could have difficulty working effectively with their former colonies e.g. France in North Africa, due to local sentiments about colonialism. Working through the EU could be a better alternative.

### EU Institutional Architecture

- The HR/VP had suffered more criticism than a man would have in her place and been given an unmanageable task in not only having to assume representational duties but build an administration at the same time. Double-hatting the HR/VP hadn't increased coherence in EU foreign policy, partly because of this and the current presidential nature of the Commission.
- What could change? If the practice of a commissioner per Member State continued, the external relations commissioners could be clustered under the next HR/VP.
- The European Parliament had acquired a greater role under Lisbon and this was a good thing in terms of democratic accountability. Mr Watson had made the first use of a new power under Lisbon whereby the EP could make recommendations to the Council. He had put forward a report on the use of sanctions against individuals in countries where the EU already had a sanctions policy. This had helped sanctioning Syria. The EP's powers were still far short of those of e.g. the US House or Senate.

### Civil Protection

- During the flooding in Gloucestershire, Mr Watson had drawn down some Solidarity funding. However the complications – created by the UK

central/local government interface not the EU – had almost outweighed the benefits.

- It was important to point out that when “solidarity funding” was used elsewhere in Europe e.g. to mobilise EU equipment to put out fires in the Mediterranean, this could benefit British tourists.
- The 2006 blood directive had been of major use to all Member States. In the aftermath of the Madrid terrorist attack, blood had been sent to Spain from other Member States to help victims. This was another example of where action through the EU could be of benefit to UK citizens.