

## **BALANCE OF COMPETENCES FOREIGN POLICY REPORT: RECORD OF MEETING WITH BRUSSELS-BASED THINK TANKS: 12 FEBRUARY 2013**

1. UKREP hosted a meeting on the Balance of Competences Foreign Policy Report with think-tanks in Brussels on 12 February. This is an unattributable record of key points.
2. The Foreign Office set out: the background to the Balance of Competences Review; the proposed structure of the Foreign Policy Report; and emerging themes in the evidence submitted to date.
3. Comments from participants:
  - **How to define “British interests” in the Foreign Policy Report:** several participants noted that Britain’s national interest with regard to the EU should not be defined in narrow “transactional” terms in the report as this would alienate EU partners. The report should make clear that the UK: was examining competence from the perspective of a Member State firmly within the EU; acted at EU level on a large number of foreign policy issues; benefited from shaping the EU’s response to foreign policy questions; and that it was in the UK’s interest to foster the EU’s soft power. If you looked at the TEU EU “interests” were only referred to a few times (Articles 13,20,32 and 42) and on each occasion in the context of “enhanced” or “structured cooperation”. The EU’s interests went beyond those of Member States but also covered those of its citizens.
  - **The UK as a foreign policy actor:** participants were in agreement that “only the UK, and arguably France, had a true global foreign policy”. The UK played a productive role in shaping EU foreign policy e.g. UK support for enlargement had been crucial in fostering peace in the Balkans.
  - **The UK’s positioning in Europe:** in general Member States either took an “instrumental” approach to EU foreign policy or saw themselves as an intrinsic “part of an international actor of a new kind”. The UK was best amongst Member States at adopting an instrumental approach, effectively using the EU as a framework to promote its objectives. The majority of Member States including Germany and France took the second approach, putting a premium on common EU policy.. The UK’s “outsider looking in” stance was undermining its ability to deliver. It was alienating others by “ring-fencing” issues such as external representation and indeed had ended up “blocking agreements it had drafted itself” as a result. It was regarded as “a free rider” on visa facilitation agreements with countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy.
  - **Competence:** CFSP was intergovernmental and no Member State seriously wanted to move to QMV. Competence was therefore not an issue. Ensuring foreign policy tools – which were often EU exclusive or mixed competence – could be deployed effectively was.
  - **EU Foreign Policy Architecture:** one participant argued that the current institutional framework “made no sense”. Others generally agreed. The

“tragedy of CFSP” was that foreign policy had been divorced from foreign policy tools. The CFSP budget was a mere 400m euros. The Commission had 10bn euros of foreign policy tools at its disposal. It was suggested **the EEAS**: “didn’t know what it was” – a “CFSP Secretariat or policy making machine”, reactive or proactive; lacked an “esprit de corps” due to inadequate personnel policy; was dependent on the Commission in financial terms; and could not properly cover the external aspects of EU internal policies as it had lost the relevant DG RELEX desks to the Commission upon its creation. Member States could help the EEAS develop by more actively sharing information. It should act as an information hub. **The European Parliament** had gained more power through Lisbon and was a potential ally for the EEAS. There were significant divisions between **the Commission and the EEAS** which were reflected in EU Delegations where Commission and EEAS staff received separate sets of instructions. The **HR/VP** was using her CFSP hat to the full, but not that of Vice-President of the Commission.

- **How Foreign Policy Architecture Should Change:** All thought that the next President of the Commission should empower the HR/VP to ensure effective coordination of the Relex Commissioners, who had rarely met as a group post Lisbon. One participant suggested that the ideal scenario would be to **create a unified EEAS/Commission service for EU external relations**. PSC – which focused on CFSP/CSDP matters – should instead become a kind of **COREPER 3** focusing on the full range of EU external issues. This idea had traction as did the suggestion that the **Neighbourhood Commissioner** be given a stronger position within the Commission, formally deputising for the HR/VP. This could be enacted through the EEAS mid-term review. **DEVCO/EEAS/ECHO**: all participants saw evidence of silos, although one argued that humanitarian aid principles were clearly different from those of development and should be kept separate.
- **EU Foreign Policy Achievements post-Lisbon:** crisis management in the Horn of Africa; Balkans policy (the Serbia/Kosovo dialogue); and communication at the time of the Arab Spring was good under the circumstances. One participant thought the Southern Neighbourhood May 2011 communication, which they described as “enlargement lite”, was unrealistic: Arab countries were not seeking EU-style reform but instead needed a more differentiated approach. The EU had had little impact in stabilising the region. Another participant thought the new ENP would bear fruit over time. There was an observation that although many Member States did not tackle human rights issues with China, the EU and the UK did.
- **EU Foreign Policy disappointments:** Strategic partnerships “no significant change”; CSDP “dead in the water”; Eastern Neighbourhood due to differences in MS willingness to commit; opinion was divided about the effectiveness of the EU’s response to the Arab Spring.