

Thank you for the invitation to attend the recent consultation on cohesion and other funding including the TEN-Ts. It was valuable in some respects but overall we must enter a minority report to your draft as I did not feel the discussion helped us very much for the following reasons.

It was disappointing to meet so few private sector organisations and I note that the industrial policy meeting has been cancelled through lack of support. This seems to be worrying since the private sector provides the taxes upon which EU funding is based and if they are not interested one has to wonder whether they believe the process has any worth at all. Hopefully they will reply in writing at least to this consultation.

The meeting seemed to move towards a discussion about how to get more money for the UK from the EU. I was under the impression that was not the purpose of the discussions.

It was also peculiar to find the Commission present. This is the first time it has happened in my experience of these consultations. The mere fact it asked to attend should not have been accepted. This was a national discussion. Given that we were supposed to be operating using the Chatham House Rule, and there is only one, how could one do that if the EC representative was taking notes and presumably sending them to Brussels? The representative himself was charming and well informed but the Daily Mail headline factor (e.g. Government has to include Commission in national consultations) should have been considered. That to me seemed to be why few if any consultations I have attended have had the EC present. Furthermore, it was not necessary since we were assured that anonymised reports would be published anyway.

I was surprised that BIS was not willing to give a “where are we/how well have we done” on the subjects. As I heard it Open Europe and Warwick University said that assessments were virtually impossible but do you agree? The Chatham House Rule should have ensured that your views would not have gone further (EC notwithstanding). Mind you, with the Commission present, this might have been a good thing to mention anyway. When you made the point that the UK advocated more money going to the poorer EU states I inferred that the current transfer mechanisms had not worked as well as they might have. Was I right? We know we have spent money, although sometimes that has not been clear, but it is virtually impossible to know whether value has been added. Your private comment to me that Italy will only accept transfer payments via the EU was very useful but others may need to/should know this. Fundamentally, as none of us has any more money, without a proper situation report from the UK Government, one felt one was merely “shooting the breeze”. If we genuinely want to reform the EU, this consultation method may not work for 2 reasons. Box ticking is what we have had for too long and the public already seems to have a political alternative (UKIP?).

As far as transport policy is concerned its link to modal shift will imperil EU development because, as the various Railway Packages have shown, rail has yet to deliver and may not be willing or able to deliver on its promises. We have become very tired at being the cash cow from which other modes get subsidies. The way in which some member states operate their railways are in contravention of both the spirit and the letter of EU legislation.. We did not say that, Lord Berkeley, the Rail Freight Group, the International Road Transport Union and others did in another forum. It is so unusual for this eclectic group of advocates to agree on anything that it is rather like Manchester United and Manchester City helping each other to win the Premier League. In a recent UK Parliamentary Transport Select Committee hearing,

Brian Simpson, the Chairman of the EP Transport and Tourism Committee said: “as far a rail interoperability is concerned we are in the last chance saloon”. Therefore, the EU institutions seem to be wanting over TEN-Ts and some kind of better member state involvement/scrutiny might make sure that we supply only enough funds to do a proper job, once we have established how that is done and how it can be verified.

Sadly, your discussion more than any other seemed to me to be little more than a box ticking exercise, particularly when the Cabinet Office representative said the consultations would not be linked to repatriation of powers. To the public these consultations, despite any Government intention, should or will lead to at least some repatriation as implied in the calling notice to the consultation process which states:

“ As you know the Government is conducting a Review of the Balance of Competences between the UK and EU, which aims to deepen public and Parliamentary understanding of the nature of our EU membership and provide a constructive and serious contribution to the national and wider European debate about modernising, reforming and improving the EU”.

If repatriation of some powers is not being considered let alone intended then what is the point of the consultations?

I would be happy to supply more detail as you think fit.

Yours sincerely

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