



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Meeting with Vít Beneš, Institute of International Relations Prague, June 2014

1. A Foreign Office official interviewed Vít Beneš from the Institute of International Relations in Prague in June 2014, for the UK Balance of Competences Review of EU Enlargement.
2. Mr Benes considered there to be too much politics around the opening and closing of Chapters in accession negotiations. This had made the process unpredictable, and in need of streamlining through conditionality at one rather than many points. Cyprus had abused its position as a Member State in the accession process. Indeed, Member States should not have leverage over candidate countries - there was a mismatch of power.
3. With regard to enlargement policy, a key challenge could be vesting more ownership with individual Member States rather than having Member States (as a collective entity) and the Commission drive the process. Having too many little and not one big step in the accession process did not help.
4. The key motivation for the Czech Republic when joining the EU was to strengthen its negotiating position, to be competitive with its neighbourhood. The Czech Republic had used the EU to help guide due regulatory reform. However, the Czech policy elite slowly began to see the EU as a 'multiplier' in Foreign Policy and a relevant geopolitical force.
5. There were disadvantages to Czech membership of the EU: now national level politics was all about politics and not about policies. At the European level, the Czechs had policies without politics. More democracy (or even populism) was needed at the European level. The Commission was inherently elitist. Without meaningful Czech national policies, opposition to the EU could flourish.
6. The Czech Republic would not join the Eurozone soon. The windows of opportunity had been missed. So far, the Czech Republic had not budged from past Eurosceptic

positions. It was not 'when' but 'if' the Czech Republic joined the Eurozone. Despite the change of government, the Czech EU policy had been "locked" on previous policies.

7. The EU had changed. The Eurozone, with its own institutions and de facto eurozone primary law, had become an organization within an organization. The Czech Republic had rejected becoming a "founding member" of the Eurozone. Right now, its status and thus its bargaining power resembled that of a candidate country. It felt like a second 'accession'. By staying outside the Eurozone, the Czech Republic decided to become a "second-class member."
8. Even the UK should be worried. Until recently, the EU was able to manage diversity within a single legal and institutional framework. This single legal and institutional framework ensured access to decision-making processes and bargaining power for the non-Eurozone countries (as per the Lisbon treaty negotiations).
9. But now the Eurozone had its own legal and institutional framework. The consent of the non-Eurozone countries was no longer needed for the further evolution and deepening of the European (Eurozone) integration. It was a strategic mistake of the non-Eurozone countries to let that happen.