



# Foreign & Commonwealth Office

## **Record of roundtable discussion on Security and Stability, London, 19 June 2014**

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On 19 June 2014 the following participants took part in a roundtable discussion at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

- Ms Joan Hoey
- Dr Cvete Koneska
- Dr James Ker-Lindsay
- Mr Malcolm Russell
- Ms Francesca Manchi

1. A fundamental issue in this discussion was how to test the assumption that enlargement has contributed to security and stability.
2. Participants agreed that it would be helpful to establish a baseline against which to assess this assumption. The most appropriate and relevant point of departure, chronologically, socially and politically was felt to be the period during which former Soviet Union members became independent states in the 1990s. The assessment would track their trajectory towards association with the EU, which is one of the main routes through which the EU has enlarged in this period. This approach elicited trends or themes which included the following:
  - In the Western Balkans context, taking the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s as a starting point offered the most comparative potential for discussion. Yugoslavia had had good and open relations with the west, including trade and travel but subsequent progress did not pan out as expected the region had subsequently deteriorated into extensive and severe armed conflict, to the extent that it required international armed intervention over a considerable period. It could be argued that the EU helped bring security and stability in response to this conflict, but this was more due to intervention than enlargement. It was difficult to assess whether earlier or more robust EU enlargement policy towards the Balkans could have prevented or

minimised the conflict, but the attraction of EU membership may be a contributing factor to containing violence in more recent years.

- Comparatively, understanding what might be defined as success was considered difficult within the realm of security. The nature of security is different (energy, finance, terror) depending on the aspirant's or member state's geographic location. Speakers suggested that this had been redefined in the wider non-EU area, especially when you consider the impact on Ukraine and Georgia. It was accepted and highlighted that enlargement impacts not just EU members states' security but will have an effect across a wider area. Speakers pointed to the example of recent Russian reactions to EU activities.
- Romania and Hungary faced tensions wrapped up in pre-existing ethnic issues which had threatened violent conflict. EU engagement with Cyprus was cited as another a case in point, Cyprus's 2004 accession was right but it highlighted flaws in the process. Significantly, the EU lost leverage with the (Greek Cypriot controlled) government of Cyprus. Before joining, enlargement acted as a catalyst, encouraging conflict resolution, but the EU could have wielded this leverage more effectively. As enlargement in the Western Balkans approaches, lessons must be learnt from Cyprus' accession. Nevertheless, the sense was that the EU has 'softened' conflicts. Romania and Hungary's 'good neighbourly policy' meant that both countries improved their relations despite these tensions. This is an example of where EU accession seems to have played a role in improving security and stability.
- Evaluating the impact of EU enlargement on security and stability impact needs to be considered not just in terms of violent conflict. Another factor is financial security and stability. Cyprus was considered economically qualified for EU membership in 2004 but its economic and financial institutions have not improved as expected. It was noted that this is true of many new member states. EU member states appear to be no more economically successful than non-EU countries. Indeed, some member states have suffered dire economic crises which have threatened wider European financial and economic stability across the Euro-zone. On this basis, it would be difficult to conclude that enlargement has led to greater financial and economic stability within Europe.

- Influence and impact on neighbouring countries and new member states is another way in which security and stability should be assessed. Continuing with an analysis of Cyprus, the EU was able to exert more influence on the security and stability situation within the country prior to accession. The application process acted as a catalyst encouraging conflict resolution and the EU could wield this leverage effectively due to the conditional nature of the relationship. This is something that should be borne in mind with the continuing enlargement programme in the Balkans. Another example is Ukraine. Ukraine's move towards the EU and away from the Russian sphere of influence could be seen as one of the contributing factors for instability and insecurity in contemporary Ukraine, and which some fear could escalate into a broader international security threat. Russian concerns over Georgia's move towards the EU had, arguably, contributed to border and internal tensions. These tensions were also wrapped up in pre-existing ethnic issues.
- Counterfactual and perspective considerations were also difficult. The EU had become a major actor across a much wider Europe since the demise of the Soviet Union. There were newly independent states and a new alignment so it could be argued that this vacuum needed to be filled by some form of regional organisation. Only NATO and the EU were realistically and practicably placed to do this and they both played a role. The impact of both was a change in the geostrategic political balance and an ideological change. This was realised in people's perceptions also. Consideration of whether NATO or the EU could, or should, have taken more of a lead, or acted alone lead to a recognition that both organisations were necessary. NATO has exerted extensive and focussed intervention and influence within Europe. Its role in political and military engagement has resulted in convergence of doctrine, its Partnership for Peace activities lead to greater cohesion in security and defence forces across Europe immediately following the collapse of the Soviet military structures. Its continuing role as the conduit for European stabilisation and intervention force activities provides unity of identity and contributes tangibly to the external security and stability for the EU. However, NATO's defence focus and mandate makes it less well equipped to address the social and political changes needed to foster longer term security and stability within Europe. Its more 'central' US voice may have antagonised wider relationships, for example with Russia, had it acted as the sole means to fill the vacuum of post Soviet Europe. The EU, on the other hand, is essentially a political and social organisation, with a broad European focus and its remit is to foster institutional, political and social transition, which it has done as an integral part of its enlargement programme. EU enlargement, therefore, is

closely associated with longer term security and stability transition within Europe. Counterfactually, therefore, the indicators suggest that both NATO and the EU have played an important role in promoting security and stability in Europe. Neither NATO nor the EU could have done this alone. The indications are that EU enlargement has helped to avoid instability caused by a political and social vacuum and has provided a practicable route to facilitate the longer term political and social transition underpinning security and stability in Europe.

- It was felt that it is important to consider the inter-relationship between NATO and the EU. On balance it was considered that there are no explicit links between NATO activity in Europe and EU enlargement but links are perceived, and this is unhelpful. For example, Russia considers Cyprus as a reliable ally despite its EU membership but had Cyprus joined NATO they may have felt that this relationship was at risk. Russia is aware that many EU aspirant states and new members also seek NATO membership. It is quite likely that those states which are not EU candidates and Russia will have (various) concerns about the enlargement of the EU for political, social, ideological and competitive reasons. The perceived NATO link to EU enlargement could be a factor in causing or exacerbating these concerns by introducing an element of perceived security, defence and territorial integrity threat. The NATO link could be seen as providing the wherewithal to enhance co-optive EU alignment with coercive force.
- Taking a perspective on the EU itself as an expanding entity, there was discussion on how to identify the rationale for EU enlargement, which could range from self-interested enterprise to altruistic catalyst for transition and change in non-EU European states. This gave rise to the question of whether enlargement in itself is the objective or whether enlargement is a tool to achieve other objectives. It was noted that the shape and definition of success would depend on the definition of the objective and the role of enlargement. It would also depend on the perspective of the analysis (for example perspective of new members, aspirant members, states who are not able to become members, and states that perceive a loss of influence as the EU enlarges).
- The baseline of the 1990s had given a 25 year period for analysis but even this was quite short in terms of the time needed to assess how EU enlargement had impacted on security and stability in Europe due to the length of time it takes to fully implement

changes across internal structures of new member states. In addition, there was the added complication that many of these states were newly independent and adapting to a different position in the international political architecture. EU membership and enlargement could not be seen or assessed in isolation to these other complex structures and processes. Furthermore, much of the enlargement is recent cases, covered broad aspects of state practice and would tend to show results in different places in different ways and to differing extents. This made it hard to quantify and qualify the impact of enlargement in a direct way or by comparison between states.

- However, considering enlargement from a pan-European perspective, the desire for ideological, social and economic cohesion appears to be driving homogeneity of purpose and providing mechanisms for social and political conflict resolution that alienates and obviates violence. It was therefore considered that enlargement is playing a role within Europe to enhance security and stability because of its inclusive mechanisms and the standards it sets. But enlargement can also contribute to an increase in violent conflict in areas outside the EU sphere of influence where these coincide with claims to influence or clash of interests with third states. The time of most effective influence and highest antagonism is immediately pre-accession.
- It was considered hard to specifically separate the role of the EU as it is a self-interested enterprise. Some believed it had helped establish security in Europe and filled the vacuum left by the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, but speakers recognised too that aspirant nations were looking for inclusion, so it was hard to attribute 'success' solely to the EU.
- EU enlargement policy tends not to be instrumental in stopping conflict but has had the ability to soften conflicts and create a trend towards prevention. There appeared to be three reasons for this (i) the economic and financial benefits of EU membership acted as a lever to encourage accession states to adopt policies of non-violence both at the national and sub-national level and to work towards levels of governance that would qualify the state for EU membership; (ii) achieving these standards of governance and security sector reform improved conditions in ways that helped to prevent violent conflict; and (iii) when EU membership was acquired, the cohesion and integration factors made violent conflict across and within states less likely.

- For improved stability and security it is important to maintain high standards, leveraging the benefit of membership while conducting exhaustive assessment to ensure that a state had reached the required standards rather than allowing standards to slip to hasten membership. It is not membership itself that is the key factor, but the achievement of the standards and reforms to acquire membership.

### **Possible challenges and concerns moving forward**

3. Speakers started the discussion by outlining the current system of assessment for EU aspirants. They highlighted that one of the weaknesses in the system is an absence of pre-report input, which had been seen most recently with the report on Albania. The Commission report included favourable recommendations towards candidacy, which were not in line with UK perceptions. The UK pushed back, but under the current system this could only occur during the 'endorsement phase', so it became public and carried the risk of political embarrassment. Speakers suggested a more discreet early stage procedure might be better.
4. Some delegates believed that the current system of aspirant assessment creates tensions between the Commission and member states. The balance of competence could usefully move further towards member states. This would reduce the problem of mixed signals such as had arisen in the case of Albania due to what was seen and interpreted as a perceived shift in the UK position purely because of the procedural process of EU assessments. It would maintain a balanced and accurate assessment of the aspirant state based on qualifying criteria for accession but avoid expectations based on mixed messages.
5. Consistent with the view on altered balance of competence in assessing applications for membership is the question of whether conditionality should become more effective and in a broader way. Conditionality appears not to have been applied as originally intended due to political pressures both to see more enlargement and, conversely, to prevent membership for some aspirant states due to wider political disputes. This was detrimental to EU credibility and the interests of member states and aspirant states. For example, the FYR Macedonia has been waiting to start negotiations for six years. This could be construed as supporting the political position of one member state over wider EU interests and those of the applicant state.

6. There may now be questions over whether enlargement remains an appropriate tool due to the way in which political considerations played an increasingly influential role. It was asked whether enlargement had now reached its limits but there was no consensus. A speaker suggested revising the policy of an individual veto in lieu of a more quantitative voting system given the problems with frozen accession negotiations. It was generally thought not to be desirable, not least as it might unintentionally create more blocking.
7. It was felt that Conditionality and Enlargement were now being viewed as ever more technical processes, which did not always align with political processes. It was suggested that this type of conditionality might be insufficient for future assessment. A clearer or possibly revised structure might allow better planning than the current system of compromise which could send unclear messaging to applicant states. The possible inclusion of a member state veto to freeze accession was discussed but, on balance, considered not an advantage because it too could be used to create more political blocking. A more structured balance of perspectives (from member states) might facilitate better measurement and assessment and lead to more tangible progress.
8. All agreed on the importance that the process of Enlargement retained as a catalyst for legal reform. However there was a view that more consideration should be given to the ability of the aspirant or accession state to implement the policies that it formulated to meet the assessment requirements. It was not sufficient to introduce the policies; they had to be implemented for compliance with the conditionality requirements. This is a matter of both capacity and social transition to accept a possible change of values. For example, LGBT rights legislation might be on the statute books, but not implemented. The harmonisation of domestic law to the *acquis* assumes a well tested, universal body of reform, applicable to all in Europe, when the reality is that many member states cannot yet achieve this requirement, to bring about wider social change.
9. The *acquis* had been created to reflect standards and conditions in market economies that had reached a certain level of developmental maturity and critical mass. In order to facilitate membership for some of the newer member states the interpretation and implementation of these standards had been flexible. It was expected that the boost of EU memberships would quickly change social and economic conditions quite rapidly to allow them to reach the required standards. This

had not always proven to be the case. Current aspirant states are starting from a point some distance from these standards and have much slower growth, a more disparate social value system. They are less similar to that in the states where the acquis was developed, and they were less likely to be able to use the economic and financial boost of EU membership to achieve those standards quickly. It would be a mistake to lower conditions sufficiently for their early membership because they would not be able to comply with the standards. Furthermore; premature accession would put a drain on the EU's resources and undermine the EU itself. On the other hand, it would be inequitable to current applicants for them to be treated more harshly than their predecessors.

10. Participants thought that the acquis had been created as a tool for developed market economies. It was viewed as unfortunate that no one was willing to assess how realistic the acquis now was. A suggestion was that they should be reviewed to see how well current members have applied it and what the realistic time-frame for aspirants is on such conditionality. It might not be in the EU's interests to continue pushing a model that was designed for Western European countries and that others may not want or even need. It was felt that applying standards not specifically developed for those countries carries a risk that aspirants will learn to comply only until they attain membership at which point they might start to ignore them. But, this could lead to some European states never becoming EU members and others might be looking at very long periods before being considered. This could be divisive across Europe. It was felt that this is a problem that needs to be addressed: the EU cannot afford to allow the veneer of compliance to be sufficient for membership. Nor can it afford to allow standards to fall. But it needs to find a way to avoid polarisation across Europe.
11. Enlargement is geographically limited to an Easterly and Southerly direction. As this continues, the geographic and power centre of Europe may remain in its Western sector but the EU's world view will gradually become increasingly influenced by differing perspectives and priorities that arise from its member states further East and South. This could be seen as a challenge or as an opportunity. The challenge will be to long held Western European priorities, with focus on the broader international security architecture, traditional global allies and geostrategic priorities. The opportunity will be for an EU with a more broadly based world view, with new networked opportunities within its nearer abroad and, potentially, longer term markets within its own broadly drawn frontiers.



12. There is also the question of the extent to which the EU can continue to enlarge. This is not specifically connected with the questions of conditionality and convergence, but more in line with geostrategic realities and wider political relationships. The EU institutionally may be reluctant to engage with this debate due to the way in which it sets limitations on its political aspirations and because it creates a polarisation within Europe, potentially alienating some important partner states. However, the result of not engaging and sending appropriate signals could be sending harmful messaging that inflames tensions and raises false expectations. Where this is linked to the question of conditionality and convergence is in relation to the question of whether the current methodology is appropriate. If some European states are not likely to reach (or if it is not in their interests to try to reach) the situation where they can comply with and implement reform based on the EU's conditions there may be a case for some form of 'second tier' relationship with the EU. This could also help in drawing the limits of EU enlargement.

### **UK role in enlargement**

13. Participants generally agreed, as the recent European elections showed, that the credibility of the EU is not as great as it was 20 years ago. It was stressed that the UK is not alone in experiencing this, but it still needed to be recognised that shifts in our policies and positions have likely reduced our influence in the context of enlargement.
14. It was considered that aspirant states might lean naturally to UK positions or policies but lack the resources for true engagement and have concerns that to show these views might be prejudicial to their case for membership. It was highlighted that aspirants seem less inclined to engaging with the UK given the possibility of UK exit and the nature of the national debate on the EU. For example, Serbia, who had been seen as historically willing to engage with the UK, is now more closely aligned with Germany. This is not a linear and direct result of UK hesitation on the EU but it is likely that aspirant states will align more with states showing a deeper and more certain commitment to the EU. The UK is, therefore, starting to lose allies and some of the levers for shaping the future of the EU within an expanded EU structure.
15. It was felt that this is compounded by a perception that the UK is, for reasons of immigration policy as much as anything else, no longer the champion of enlargement

that it once was. This appears to be resulting in shifting attitudes, particularly where our reputation was strong in the Western Balkans and Turkey. The bigger accession carrots now seem to be visas and the Euro, but the UK sits outside both, which makes UK commitment to the EU appear weak.

## **Conclusions**

16. It was agreed that the EU is now seen as a central plank for the security structure of Europe, including Russia. Ukraine highlights the potential and the risk. It wants to do things the EU way while Russia wants to pull it in another direction. In all future enlargement discussions the EU should recognise Russia's need to influence, and maintain this influence, and that this will continue to affect states who wish to accede to the EU.
17. A solution needs to be found on how to deal with those aspirant states that are unlikely to be able to actually implement (not just introduce the legislation for) full compliance with the conditions of membership. They cannot be left in limbo for long periods, nor can EU standards be allowed to fall.
18. The EU and NATO played crucial roles in filling a vacuum in post-Soviet Europe. This provided the framework for cohesion that helped shore up stability and security, but it was not able to prevent violent conflict in some areas, notably in the Balkans. Neither NATO nor the EU could have filled this architecture gap alone, each had its limitations and its advantages. But both have contributed to security and stability when considered at the geostrategic level.
19. In particular, the EU has been a catalyst for social, political and institutional reform that has enabled conflict to be channelled away from violence and into political and social contestation. This has facilitated the rise of democratic processes and the rule of law. The economic and financial benefits of EU enlargement have provided the impetus for reform among aspirant states and the benefits this reform has brought to a new large geographic bloc has amplified success for the EU, its member states and its partners through improved prosperity and stability.
20. There are risks, and there have been setbacks. Risks include getting right the balance between ensuring efficient and speedy accession, ensuring the pace of change can be absorbed by the aspirant state, and the ability of that state to

implement reform. Where this has not been appropriately achieved financial, economic and social failure has been experienced, some of which have threatened cross-EU financial stability. There is also the risk of violent confrontation when the interests of other regional actors appear to be in tension with those of EU enlargement, in particular with regard to Russia. These are important factors that need to be considered very carefully in the continuing process of enlargement, but they do not detract from the overall advantages that enlargement has so far brought in terms of providing the architecture for security and stability across Europe.