



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Meeting with Professor Mitchell Belfer, Metropolitan University Prague, June 2014

1. A Foreign Office official interviewed Professor Mitchell Belfer from the Metropolitan University in Prague in June 2014, for the UK Balance of Competences Review of EU Enlargement.
2. Professor Belfer underlined that Poland was a vital player, which could be thought of as “E3 plus one”. UK had opportunities with Poland. Norway’s wish to keep out of the EU was based on maintaining control of its natural resources. If in the EU, Norway would give more than it would get back. Iceland would similarly be a net contributor.
3. The Enlargement process had been mismanaged completely, from Greece’s accession in 1981: the ‘special treatment’ Greece received then had left a legacy – as witness its obstinacy on Macedonia; Slovenia and Croatia had not resolved differences between them, or with Serbia, and ethnic tensions persisted in Croatia. The Balkans should have acceded to the EU together rather than in pieces.
4. EU enlargement was always beset by (a) EU’s lack of end-goal; (b) the gulf between the role the EU wanted to and could play. Enlargement had also led to a de facto Defence Union rivalling NATO.
5. Germany had behaved irresponsibly selfishly on enlargement, for example over Croatia where Germany had rushed to recognise Croatia’s independence. That irresponsibility fitted a wider trend of German self-interest, where Germany had bided its time through a defence policy that protected its economic interests. While not contributing adequately to defence and security of the EU’s external frontiers, nor giving NATO sufficient support, Germany had used its privileged economic position to exact political costs from more vulnerable continental states such as Greece following the 2008 economic crisis. This underlined the need for the UK to play a greater role in parts of Central, South and Eastern Europe; the ‘German model’ was (largely) unattractive, and many Member States would be interested in an alternative; a ‘UK model’ that strengthened trade links and liberalised national economies without political fracturing. Germany might be two leaderships away from exerting a leading role in Europe.