



Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Record of meeting with Dr Charles Tannock, MEP, April 2014

Dr Tannock believed EU enlargement benefitted the UK in creating a wider, looser, more flexible Europe – in line with Conservative thinking. Further enlargement will not occur before 8-10 years, by when the EU's structure could be very different. The Conservatives are calling for a new accommodation in Europe both for the UK and for others. Future membership terms may also differ in free movement, following the UK's experience after 2004. Turkish membership would be particular challenge.

Russian expansionism is a new element. Moscow has said it sees EU enlargement as a threat to Russian interests, particularly following the Georgia conflict when it saw the Eastern Partnership in a new perspective. Given the EU has recognised Turkey as a negotiating candidate, it would be inconsistent not to recognise Ukraine also as a potential member, even if Russia disapproves as it wants Ukraine by force if necessary in its Eurasian Union.

The UK should remain pro-enlargement but recognise it cannot continue in future as now. There are issues – eg - around welfare, benefits tourism and free movement to be addressed. The case for enlargement to the western Balkans needed to be made more convincingly as in our enlightened self interest. The EU and NATO would glue the region to Europe, without which there was a real danger of destabilisation, influx of refugees etc etc. The Ukraine/Crimea crisis were already impacting negatively in Bosnia's Serb regions.

In Brussels, enlargement has clearly been in the UK's interests. The enlarged EP has worked very well, with new partners joining the Conservatives in the ECR. Paradoxically, however, enlargement increases the workload yet reduces the number of MEPs per Member State. The UK has found new friends and partners among new Member States, many of whom remember the UK's role during the Cold War with gratitude. English has become more widespread in the Institutions. UK leadership in EU foreign policy is respected, and the UK is able to project significant influence through the EU as a major global trading bloc – which grows further with enlargement. A larger EU is more attractive for other global partners – eg, the US and India – to deal with. New Member States have also provided a pool of skilled workers that the UK and others have drawn from.

The Commonwealth could not offer these benefits as an alternative. Indeed, our Commonwealth partners, the US and many others very much want the UK to remain within the EU.

The Member States and Institutions have learned from previous enlargements. Bulgaria and Romania were admitted too soon, before they had reached the required standard – eg – on

the rule of law. Processes are now far more vigilant. The western Balkans countries will be required to do more to tackle perceptions of crime threats.

Conditionality does appear to have been effective. Most recently, Croatia has had to pass a higher barrier than other previous EU applicants. Croatia also acted to arrest a former PM for corruption, and others accused of war crimes.

Alleged lack of accountability and transparency in the use of EU funds, including pre-accession funds, has been a driver of Euroscepticism. The fraud rate has in fact been in line with UK norms. However the error rate has been unacceptably high. The EIB has done particularly good work with EU applicant countries.

Overall, enlargement has increased general EU sensitivity towards the interests of individual Member States. There has not been any drive in an enlarged EU against any individual Member State interests.