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THE EUROPEAN

The European View

Is the European External Action Service fit for purpose?

What do Britain's political parties really think about the EU?

Is Turkey a trip of discovery for the EU?



REGENT'S COLLEGE
LONDON

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The European View

For a while now the rhetorical narrative of those that advocate leaving the EU has been accompanied by a variety of alternatives to EU membership. Many ideas have been put forward, some quite ‘exotic’ or outright unrealistic, but there are two paradigms that are held up as the best possible options for Britain: Norway and Switzerland.

But upon closer inspection both options fail to stand up to scrutiny. They are both small and peripheral countries, with specialised economies and limited aspirations for influence at the global stage.

Norway as a member of the European Free Trade Area is part of the European Economic Area, which gives it access to the Single Market, with all the economic advantages that come with it. But here lays the catch, to be part of the Single Market and enjoy the benefits that affords you, one has to abide with its rules. But when that state is not a member of the European Union it does not have the right to take part in the decision-making structures that decide the rules that govern that Single Market. Not a particularly advantageous state of affairs and the Norwegian government had the following to say in a recently published report:

"The most problematic aspect of Norway's form of association with the EU is the fact that Norway is in practice bound to adopt EU policies and rules in a broad range of issues without being a member and without voting rights. This raises democratic problems. Norway is not represented in decision-making processes that have direct consequences for Norway, and neither do we have any significant influence on them. Moreover, our form of association with the EU dampens political engagement and debate in Norway

and makes it difficult to monitor the Government and hold it accountable in its European policy"¹.

This is a damning verdict for those that call for withdrawal of the EU. Asking to relegate the UK to such an associate membership status is catastrophic and it does an enormous disservice to Britain, limits its influence on the international stage and undermines its ability to form the decisions that have an impact on its economic wellbeing.

The case of Switzerland is no different. It has to abide by the rules that govern the Single Market if it wants its companies to trade within it but it has no representation in the institutions, the EU Council and the European Parliament, which make those rules.

Perhaps this is a satisfactory situation for a country with 2% of the EU population that might have compromised with the fact that its ability to influence the things that affect it is limited. But Britain is one of the largest EU member states, smaller only to Germany and Poland, and of similar size to France. It has considerable influence over EU policies that affect it and its views, when argued with confidence and convincing arguments, are respected and listened to. Very rarely has it lost a vote on matters governed by qualified majority voting, it is always consulted by the European Commission when it comes, for example, to rule-making in financial services and it has repeatedly and successfully argued its case before the European Court of Justice, which has ruled in its favour in cases that have to do with single market issues and liberalisation of trade.

Leaving the EU would mean removing ourselves from where decisions are made. Britain's place is not

¹ Outside and Inside: Norway's agreements with the European Union, p. 7 http://www.regjeringen.no/pages/36798821/PDFS/NOU20122012000200_OEN_PDFS.pdf

outside of the room, with its face pressed against the window, watching others take decisions that affect us, without us. Britain's place is at the heart of the decision-making structures that govern one of the biggest economies of the world.

The benefits of EU membership are numerous and have often been repeated in *The European*. Britain gains both in economic terms and in terms of its standing in the world. Our ability to influence the things that affect us, like Iranian nuclear aspirations, negotiations on climate change, international trade agreements, energy security, illegal immigration, international crime is enhanced when we act together with our EU partners, using the institutions of the EU as a vehicle to pursue our common interests. Leaving the EU will remove us not just from the biggest and wealthiest common market in the world. It will set us apart from an organisation (and its institutions) that

share our aspirations for a liberal and peaceful world where democracy, the rule of law, respect of human rights and environmental protection reigns.

The globalisation of our world and the rising power of developing countries are both full of challenges and opportunities. Britain can either try to make the most of these challenges and opportunities by standing together with its EU partners or risk having its influence fade by standing apart from them. This is no time to contemplate leaving the EU. The EU is a platform upon which we can all stand taller. We must make the most of that platform to increase our influence in the world and promote the principles that are important to us.

Petros Fassoulas

Chairman, European Movement UK

Is the European External Action Service fit for purpose?

The EU is committed to a more coherent and visible foreign policy, and some of the goals it has for its role on the world stage are laudable, particularly if you consider the extent of Europe's waning power. Lucky that it has had a new diplomatic service for the last year, I hear you say? Well, not if you've listened to the governments, NGOs and media who have been quick to point out its flaws on its first anniversary, often with good reason. A clunky bureaucracy and bad management are favourite gripes, and foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton stands first in the firing line.

A tough racket

Let us start, however, by saying that Ashton and the European External Action Service (EEAS) don't have an

easy job. The EU is in the eye of a financial and economic storm and is facing an identity crisis, even being posed some existential questions. With Europe facing what Angela Merkel has described as its worst hour since World War II, it is not the ideal time to start a new diplomatic service. And it hasn't been a quiet year around the world either. The EEAS has had to deal with the revolutionary changes on its doorstep in the Middle East – including a deeply divisive NATO intervention in Libya – and a devastating food crisis in the Horn of Africa to name but two examples.

The EEAS' job is not made any easier by the fact that a number of EU member states have simply refused to throw their political weight and commitment behind it. Stir into the mix some petty squabbles and turf wars amongst EU institutions and you can expect, and forgive, teething problems – it also makes the successes it has had worth celebrating...

Reasons to be cheerful

And there is good reason to be optimistic, particularly with the EU's renewed approach to foreign policy since the Arab Spring. The EU has changed gears and is now proactively working to promote democracy and respect for human rights. In line with this, the EU has pledged to do away with its double standards in its dealings with Arab Spring countries, and has put human rights and democracy at the centre of EU policies. This is all very encouraging, but for this strategy to work, the EEAS must ensure that that civil society groups actually have a say in policy making, for example, and cannot shy away from backing their fight against human rights abuses, even if it gets politically awkward.

The work that the EEAS is facilitating in South Sudan – the world's newest country – is another positive example, clearly demonstrating that it has the potential to help the EU be more coordinated in its action abroad. Through joint programming the EEAS is working to bring together different EU institutions and member states so that the EU operates as one effective unit to support South Sudan. This type of coordinated action makes it easier to organise tasks, plan funding and come up with a clear strategy for development. Working as one coherent player also prevents the administrative chaos that is all too often associated with EU aid programmes.

Leading, but not into temptation

If the EEAS is to champion an effective EU foreign policy that puts the poor and vulnerable first, it must avoid the temptation to instrumentalize its 'soft power' – the fact that is a major donor of humanitarian and development aid – for politically motivated security gains.

In the case of Yemen², the call to make development aid conditional on political reform resulted in EU member states withdrawing aid channelled via the Yemeni government, without making sure that aid was reaching those in need through alternative channels such as UN agencies and NGOs. Catherine Ashton is to be commended for finally insisting on the continued delivery of development and humanitarian aid during the transitional period in Yemen. Refusing to deliver aid until political change is achieved means punishing those in dire need for something that is beyond their control.

The EEAS must ensure that its leadership and efforts to increase coherence and coordination does not end in the politicisation of the delivery and allocation of aid. Oxfam has time and again seen aid effectiveness undermined and impartial attempts to provide assistance and tackle poverty damaged by donors who have gone down this route.

The 'vision thing', with effective back up

The EEAS is clearly a work in progress, but it must now build on the successes it has had and lay out a plan that pinpoints where the EU wants to be in 2015 – the 'vision thing' – and which traces how it's going to get there. It won't be able to do that, and meet its full potential, without the strong and unambiguous support of EU member states. For example, in the case of the negotiations currently underway in the run up to the Arms Trade Treaty in New York, stronger alignment of member states with the EEAS meant the EU could speak with one coherent voice and have a greater impact on international affairs.

In other words, the new diplomatic service provides the EU with an opportunity to address its shortcomings in foreign policy. Facing a reduced political global influence, Europe cannot afford to

² <http://euobserver.com/9/114837>

respond with splits in international forums and greater division between member states, where national interests prevail over collective ones.

Oxfam wants and calls on the EU to champion an international order premised on respect for human rights and international law, the principles of equality and solidarity, the eradication of poverty, and fair trade. Maintaining the status quo will hamper Europe's ability to do so.

Daniel Gorevan

Head, Humanitarian Campaigning, Oxfam

For more see Oxfam's new report 'Fit for purpose? The European External Action Service one year on' at <https://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/fit-purpose-european-external-action-service>

What do Britain's political parties really think about the EU?

Who would have predicted this time last year that Britain's relationship with the European Union, normally the preserve of only the most enthusiastic Europhiles and most hardened eurosceptics would feature as one of the most high profile debates of the year at the end of 2011?

Suddenly, the general public is starting to care greatly about this now explosive issue, which could potentially cause a problem for those parties and their leaders who had not given it a whole lot of thought before the last election.

So, how do Britain's political parties differ on their official positions on the EU? Here, we will examine the websites of the Conservatives, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats, as the three leading parties in the UK today, along with the UK Independence Party, whose vocal commitment to withdrawal from the EU has resonated well with the general public in successive elections to the European Parliament as well as recent opinion polls.

A logical place to start is with the party already responsible for managing Britain's relationship with

the rest of the EU – the Conservatives. They may depend on the coalition with the Liberal Democrats to govern, but David Cameron proved who calls the shots on Europe at December's now infamous summit.

Their website clearly states that the official position of the Conservative party is to remain an active member of the European Union, but not sanction the transfer of any additional powers without the explicit consent of the public through a referendum. Recent opinion polls suggest, therefore, that a Conservative Britain would refuse to commit itself to continued integration, raising questions over its membership of the EU altogether.

However, the Conservatives' website also clearly states their belief that Britain's membership of the EU is essential to effectively responding to the global challenges of international competitiveness, climate change, and poverty. The real question therefore is which is more important to the Prime Minister and his party: working with EU member states and institutions to meet those challenges or honouring their promise to the British people; and what would they do if these two priorities came into direct conflict? Unfortunately, the website doesn't have an answer to that one.

David Cameron's response to the eurozone crisis has done little to clarify matters either. On the one hand,

he has consistently called for more decisive action to resolve the crisis, stating that: the stability of the euro is vital to the recovery of the British economy; resolving the crisis requires the ability to make swift decisions; and the current process of every decision being signed off by 27 separate parliaments isn't working. However, it is also the unequivocal position of Her Majesty's Government that as far as the UK is concerned: the eurozone crisis is not our problem; further EU integration is a threat to parliamentary sovereignty; so all future treaties must be approved both by Parliament and by referendum.

Interestingly, the position of the Conservatives' coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats, bears a far closer resemblance to that of the official opposition, the Labour party, in so far as it is possible to discern a specific position that is. It would be far more accurate to say that when it comes to the EU, both agree with each other on the value of our membership of the EU and both disagree with the policies pursued by the Conservative party.

In spite of Labour's best efforts to hide the fact they hold any position on the EU whatsoever by making no mention of it on their website and cleverly re-directing any cunning researcher who tries to find it in their 'International' section to their home page, Ed Miliband's condemnation of David Cameron's veto remains there for all to see. A little more digging will also unveil a recent speech by shadow Foreign Secretary, Douglas Alexander, on the future on Britain's relationship with its European neighbours, 90% of which is naturally spent re-examining the last 40 years of government policy, conveniently leaving a mere paragraph or two to outline his own vision going forward.

What is left are a series of commitments to: preventing the emergence of a two speed Europe,

increasing access to the single market, retaining the social chapter, and increasing co-operation between member states on security policy for the region. All this, Alexander insists, can be achieved within the remit of existing treaties alone, an implicit pledge to match the Tories' refusal to transfer any new powers to Brussels.

The Liberal Democrats, like the Conservatives, do have a specific section of their website devoted to explaining their position, but that is where the similarities end. Indeed this section mostly contains a long list of examples of how our membership of the EU benefits the UK that can basically be described as Labour+. They go into a little more detail though, citing: stricter regulation of the banks, a clampdown on tax evasion, the pursuit of renewable energy, and the defence of the European Arrest Warrant. The closest they come to a policy, since dropping their pledge to take Britain into the euro, is calling for the UK's energy supplies to be sourced solely from within the EU and the abolition of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Unfortunately, they stop short of saying if the Union in its current form is adequately equipped to achieve these goals and, if not; under what circumstances they would permit deeper integration in pursuit of them. I guess we'll have to put that down to editorial oversight for now.

This brings us to the UK Independence Party, more commonly known as UKIP. Perhaps the most ironic thing about their website is that all four pages of their stated policies are so inextricably linked to their commitment to withdraw from the EU that it contains no formal policy on Britain's membership of the EU itself. Comb through the four pages though and it's easy enough to identify their key pledges. These include: a referendum on leaving the EU, the

establishment of a commission to decide which EU regulations to keep and which ones to abolish, and the replacement of VAT with a local sales tax.

It goes without saying that if policy #1 backfires, #2 and #3 automatically become null and void - or do they? Indeed, the very existence of the party itself seems to be something of a paradox as of course if they actually got their way and successfully led the UK out the EU they would have little reason not to disband.

Perhaps the oddest thing about UKIP though is their strategy of pursuing their ultimate goal by getting elected to the European Parliament. To be sure, participating in the elections is a good way of raising their profile on a relevant issue. It is also politically expedient for a party that has so far failed to make any impact in a national election. What makes less sense is their decision to actually take their seats in the European Parliament, and accept the taxpayer funded salaries and perks that come with them, despite refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the Parliament itself. Their defence of this is that they use their presence and their salaries to team up with like-minded eurosceptics and punch above their weight. Power to them, but once again the paradox strikes as any success they enjoyed would only serve to prove that it is possible to exercise meaningful influence and advance the national interest from inside the EU, fatally undermining one of their most central arguments for withdrawal. Never mind, I guess it's the thought that counts.

So what does all this tell us about the future of Britain's relationship with the EU? All parties, except for UKIP, see clear benefits to our continued membership, but are undecided about the costs. Once more political expediency dictates that whichever party holds office take the credit for success and shift the blame for failure. So, benefits are a testament to Britain's ability to work with its European neighbours and costs are billed as a power grab by 'Brussels', that monolithic symbol invoked by governments reluctant to admit they plan to obey a law they helped create. How much attention a party pays to each is a good indicator of where they stand, so at one end of the spectrum, UKIP dwells solely on the costs of membership, while the Liberal Democrats' policy is essentially a list of all its benefits.

The advantage of what initially comes across as chronic indecisiveness across the three parties most likely to be in the driving seat over the next ten to fifteen years is the flexibility it allows each of them to make decisions on a case by case basis. However, should events overtake us as circumstances push the EU closer to realising their aspiration of ever closer union, they'll need to come up with a long term vision of the role they want Britain to play, if any at all. I look forward to reviewing each party's updated website when that time eventually comes.

Tony Koutsoumbos

Is Turkey a trip of discovery for the EU?

I recently found myself on a surprise trip to Turkey and from the moment I realised what my destination

was I was filled with excitement about the trip, as Istanbul has always been somewhere I wished to visit. It may seem odd but as we drove into the city from the airport and looked out on the houses that zigzagged up and down from one side of the Bosphorus to the other my immediate thoughts

turned to a question I have often discussed with friends - should Turkey join the European Union?

Many might be aware of the arguments in favour and against Turkey's integration into the European family. Arguments have traditionally centred on the issues of immigration, human rights, economic advantages and disadvantages, security and diplomacy, culture, geography and religion. In my mind however the issue of Turkey's accession, and enlargement more widely, has always been more about what the European Union should be about and what it will stand for in the future.

From 1957 enlargement has been a topic of fierce debate. From the original 6 to today's current 27 and soon to be 28 (Croatia) member states, enlargement has transformed the context of European integration by opening up the European Union to different identities, histories, cultures, language and local customs all of which have to be incorporated into the EU identity, message, values and economic and democratic standards, not to mention its global aspirations.

For many the most diverse enlargement in the European Union's history has been the recent Central and Eastern inclusion. Although the recent move to the East has given the European Union the historic and moral opportunity to foster stability and security across the European continent by means of political and economic integration, some commentators have raised concerns about its cost and the consequences of how the European Union will function in the future. While some argue that each enlargement has increased the complexity of intergovernmental bargaining and has made decision-making harder to achieve, others argue that it has made the European Union stronger both economically and in global diplomatic terms.

I realise how serious the current fiscal and monetary difficulties are in the European Union, especially with the need for growth, but borrowing a theme from Claudia Crawford's piece in the November issue of *The European* ('Europe will change' p. 4) I also agree that the European Union must change. The question is how?

I am not a federalist but I am confident that there will come a time when the current financial difficulties will be resolved and political leaders across Europe will have to look beyond the economics and focus on what the EU wants to become and what it stands for in the future.

The integration of Turkey into the European Union will of course have economic benefits but perhaps more importantly it could have the potential to generate positive political tension. Turkey's accession can be the catalytic factor that will make the European Union consider how better to administer its core values of cooperation, negotiation, democracy and liberty, but also its social welfare agenda. In so doing this can fuse the founding and fundamental principles of the European Union with its developing foreign policy agenda.

Rather than fearing the challenges that Turkish accession might pose we must welcome the opportunities that it will bring with it, both economic, political and institutional but also cultural and religious. One thing is for sure, it will forever alter the character, footprint and reach of the European Union. I for one certainly welcome the opportunity for renewal.

Max Deckers Dowber

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