

Summary - House of Lords Select Committee on the EU



Inquiry: *Visions of EU Reform*

Evidence session No. 4: HE Claus Grube (Denmark's Ambassador to the UK), HE Dan Mulhall (Ireland's Ambassador to the UK) and HE Witold Sobków (Poland's Ambassador to the UK).

Summary: The EU Select Committee took evidence from the Ambassadors of three of the UK's fellow EU member states. The committee sought to gain insight into the respective positions of the Irish, Danish and Polish governments with regard to the UK government's pursuit of reforms in the EU. The committee asked for the views of the witnesses on their interpretations of the intentions of the UK government, and how their governments interpreted this. Each witness expressed their country's desire for the UK to remain in the EU, and expressed a willingness to engage in negotiations with the UK government to this end.

The Danish Ambassador, Claus Grube, referenced the common ground shared by Denmark and the UK, such as concerns about welfare benefits and the competitiveness of the single market. This sentiment was also echoed by Polish Ambassador Witold Sobków, who presented the Polish government's desire to improve competitiveness and "reduce red tape" in the EU system. Sobków also stressed that he believed that no EU member state was interested in a potential Brexit and that there would be "good will" on the part of Poland. One caveat that Sobków emphasised, however, was that the outcome of the negotiations must be "non-discriminatory."

Similarly, Claus Grube established in which areas the UK's concerns were shared by Denmark before warning that his governments proposed methods of achieving reform may well be different to that of the UK. According to Grube, the UK's proposals would have to be realistic. "Other member states have their own legitimate concerns and they also sometimes face domestic constraints, which have to be taken into account. We should also seek solutions by 28, and all 28 member states would have to agree to it." Denmark are clearly therefore looking for an inclusive negotiation process rather than a bilateral negotiation between the UK government and the European Commission.

Representing the Irish government, Dan Mulhall echoed the desire for the UK to remain in the EU. Mulhall referenced the "unique relationship" that exists between Ireland and the UK, largely facilitated by mutual membership of the EU. Mulhall conveyed the great extent to which Ireland values UK membership of the EU, citing reasons such as the mutual benefits gained in terms of the free movement of persons and goods, as well as the role that the EU has played in the Northern Ireland peace process. The EU, Mulhall claimed, has enabled greater north-south cooperation in the region, and reconciliation efforts have been greatly aided by the PEACE programmes.

Mulhall was weary of a potential UK exit from the EU, however, and concluded that "whatever happens, we [the Irish government] would want [the] unique relationship with the UK to continue, and we would want that the common travel area provisions – which pre-date our membership of the EU by decades – to be respected."

Source: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/european-union-committee/visions-of-eu-reform/oral/23776.pdf>