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This is Malcolm McBain interviewing Andrew Bache at his flat in London on Monday 28 February 2000.

MM I see from your biographical details, Andrew, that you joined the diplomatic service in 1963 after a period at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. What decided you to join the diplomatic service?

AB It had never been my intention to join as we have a family business up in the midlands, George Salter & Co, makers of weighing machines. My father hoped I would go into that business and indeed run it when he left. I had some doubts about that but certainly up to and through the time at Cambridge that was the plan and in fact I carried it on by going to work for the large firm of accountants, Cooper Brothers, now Price Waterhouse Coopers. I worked for them for a while in Paris and then joined as an articled clerk in London, but it became clear to me very quickly that accountancy for me at least was not to be the future and I could see difficulties ahead for the company because of the wide number of members of the family who were involved and making its future vulnerable. I had always been interested in the Foreign Office and so when I thought the time had come to look at other areas I applied.

MM And did you enter through an examination?

AB I did indeed. It was a rather strange entry and unusual because I applied in January 1963 and at that stage I would have had to wait, normally, a long time to take the exam at the end of the year and then hopefully, join. But as luck would have it they were very short of people at the Assistant Principal level and so they offered me a post on a temporary basis. So I was taken in on a temporary basis. When it came to the end of the year I sat the normal civil service selection board exams and had passed the first stage when they needed someone for an emergency posting in Cyprus. So they said, would I go out, on the basis that if I didn't succeed I would have to leave. I thought it worth taking the risk and off we went. As it turned out all was well.

MM What were you actually doing in Cyprus?

AB Well, the Cyprus story doesn't start quite there. It starts a bit earlier. During that first year, 1963, I was working on the economic desk for Malaysia. I got married in the summer and I spent my first Christmas with my in-laws. My father-in-law was the chaplain at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea and we had dinner there on Christmas eve and during the dinner the telephone rang. It was the Resident Clerk from the Foreign Office to say that he had been working nonstop for 36 hours, was absolutely exhausted and had been ordered by Ministers to find a replacement in very quick time. I was the nearest man at the grade so he was ringing me. He happened to be a good friend as well. So within the hour I was in the Foreign Office faced by a battery of 'flash' telegrams. His instructions to me were, "Duncan Sandys, Secretary of State, has just gone back to have his Christmas dinner, Sir Arthur Snelling, the Under Secretary is at home. We were all to have a three-way conversation at seven o'clock in the morning. This was the present position in Cyprus: the Turkish Cypriots and the Greek Cypriots were killing each other at a tremendous rate. We wanted to intervene with British troops who were in Dhekelia under General Young and ready to move but we can't do so without the agreement of the Cyprus government, which means Archbishop Makarios, and Doctor Kuçuk in the Turkish sector. We can't make contact with Doctor Kuçuk from the Turkish sector and Archbishop Makarios is also out of contact. Meanwhile the Turkish navy is setting sail from Iskenderun to head for Cyprus". At that point I was left, sitting in front of a desk, with telegrams coming through every other minute. To cut a long story short, during the course of the evening we arranged contact with Archbishop Makarios, and with Doctor Kuçuk. They both agreed that we should issue a communiqué which allowed General Young to march from Dhekelia with the British troops who then intervened between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. And when this happened the Turkish navy put back into Iskenderun. It was not surprising, perhaps, when Sir Arthur Snelling came to have breakfast in the flat in the morning that he commented that he thought we had actually stopped a NATO war. That was my introduction to Cyprus. I then went back to the Malaysia desk. I didn't expect to hear any more but suddenly I was asked to go into Personnel Department and the suggestion was made that I should go out on an emergency posting.

MM Why was the posting an emergency?

AB Well, the High Commission in Nicosia had been very short staffed when the fighting broke

out and now with a military force in the centre of the island it needed bolstering in order to give the necessary weight to our position and they needed to get people out there very quickly.

MM So you were in fact helping the political wing of the High Commission.

AB Yes.

MM Well, it must have been a very interesting introduction.

AB It was fascinating and actually the particular job I was doing meant I was seeing all the information that was coming in and this meant that one was able to follow the war very closely and sit in on meetings with the High Commissioner and General Carver, who was in charge once General Young had moved on. General Carver came out to head the United Nations force which eventually took over from the British force.

MM I can't quite remember when Cyprus was partitioned, when did they become independent? 1961?

AB Earlier I think, 1956.

MM Yes, but the Turks invaded in 1974 didn't they?

AB Yes, there was one line set up in 1963 which held for a long time but then the pressure on the Turks eventually resulted in the later invasion.

MM But by then you had left and gone in 1966 to the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies, what does that mean?

AB Well, that was a training programme which was encouraged at the time to ensure that civil servants were economically literate and so a lot of emphasis was put on economics and young civil servants were sent off to Regents Park where they had 6 months of studies.

MM It no longer exists, does it?

AB No, it ran for several years after that but not very long.

MM You were there for a relatively short period of time before going on to Sofia.

AB That's right. Bulgaria of course at that stage was deep behind the iron curtain and in fact was the blueprint for what the Soviet Union would like to have established outside its borders. It was seen as a Slav state, loyal to Moscow, ready to do its bidding and was therefore given a lot of help from Moscow to develop properly and make its way. So it was interesting from the point of view of studying the communist system and we were thrust into it for the first time. Life was totally different from anything I had experienced and I think totally different from what most people believed it to be. We were often followed around, we had our telephone tapped definitely, there was considerable surveillance in one way or another and we weren't allowed to meet ordinary Bulgarians. If we invited them to come to the house they had to get permission to do so. So life was circumscribed in those ways which meant that one saw more of the other diplomats, which in its own way was good fun and interesting. We were able to do quite a lot of travelling in the country. I travelled all over. It's a beautiful country, for the most part. But as far as the political regime was concerned, it was stable, and trying desperately to get 5 year plans going, 1 year plans going and to introduce as much technology as they could. All with the backing and support of the Russians. As far as the West was concerned there was contact but it was very much at arms length.

MM They weren't really prepared to enter into an independent negotiations with capitalist countries?

AB They allowed a certain amount of contact through scholarships, and a number of Bulgarians came over to Britain on scholarship schemes. Others were allowed to travel out for specific purposes, but deep bilateral contact was very difficult. Of course there was a certain amount of hope. They always wanted to attract western investment into the country if it could be brought in

under the terms they wanted.

MM Was there any investment?

AB There wasn't much investment in Bulgaria, as I recall, for obvious reasons.

MM Why did we have an embassy there?

AB Well, I think we had embassies in each of the communist bloc countries, they were certainly listening posts for what was going on and there was a certain amount of bilateral work to be done inevitably, not least on the consular side, although I wasn't involved in that. Certainly we needed to study the political developments in the country and in terms of the surrounding area. After all Bulgaria was a neighbour to Yugoslavia and was one of the main supporters of Moscow. The Macedonian Question was also stirring which raised difficulties for Greece and Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. So there were a number of areas of interest.

MM Could you discern any sort of possibility of rift among the communist bloc powers?

AB Well, the Bulgarians themselves looked very loyal and the idea of fellow Slavs was strong in the country. So one didn't expect there to be a dramatic change there. We can look at Romania a bit later, and certainly there were differences there. And of course by the time I was in Bulgaria we had already had the Hungarian uprising so one was aware that it wasn't all plain sailing as far as eastern Europe was concerned.

MM Had that Hungarian uprising had any resonances in Bulgaria?

AB No more than to keep a very tight watch on any opposition groups, whether they came from trade unions or any particular walk of life. Anything that suggested a strike was first of all hushed up and secondly disposed of as quickly as possible. There was a fear of opposition, but it wouldn't go much further than that.

MM Did you get the feeling that you were in a European country, or was there some distinction

there?

AB Certainly in terms of freedom of movement, freedom of life, freedom of expression one was not in a western European country. Everything you said had to go through a mental filter simply because it was being listened to, or picked up in some way.

MM And it was not a very prosperous country.

AB No, it wasn't far behind Greece because the Soviet Union had pumped in a lot of aid and was determined to make Bulgarian agriculture a modern industry and fairly efficient. Greece at that stage was only just picking up after the war. So it wasn't so very far behind Greece.

MM So, after that you went back to the Foreign Office for three years, the FCO as it then was. What job did you do there?

AB I went into what was then known as the Northern Department and my responsibility was to look after Romania and Bulgaria. I suppose the most important part of that job was actually the Romanian side because Romania was now beginning to assert her own style of independence. Ceausescu had just come to power but hadn't yet turned into the power-hungry individual that he became in the 1980's, or even actually at the beginning of the 1970's. So in 1968 to 1970, the time I was dealing with it, he had just come to power and was anxious to move things along and to be seen to be his own man. One of the ways he could do this was by appealing to the nationalism of the Romanians. He could do that most easily by distancing himself from Moscow. He set out to do all of those things and really quite effectively. First in 1968 we had the Prague spring. The Romanians conspicuously had not been involved with what was happening there and had stood aside from it and from then on they quite deliberately and outspokenly said that they would have no Warsaw pact troops stationed on their country and they would allow none through their country. They adhered to that right up to the tearing down of the wall. This, of course, was a red rag to a bull as far as Moscow was concerned and there was continual pressure on the Romanians throughout this period but although some people were worried that we could see Czechoslovakia followed by Romania in terms of Russian intervention

the Romanians played a very clever game and whilst they were nationalist in outlook and made pro-Chinese statements and allowed visits from Nixon and many others in terms of internal security and espionage they were very conservative. In this way they were able to keep in touch with Moscow, if not in all the ways that the Russians would have liked. During the period I was in London we arranged the first visit by the Romanian Prime Minister, Ion Maurer, to Britain in the post-war period. The other interesting point to come out at that time was that the Romanians insisted on changing the spelling of Romania. Previously it had been spelt Rumania or Roumania, but they insisted that it should be spelt Romania, and they went to great lengths to get us to change the spelling. Having learned the language and lived in the country I can see why now, but it took a long time to persuade others in Whitehall that this was the right answer. But eventually we did change.

MM Why were they so keen on that?

AB Well, it was another way of getting out from underneath the Soviet Union. They wanted to suggest a link with the Romans...

MM Ah, it really was that...

AB They wanted to have some suggestion of a Western link. So that was I think an interesting sideline. What was going on with Romania at that time were some big negotiations over the BAC 111 aircraft and the possible construction of aircraft in Romania, a subject which dragged on and on and on through the 1970's. The Romanians didn't have any money but they were always prepared to pay with tomatoes. It was almost a case of tomatoes for anything.

MM You mentioned at an earlier stage the Prague spring. Could you just explain that a little?

AB Well, in 1968 there was a student festival in Sofia, I think in July or August, which attracted students from all over the world, but of course mainly from the Eastern Europe and Soviet bloc, and to this festival came a number of people, out of Prague, out of Czechoslovakia, who'd brought with them some of the ideas that were moving around at that time and which were to

lead ultimately to the Czech wish to escape from the clutches of the Soviet Union and set up its own country under Dubček. This happened if I remember right in September of 1968 but, as far as the Bulgarian end was concerned, there was a certain amount of speculation around and everyone was quite excited as to what was going to happen because the Czechs were showing more and more courage and standing up more and more for their own ideas throughout that summer. This could be seen even in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Europeans were reacting in various different ways to try and hold the line.

MM You mentioned also the BAC 111 negotiations with Romania. Did they ever succeed in building it there?

AB I didn't follow the negotiations through but I think they built some models, I think that the contract eventually that came out at the end of the 1970s, perhaps at the time that Ceausescu visited London on a state visit, should have enabled BAC to have something like 20 aircraft built in Romania. As far as I know by the time that 1989 arrived they had only completed 12 or 13.

MM But they did actually build some there.

AB Yes. They were good engineers and quite capable of doing it. It was much more a question of the political and contractual difficulties.

MM And the finance.

AB And the finance.

MM So that was yet further insight into that part of eastern Europe at a formative stage in your career. And then you went, as a reward for that research, to Lagos.

AB Yes. I got as far away as one could get. But, looking back on it, I was very lucky to go there because Nigeria was the most populous country in Africa, a black African country. It had its problems but was at that point one of the few African countries which could have reached the

take-off point in terms of economics and was therefore of some importance. Actually of course when I got there in 1971 the civil war had just finished, the civil war with Biafra, with the federal troops the victors, and the young General Gowon as President of Nigeria. He was a Christian by background and he was quite determined that there should be reconciliation with the Ibos of the East and he went out of his way to work for that and to demonstrate the need for it. I think history will pay a lot of respect to that point if Nigeria remains one country. His difficulty was that he was surrounded by young colonels and others who were more grasping, wanted a share of any spoils that were around. There were spoils around at that time because they had discovered oil in quantities and Shell and other oil companies were already out there and this was bringing in huge revenues which could be used in a variety of ways. Therefore there was money to be grasped by the unscrupulous. What we saw at the time was investment in things like hospitals but then no attempt to maintain them. One could see hospital buildings which had looked grand when they were built but, two years later, tropical weather had got at them and they were crumbling. They weren't being patched, repaired or maintained, so this was rather sad to see. This was the problem for Gowon. As far as the period I was concerned with, 1971 - 4 he remained in power and with 12 states beneath him, each with its own governor. We were watching the political situation very carefully, as there was a large British investment in Nigeria. There were also a large number of British ex-pats living there. So we still had very considerable interests but the relationship with the UK was, I would say, bumpy. There was constant pressure for Nigeria to have greater control of the banks, the British banks which were out there. There were the problems of Rhodesia which kept coming up. South Africa was a problem. And then of course there were Nigerians, including Ibo's, in the UK who were criticising and making trouble for the Nigerian government. All of these made for quite a difficult period. But ultimately corruption got deep into the government again. The General wasn't strong enough to keep a grip of this and ultimately, after we had left, he was thrown out. During the period we were there, there were a number of ministerial visits, Alec Douglas-Home came out to Nigeria, and then there was a state visit to the UK by General Gowon, if I remember rightly in 1973, which was a great success.

MM Yes, he seemed to be very well accepted by everyone in London, was that a disadvantage to him?

AB I don't think so although he was Sandhurst educated. He was a straightforward, straight type of person. A lot of his colleagues had also been educated in the same sort of way, but just didn't have his integrity and outlook, and grabbed what they could for themselves.

MM Yes, I understand that corruption is really endemic in Nigeria and it is generally accepted provided it doesn't go too far. That's how it has been put to me.

AB I think that is right but when it goes too far is a difficult measurement. It can quite quickly become a political measurement. Certainly at that stage the young colonels, who hadn't much money but were often the governors of the 12 states were quite prepared to put their hands into the pot.

MM So probably got rich too quick. This is one of the things that...

AB And then flaunted it. Nigerians by their nature like to wear fine clothes and to be seen to the best advantage.

MM Who was our High Commissioner...

AB For the first few weeks it was Sir Leslie Glass and then Sir Cyril Pickard.

MM So they were acceptable to the Nigerians, weren't they?

AB Oh yes, and then just after I left Sir Martin Le Quesne, came out and lasted a very short period...

MM But that was after your time. So we can't ask you about that. But you came back to the FCO in 1974 and you were there in Personnel Department.

AB That's right. A very interesting period. I found it fascinating in fact. I don't know if there's

an awful lot I need to say here except that I think it was probably the first time that we really began to get our teeth into the whole question of man management and staff relations. Personnel Operations Department divided the world into four areas and I had one of them. There were two ambassadors who were quite clearly intolerant people, very bad with their staff, and actually made for a great deal of unhappiness. Certainly this definitely detracted from the efficiency of the posts and there was quite a fuss made about these two in their different ways and as I remember neither of them got further jobs.

MM Do you mean they retired early?

AB Yes. And from that time forward there has been more and more emphasis on the way in which staff need to be handled.

MM Yes, so that was quite a significant change in fact, for the...

AB It wasn't a deliberate policy change, I think, and probably those before me would say that something like this was happening, but I suspect it was beginning to come to fruition.

MM Those were the years of the great financial crisis in Britain, very high inflation and an application to the IMF for funds to try to cover our deficit, did this impinge at all on the Foreign Office?

AB Well, we were of course going through a slimming down process all through the period and so each of the embassies which fell within my area was constantly looked at. One of them was Washington and so just what size Washington should be was a constant question.

MM And no doubt it still is.

AB Yes, I'm sure.

MM And yet other European countries don't seem to have suffered the same problem, do they?

AB I think they have. I think when one talks to colleagues now you find that the French, the Germans and the Italians have been through this sort of process. Perhaps it hasn't always been as protracted as ours, but they have certainly shed staff.

MM Did you post yourself to Vienna?

AB People always say that's what happened but I wouldn't put it exactly like that although I have to say that it was one of the posts I would have liked to have gone to for a number of reasons. One was I particularly wanted to learn a main European language and I learned German to go there. I also wanted to get onto the commercial side of the office because I believed that was going to be increasingly important, in terms of our diplomacy for the future and also because of my background. So they did all come together in this posting.

MM You said before you joined that you had been in France for your family firm, did you speak French?

AB Well it wasn't actually for the family firm. After Cambridge I took myself off to France to learn French and then linked up with Coopers Brothers in Paris and worked for them for a month or two.

MM Oh, I see.

AB So I had some French.

MM But you set about learning German in a professional way?

AB Yes, lessons in London and then I went out to live with two Austrian families before joining the Embassy.

MM Very useful. How did you find things in Vienna?

AB It was then a very strange city. On the edge of eastern Europe with international organisations, parts of the United Nations, drawing together the peoples from all the countries so it was a melting pot for diplomats. It had a lot of contact with eastern Europe not least because of the old Hapsburg empire. The Austrians thought they knew how to deal with countries in eastern Europe and so a lot of trade was done through Vienna. I was involved with some of that but my main activity was economics and the commercial relationship between Britain and Austria. One of the things which was brought home to me very much at that time was how poor our own middle management was. I used to receive complaint after complaint from the Austrians about the way in which staff of British companies failed to answer letters, failed to respond on set questions, were slow in providing product. A country like Austria expected a more Germanic approach and found this very very difficult.

MM Of course Austria had been a member of the European Free Trade Area which we had set up when we failed to join the European Common Market in the early stages, so we ought to have had a particularly close relationship with them.

AB I don't think there was ever a very close relationship with the Austrians. We had an occupying force there for a long period of time, and I think they were grateful for the fact that that prevented the Russians from moving further westward but once you got down into southern Austria there wasn't any particular love of the British.

MM So there were no especially strong trade links?

AB Not really, no. We were trying to involve the Austrians at times with companies who wanted to trade into eastern Europe and there was a certain amount of that going on, and of course there were some bilateral trade as well but it wasn't a very strong link.

MM So by trading through Austria, do you mean that British companies would export goods to Austria and they were then sent on to Bulgaria or Romania or Hungary and so on?

AB Well, there were a number of different ways in which trade with eastern Europe could be done and the Austrians had got onto most of those ways including switch trading. There were different methods of payment which could be involved. Almost any thing that could be done could be found in Vienna. So if British companies had a product which was wanted in eastern Europe, but the eastern European country couldn't afford to pay then there might well be a way in which the deal could be done through Vienna.

MM That didn't impinge on the BAC 111?

AB It wasn't at that stage, no.

MM Did you learn about commercial work on the job there?

AB Yes, very much. I travelled around a lot of Austria, saw a lot of the companies there and of course the British companies who were coming in.

MM What do you think, looking back on it, that a British commercial officer can do for a British exporting company or indeed any other British commercial interest?

AB I think there is a lot that can be done. First to be able to signal where there are areas which the British manufacturers can target is a very important part because our sales forces, our market forces are not strong enough in most companies to do this. I think there is also quite a lot of fence mending which can go on, certainly what I was trying to do when the Austrians had a very low opinion of the UK. Then when it comes to projects there is often a political element where Embassies can make an input in negotiations for large projects and perhaps even on the contact side, the banking side which can help to bring large projects to fruition. So I think there is a lot which can be done.

MM You didn't have a British week, or anything like that while you were there did you?

AB No, we didn't.

MM So you left Vienna and went in 1981 as Counsellor and Head of Chancery to Tokyo.

AB Yes, that was a surprise. I was sitting out there in Vienna one day and very soon afterwards was in Japan. I'd had no contact with Japan or the Far East apart from dealing with our embassies whilst in Personnel Department, but it was a fascinating posting to have had and I was very lucky because normally they had Japanese speakers in that job and it just so happened there was no Japanese speaker of the right seniority to fill the post when it was needed. So I was extremely lucky to get the chance. It was a big embassy and a very expensive one to run so there was a big management job to do, quite a good personnel job to do too, because it wasn't a particularly happy place as there was a lot of rivalry within the staff. And then there was the Japanese development to follow. Japan was going through a stage of emerging in terms of its foreign policy, beginning to realise that it could play a bigger part in world affairs and it was just starting to do that, coming out of its shell, one might say. One of the ways in which this had to be demonstrated, I suppose, was over the amount of money they would spend on defence. They had quite deliberately kept that figure as low as possible to allow the Americans to carry the burden of defence. But gradually it had to creep up. A so-called ceiling of one percent had been set...

MM One percent of?

AB Of GNP. By the time I got there they were very close to this ceiling and it was a question of when, or would they ever, breach it. They did, but they found different ways of adding up the figures etc, so it wasn't very clear. But it did impinge on us, this attitude towards defence. Of course they had no nuclear weapons, their constitution forbade having them. Yet the Americans were defending them and had big forces there. At one stage we wanted to bring HMS Invincible to Tokyo on her way round the Far East. We said to the Japanese we would like to do this and there was a nod in the general direction of doing it and we started to make plans. Then because of the sensitivity of the whole subject we started to negotiate with them to see whether they really would allow Invincible in. They said, as you would expect, 'Will there be any nuclear warheads on board?' We used the normal response that we would not say whether there were or

were not, the response that was used world-wide. This went on and on and on. Invincible was getting closer and closer. It looked as if it would come and then the night before she was due in, she was only a few miles away, they told the ambassador that she would not be welcome. She had to turn south. We never knew whether she had nuclear weapons on board or not.

MM This is the carrier isn't it?

AB Yes.

MM Alarming. What were the Japanese like to deal with? Did you have any problems because you were not a Japanese speaker yourself?

AB Yes. I had no problem with doing the day to day work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was very busy and there was a lot going on, so I was involved with that a great deal. I had to get to know a lot of the politicians and there were only a few of them who spoke English. So I did have to use an interpreter. I don't think it mattered very much because the way in which Japanese treat foreigners, whether Japanese speakers or not, meant that the relationship you had as a non Japanese speaker was probably very close to that of a Japanese speaker. So I never found it to be a difficulty. It was a nuisance rather than a difficulty.

MM Did you get the impression that Japanese speakers would not be sufficiently capable of carrying out sensitive conversations with Japanese officials?

AB No, I wouldn't have said that. I would have said that our Japanese speakers were very good by the time they had done what was effectively a two year stint and had some practice in the embassy. They were capable of a great deal. I think I counted nineteen speakers inside the embassy so we had a lot of them, in different areas at different levels. We were well supported and better than all the other embassies, perhaps with the exception of the Americans. This paid off. The period, 1981-5, was intensely interesting in terms of the bilateral relationship because, as I said, the Japanese were emerging from their shell and we were looking for more bilateral contact. We looking for more trade and in particular we were looking for investment into the

UK. The government was increasingly concentrating on this and Japan was seen as a potential investor. There was a lot of work being done on the political side and on the economic side to draw Japan's interest towards Britain. The first big success was Nissan, their car plant, But it has been followed now by, I think, hundreds of Japanese companies, which have made a tremendous contribution to the British economy over the last 20 years. But this was all just starting up, really just getting going at this time. And so we had a number of visitors coming out, including the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and ministers of all sorts and descriptions. Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, came out. Her visit I think was in 1983, and brought about a considerable change in the relationship between the two countries. For the son of the Crown Prince, who is the now the Crown Prince since his father has become the Emperor, it was arranged that he should go to Oxford for a year. That too established an important link. So there was a lot going on and I think it was a significant period of time in the development of the relationship.

MM Did anyone hark back to the period of the great alliance with Japan? Was that in people's minds?

AB The Japanese are very conscious of those early links between Japan and Britain, and in particular how much they learned from our naval traditions, from the navy itself and the training that they have had subsequently. So, yes, there was a lot of discussion and in fact I heard the story of the Emperor Hirohito who, just before he became Emperor, during the time of George the Fifth, came over to Buckingham Palace. This young seventeen or eighteen year old, very proper, very straight and bred in a very, very tight court, was having breakfast when the door was flung open and George V appeared with shirt, no tie, and in his braces, which for a Japanese is unheard of, slapped the prince on the back and said, 'How are you doing, young Prince. Are you enjoying yourself?' all the while slapping him on the back, not exactly a Japanese custom. But out of this came a great fondness for a lot of the things British. The young Prince took a fancy to bacon and eggs, which I believe he had for every breakfast until he was 75, and also to golf. He had a golf course built in the Emperor's Palace in Tokyo.

MM Certainly golf was a great fashion among the Japanese.

AB Yes. Many of the golfing links with Britain they set up during the time I was there, with clubs like Wentworth, enabling the Japanese to come over here to stay and play on British courses.

MM Did you get any impression of how the Japanese had managed to raise themselves up after the nuclear bombing of their cities and had become a world economic power? How had they done it?

AB I think there are several things one could say about Japan. In terms of the nuclear bombs they were only dropped on two cities, that's bad enough, but each of those cities was fairly isolated, so the rest of Japan wasn't affected by the fallout. Tokyo did suffer from fire-bombing but not from the nuclear stuff, and it's a very large population, well over one hundred million. They are a very hard working people basically and by tradition, so I think when the Americans arrived, gave them their new constitution, and really told them what they had to do to recover, I think inherently the Japanese way forward was to pull themselves together on the economic side and, if necessary compete with the Americans and others, in this way before pushing forward again on the political side. I think that's the way it has gone. What I found particularly interesting about Japan, was that if one looked at post-war history Japan hasn't ever had what one might call a close ally or close friend. The Americans, of course, were very much the big brother and had to be listened to, and as for the other countries, well they are all very distant. And so not having had the relationship of a close alliance, they missed out on one element of international relations, how to perform and how to operate with those you liked and those you wanted to get on with. I found that this was what had caused them some difficulties in getting themselves going again on the international stage.

MM But, of course, not economically.

AB No, at this time they were on their own as an economic force.

MM How is it that they were able to devise so many fiendishly ingenious electronic products.

AB Well, they don't always devise them. One of the things they were always looking for was new ideas that could be brought back to Japan from abroad. They had lots of scouts out trying to find those new ideas and if necessary buy them. A lot of our scientific developments which were not successful in the UK were taken on by the Japanese, and if necessary the individuals who developed them went to Japan where they were used in production. That was their strength, the ability to take a new idea and develop it so that it was really successful.

MM Do you except intelligence?

AB No, great intelligence and hard work and, very important, attention to detail.

MM It's a remarkable story. You went from there to the same sort of job at Ankara, half the population but also an interesting country.

AB Yes, but totally different. Where the Japanese did have attention to detail the Turks had almost none. Of course there were all the religious background differences etc. However I must say I found Turkey very interesting too. Of course, for me it had the contact with Cyprus but also Turkey had had some difficult years in the post war period with periods when it was under military rule. It had just emerged in 1985 from another of those periods and the Prime Minister was one Turgut Ozal who had a good and strong grip of economics and could see the ways in which Turkey could and should develop. He gave much more opportunity to the market place and the market during the years I was there. There was a lot of improvement where there were trading opportunities and our trade increased very fast with Turkey. So this was all very positive. We had some big contracts and some big projects, including AMEC who bid for and got the contract to build a gas heating system and in that way got rid of a lot of pollution in Ankara which had occurred with the very poor coal which the Turks were using. Some of the problems which we see today were incipient then. The Kurds; yes there was a problem with the Kurds, but it hadn't come to a head in the way that it has since. The military was involved in trying to keep down the Kurdish insurrection but it wasn't as fierce as it is now. The Turks were

very anxious to be involved with the European Union and we supported that from the embassy. We could see a number of reasons why it would be useful to have Turkey inside the European Community and certainly the west of Turkey is as European as many other parts of the Mediterranean and there is some very efficient and very effective business in that area. And to us the question of religion would be eased in terms of the divide between Christianity and Islam if Islamic Turkey was inside Europe, rather than held outside, making Europe look like a Christian bastion. Some progress was made during those years to bring Turkey to a slightly closer position as far as the European Union was concerned, but of course it has taken a long time for that to develop further, and there have been some setbacks in the last two or three years, hopefully overcome last Christmas.

MM Did you see any other advantages in encouraging Turkey...

AB The Americans and NATO have always recognised Turkey as an extremely important player. It could well be that Turkey will be important strategically in the future and for her to be part of the European Union would cement her to the right side, whereas if she is held out, held aside, there could be a change of government in Turkey which could see her move away.

MM It's not a question of trying to keep the Turks out of the grip of Iraq and Persia and...

AB Well, that's where she might have to go, if she had to go in another direction. I don't think that the current government would move in that direction, or most of the governments of the past years but there are some more Islamic groups who might be less than reliable...

MM You are talking about Turkey...

AB In Turkey, yes. But in the mean time, as indeed when I was there, the question of human rights keeps coming up. The Turks do look at things in a different way. They do treat prisoners differently from the way we treat prisoners. There are a number of other aspects which European countries could find difficulties with, in dealing with Turkey.

MM The treatment of women, marriage. That's all part of Islam, isn't it?

AB Women, high birth rate, large families. The Turks already flood into Germany so there could be difficulties with the European Union with the people from eastern Turkey and the standard of living is very low...

MM Well, we wait and see what the outcome of that is. Is there anything further you wanted to say about that, or about Japan?

AB I think that's it.

MM OK, then from 1988 to 1990 you came back and headed Personnel Services Department of the FCO. What were your problems in that particular post?

AB Endless. That Department was a large department which, our budget at that stage was £190 million and the main aim was to manage and control the resources of the FCO and certainly salaries, allowances, services, pensions, travel, early retirement. So there was a lot of movement and a lot of negotiation for big contracts with people like Thomas Cook for the world-wide travel contract, the first of its kind; with Pickfords where a policy was put forward and a contract finally negotiated to try and make an efficient transfer of baggage across the world. So it was very much a resource job.

MM When you were negotiating with Pickfords, for example, did you look at what the bill had been for shifting baggage for the last year, and say to Pickfords would they do it for us for a sum of money, or was it dependent on how many people were moved from A to B? Was it a question of them just saying, 'we'll do it very efficiently but the amount we charge you will be based on the number of movements?'

AB I think it was developed on a certain number of moves to be taken during the course of a year, and then a negotiation as to what the price of those movements would be and what happened if there were more or less moves happened than we had expected. A large part of the

contract was the monitoring and controlling of it. Once the contract came into being we were trying to ensure that the quality was maintained, that corners were not cut. This was an important part.

MM What was the advantage of it to the FCO?

AB There was a very big cost saving as with Thomas Cook. Because they had our world-wide travel we were able to negotiate a contract which saved the FCO a large amount. They then in turn, in order to meet us could get special rates and special travel arrangements for staff. But apart from that I was also involved in what was one of the last big packages which was negotiated with the Treasury worth £5 million p.a., to give the FCO more money for a number of areas including health support and a dedicated part of the St Thomas's hospital so that staff with difficulties would have a hospital to come back to, where they were immediately admitted and treated. But it was also to offer more help for those in the more difficult posts around the world.

MM So quite a large...

AB It was a large package. It was extremely hard to negotiate and had to be taken right up to the Secretary for State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and then followed through to ensure that the full package was accepted.

MM I see, yes. Well, you went from that job to be the diplomatic service Chairman of the Civil Service Selection Board, now, a personnel related task but this time looking at incomers, or new entrants. Do you have any observations to make about that?

AB It was a very interesting year because one saw a large number of able undergraduates and graduates who were all looking towards the service, and in most cases towards the Foreign Office, for a possible career. I think what struck me at the time was that there were a number who had come from the city where they had been for two, three or more years and had become disenchanted with what they had seen there and wanted something rather different and so were applying to join the Foreign Office.

MM Something a shade more ethical perhaps?

AB Perhaps. Yes, they normally had that as one of the reasons. The second thing certainly was the number of people who applied to join, there was no shortage of people, we were always able to fill the number of vacancies we had.

MM Good calibre people?

AB Good calibre people, yes. I hadn't done this in previous years so I couldn't say if they were better, but there was certainly a good general level.

MM I have the feeling that maybe there was a certain prejudice these days against people who had been to Eton and Oxford, prejudices against them and that subtle barriers were raised to prevent them, or discourage them, from attempting to join the foreign service, do you think that's the case?

AB I don't think it was when I was there. It's very easy for those barriers to become accepted outside. I remember a number of Cambridge people saying if you ever mentioned the possibility of going into the Foreign Office people would say, 'Oh, it's not worth trying for that, too difficult, thousands apply and very few get in.' And so it's very easy for that sort of prejudice to work up against public schools, against Oxbridge, against whatever it might be...

MM You didn't come across any bias in favour of Redbrick backgrounds, if I can put it that way?

AB Oh no. There was certainly no bias at all while I was there.

MM One way or the other?

AB No. I think it all depended on what sort of people came forward. I think the difference

between the group I saw and fifty years earlier would be that a lot of Etonians would have come up 50 years ago. In fact we saw relatively few. There were a lot from Oxbridge, yes, certainly, but one would expect there would be, Oxbridge drew the cream from a lot of schools. So you'd expect the cream to go on into this, so I wasn't surprised. Although there was a lot of talk about if there were enough immigrants, whether the colour was right, again I must say I feel this is going to take time. When you get an immigrant family arriving in Britain the first thing they do is look after themselves from a financial point of view, the second is to establish a shop or a business, then they start to look towards the professions. After that they may start to look towards going into government. They are not going to speed that process up very much.

MM It does seem that when the Americans, for instance have tried to curry favour with black African countries by sending black Americans to them, they have not been a great success. They have been regarded with suspicion. Because of that feeling that must be a risk for us as well, mustn't it? If we were to send, for example, people of Asian origin into the British High Commission in New Delhi, what would the Indians think?

AB Well we are doing that sort of thing now and I think there is some initial concern about it. But I haven't seen it going too badly, so I think that will work. It's a question of how quickly we can get the intake of the calibre needed without sacrificing quality.

MM It's a sensitive business, representing this country overseas isn't it?

AB But if we are recognised in the world as being a multi-racial society then people would expect us to be represented by all colours and creeds.

MM After all I suppose there are plenty of southern Irishmen in the diplomatic service, doing a jolly good job too. After that interval you did four years as Her Majesty's Ambassador in Bucharest.

AB Yes, I felt I was very lucky to get that job and in fact I know there are a quite a long string of people who would have liked to have had it. Why I was so delighted was that in the service we

had spent a lot of our career dealing with communism and now to see the wall come down and to have a chance to go and deal with these countries in a more straightforward way was very satisfying from a career point of view. And of course I had had dealings with Romania and Bulgaria earlier so there was a double satisfaction. I was the first British ambassador to be appointed to Romania after the fall of Ceaucescu. There had been someone there of course at the time. To arrive in the country at that time was an experience in itself. It was headlines in the newspapers and on the radio. A Western ambassador was treated at that time nowhere else in the world. The country itself had been surprised by the fall of Ceaucescu. People had never thought it was going to happen, and they were surprised too to be in a state of freedom at the time I arrived. They were still to some degree looking over their shoulders not quite believing that it had happened. There hadn't been a clean sweep of all the communists out of the government but a rather pragmatic government had come to power. This had been labelled as communist by the British press and in Whitehall but after a time I began to think it was more opportunistic than communist.

MM Was there anything discernibly communist about what they were doing?

AB No. I think some of the ways they did things were in the ways in which the communists did them, but that was inevitable because that's all they knew. I think comparatively few Romanians actually believed in communism even during the time it was in existence. They just knew they had to get on with it. As a nation they were extremely good at bending with the wind, and coming back up when the wind died, and that's just about what had happened. What they were, I think, was genuinely anti-Russian. And they always have been genuinely anti-Russian and they are still frightened that one day the Russians will return to their area and cause more trouble. There was definitely a tendency towards nationalism but they were prepared to move towards Europe if with some residual suspicions. So that was the background to my arrival. The American, UK, French and German embassies were the front line embassies in Bucharest and a lot of attention was paid to what we had to say. We had good access and it was a rather competitive existence because the French believed that Romania was their stamping ground. They thought of Romania as Francophone and they wanted to promise Romania everything. The trouble was that, certainly during the period I was there, the Romanians realised that the French

promised a great deal and delivered very little, and so they were ready to look elsewhere. We didn't promise them a lot, not quite enough I thought, but nevertheless they respected us for that and when we said something they listened. That was always helpful.

MM Was it a former Francophone country.

AB It is now a member of Francophonie. It's a bit tongue in cheek but it's there. All the young people in Romania speak English, not French. Anyone over 55 would probably speak French but the younger generation are all English speaking. The French ambassador, a good friend, on one occasion bewailed the fact saying 'Andrew, I travel around Romania and when I talk to the Romanians in French they won't answer me in French.' I said, 'Well Bernard, I feel so sorry for you because I travel around Romania and when I talk to the Romanians they often answer me freely in English.' So for our part we had a good laugh about that: there was more English spoken than French. But equally, I had to have some Romanian, as often when travelling outside Bucharest they could not speak English.

MM Did you?

AB I attempted it.

MM Oh really, you learned it on a previous posting?

AB No, I learned it before going out, and then continued once I was there. I stepped off the plane and gave my first press conference in Romanian, it made a huge impression. And whenever necessary I could use it. I think, in some ways, western Europe was rather slow to recognise the situation which had developed in Romania. She really had been totally destroyed by Ceausescu and was so run down that in order to get going she needed a kick start and that she didn't get. Most of the countries were wary of the Romanians because of Ceausescu so they really didn't put their hands in their pockets very quickly. The Romanians for their part saw how much was given to Poland and the effect it had on the Polish economy and wondered why something hadn't been done for them. Certainly if they had received something like that they

could have got on much more quickly than they have.

MM Presumably the reason for that is mainly geographical?

AB Well it was at that stage, but of course now we have learned a few more lessons as far as the Balkans are concerned. I think that what people are realising is that if you are going to have peace and stability in the Balkans there has got to be a certain standard of living. That's what there isn't in many of these countries. So maybe there will be more assistance in the years ahead. There needs to be as far as Romania is concerned because in order to undo what Ceaucescu did there will have to be some very painful decisions taken which will lead to a lot of unemployment in Romania and unless that is supported by reasonable funds there will be political trouble.

MM They can't do it on their own?

AB They certainly can't do it on their own without risking political turmoil and I don't think they are prepared to do that. That's the weakness of the situation. But what the UK did which was particularly effective was to set up what was known as the Know-How Fund, and that was very much appreciated and very valuable. The aim of this was to transfer know-how as quickly as possible to young Romanians and Romanians in managerial positions. We concentrated on areas like banking, finance, accountancy, agriculture, parliamentary democracy and eventually did quite a bit of work on their stock exchange. We could make quite considerable progress with relatively small courses. What we discovered more and more was that you had to build a critical mass of people inside any institution so that when they got back into that institution they weren't smothered by the old communist style of thinking and were able to develop what they had learned. And unless one had this critical mass they were discouraged from pursuing the ideas which they had picked up from us. But the real strength, which was particularly effective I thought, was the speed with which assistance could be set up. By the time I left we had already spent something like 10 million pounds on it and I felt this was a very efficient investment. The second thing we spent a lot of time on, and paid a lot of attention to, was the British Council, English language teaching and the setting up of libraries all round Romania. Here again the young Romanians were very keen to get into English and these libraries became very popular

and developed in the ways that we hoped they would. So that was an initiative which certainly paid off. Elsewhere, I recognised very early on that as far as the Romanian army was concerned, it had a particularly isolated position. It hadn't been part of the Warsaw pact to the same extent as the other eastern Europeans, it had deliberately held back on that side. It didn't have contact with the West and so within the Romanian army there were a group of officers who probably only spoke Romanian, possibly not even the Russian which would have been found in most of the other forces, an inward looking force which was quite worried and frightened by anyone who were outsiders. So I suggested to London that one of the first steps to take would be to get English language teaching into the armed forces and to make them more extrovert and fortunately that was taken up.

MM Fortunately?

AB Yes, because quite quickly the army began to become much more outward-looking. There were a number of developments. They could see the reason for being linked to NATO. When the scheme for partnership for peace was developed the Romanians were actually the first to sign up. Almost simultaneously we managed to find a first place for them on the RCDS (Royal College of Defence Studies) course. They sent a very high level Brigadier on that course who has subsequently become their Chief of Staff. So we have developed links which are very valuable in terms of the military side of Romania.

MM What is the population of Romania?

AB Twenty-three million. It's a large country.

MM You said we gave about 10 million in the context of the Know-How fund, spread over a number of years. I was just wondering what the French were giving them?

AB I don't have that information.

MM Or the Americans, Germans?

AB The Americans were giving, but not necessarily in the same way. The Americans were pouring in quite a lot in different ways.

MM Were they doing the English language as well?

AB No they weren't doing it to the same extent. The French were trying to push the French language.

MM What other western countries were represented there, EU countries shall we say?

AB Most of them.

MM Most of them were there in some way, and NATO?

AB And NATO.

MM So it was a powerful representation, is this aimed with the ultimate objective of getting them to join the EU, or is it the Romanians wish to join the EU?

AB I think the Romanian view while I was there was that, 'we must do all we can to ensure that the Russians can't get back and surround us or take us over. The first priority therefore must be to develop a strategic policy which ensures that can't happen. That means we want the NATO umbrella.' Partnership for Peace was one step towards that. Hopefully Romania will become a member of NATO eventually. Then they should be safe. Membership of the European Union, as far as the government that was in power while I was there was concerned, was secondary to that and could be taken at a much slower rate and could be fitted in to what Romania might, or might not need in the future. The Opposition wanted it to move ahead faster. They've since been in power, they've pushed very hard and with our own support last year have been given the chance to put forward their case for membership and are currently baring their figures for EU scrutiny this spring. The present government has moved forward on this but the government that

I was dealing with was more interested in the military side than it was in Europe. I think one should also say that there were a number of political issues which came up of course during the time I was there. The whole question of Yugoslavia came to the boil and the Serbs were behaving as they shouldn't and sanctions were stalled and for the Romanians that was very difficult. The Serbs were orthodox in terms of religion, as the Romanians are. They were a neighbour. They had never caused Romanians any difficulty, and indeed they had been very helpful under Tito. There was a lot of trade between Romania and Belgrade, particularly western Romania and Belgrade. So to break all that up was a very painful proposition for the Romanians and they were very reluctant to do it. We could see that at the time and indeed there were a number of attempts to beat sanctions by crossing the Danube, getting oil and other things through and we had to weigh in, on many occasions, to try to prevent this and ultimately close it down. I think fairly effectively in the end, but it took time. And it did of course cost them a great deal in terms of trade and in terms of their GNP. Again they had hoped that the west would recompense them...

MM This was trade interrupted between...

AB Between the two. But they never got any recompense afterwards and in subsequence have suffered again. Finally, before I left, Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, had a visit to London. He was particularly anxious to do so and it was very nearly stalled because of a very difficult case with a family called the Mooneys. The Mooneys wanted to adopt a child and eventually did so. They smuggled, or tried to smuggle a baby out of Romania without going through all the proceedings. The Romanians stopped them, found the baby, arrested the Mooneys, and this happened about two or three months before the President was due to visit London. A tremendous consular case developed with the British press saying we must do something about this, and we resolved it literally days before Iliescu finally set off. And I must say this was a difficult situation because the Romanians were within their rights to arrest them.

MM What had they done wrong? They hadn't bribed somebody or...

AB They just hadn't gone through the necessary formalities. They smuggled the baby out in a

blanket or something in the back of a car and were caught when going through customs.

MM How were they discovered?

AB Somebody searched the car.

MM Such foolish things can have serious consequences.

AB It certainly did for us. The Mooneys overshadowed four months of our...

MM The British press doesn't help either does it?

AB No, or some of the politicians who came out, and I don't mean the government. One or two politicians who came out and deliberately stirred it up...

MM British ones?

AB Yes, because it was of benefit to them.

MM I see. Shameful. So that was Romania.

AB Yes, perhaps I should say a word about investment.

MM Yes.

AB One of the things the Romanians particularly wanted in those early years was foreign investment because this would help the economy to recover. It did have some British investment during that period: Shell, Unilever, Enterprise Oil were all to be found there and there were one or two smaller companies too who had some investment. There have since been a number of companies who have invested but, again, at a fairly low level and I am sure the Romanians are disappointed by the level of western investment so far.

MM Does that conclude Romania?

AB Yes.

MM Any final thoughts before we quit the subject?

AB No, I think there are a number of difficulties which Romania has for the future, one of them is that the Securitate, the security force, was extremely strong under Ceausescu and no family was safe from its surveillance and indeed often brother was reporting on brother and even child on parent. This has raised a large amount of distrust, and winning back confidence and trust and ultimately respect for truth as well, will be a long process they're always liable to look at various scenarios which may be developing and have suspicions about them, not taking them at face value.

MM Well, I think that is one of the inevitable tragedies really of these authoritarian regimes...

AB And difficult to see how you clear it out. One answer, in some of the other countries that have used this, is to simply open up all the old files. In the case of Romania if you did that, and I suspect some have been destroyed now, if you were to do that you could set family against family, parents against children, perhaps doing untold harm rather than good. But I know they are debating this in Romanian parliament right now.

MM Well, on that rather sad note you then moved on to Copenhagen, which must have been rather a pleasant change, or was it, was it a pleasant change, or just an interesting change?

AB Yes, leaving Romania in many ways was a sad experience for the reasons which I have mentioned but looking back on it I can't help but be attracted to much of what one finds there. They are very hospitable people and of course the political situation was fascinating for a diplomat and the stage of development, certainly the way in which bilateral contacts developed, all, from the diplomatic point of view, very good, very interesting.

MM Very friendly?

AB Yes, very friendly. And now, in the post Ceaucescu era, there are no problems with that. I was glad to go to Denmark because it filled in for me one of the bricks in a career which I hadn't had, and that was to serve within the European Union. This was going to give me the chance to do that. I had been in both Austria and Romania, and indeed Turkey, which were looking in on Europe to some extent. To be on the inside to see how it actually worked was particularly interesting and so that chance was given to me. In Denmark there are about, I was amazed to find, 10,000 British inhabitants. That's against the background of a total population of only a little over 5 million. When I inquired about how many Danes there were in Britain, I was told that there were some 40,000. I think that what this shows is that it's a very easy crossover in both directions. There is a lot that Denmark has in common with Britain. We share bits of history. We, of course, sometimes refer to the Vikings, but it is much more than that. They find it easy to come over here and settle.

MM A much higher standard of living I suppose?

AB Yes indeed. They have developed an economy which is among the highest in Europe now, and a very even standard of living across the country, a great respect for the environment, and a very good balance to life. They don't work all hours of day and night. They enjoy their time off. They do a lot of sailing. There is a lot of sport played, as well as picnic and family occasions. Whether they will be able to continue like that and still stay at the top of the economic league, I have some doubts, but they have so far.

MM How do they do it?

AB Well, they have got some very efficient companies. Not particularly well known to the outside world, but for instance, the Maersk shipping company is one of the most efficient shipping companies in the world. It has very large tankers which are built in Denmark, other ships built all over the world, China and elsewhere, run very effectively, on time, so it has a huge

reputation across the world and this company is just one part of a larger group which owns supermarkets, builds containers, owns an airline and has various other interests. So a really effective company. There are four or five others, not quite of the same size but with strong niche activities. Carlsberg, of course, is well known on the brewing side but there are others, making cement, making hearing aids for instance (the Danes have three of the top five companies in the world for hearing aids) and there are a number of others. The question really is whether the government is going to take away too much in taxation to make it efficient to continue to produce in Denmark, or whether the companies I have mentioned will move out to other countries. We have been a beneficiary of that. In 1998 there was £2 billion worth of investment into Britain, which is a very large figure indeed. So Danish companies are looking at other areas rather than locally. I think my first impression on getting there was the way in which the Danish government regarded our attitude towards Europe. This was of course at the end of the Conservative period (1996) and they saw us as dragging our feet unnecessarily. The Danes of course have four opt-outs themselves, where they are not prepared to have anything to do with European policy. One of those is on monetary union, another one is on defence, those are the two main ones. So, viewed by other Europeans they are seen as a bit maverick but if we had any thoughts that they might actually be following us in the same direction, they aren't. Danish politics are such that the Establishment, almost to a man, is pro-European, pro-integration and it's only the lower levels of society, out in the countryside and in the towns, which are sceptical.

MM Nationalist?

AB Yes, primarily. Obstinate so I would say, doesn't want to be put upon by anyone else, likes to have its own little dreams...

MM Oh, one has heard that.

AB So, of course, dealing with the Establishment on behalf of the British government, which was then very sceptical of the way things were moving, the Danes found difficult.

MM What is the position on the currency? I thought they were signed up to join the Euro.

AB No, they haven't signed up yet because they have eventually to have a referendum before they can do so, in order to get rid of this opt out which was devised a number of years ago

MM At Edinburgh

AB Yes. When they, going back a little, had an initial referendum which proved to be anti-European, and we had the Presidency at the time of that referendum and in order to get the whole matter back on the rails for Denmark a negotiation was carried through which allowed them to agree to follow general European policy except over four issues; the four opt-out conditions, including monetary union and defence. As far as the monetary union was concerned the establishment would now like to see Denmark adopt the Euro but they can't do this until they have had a referendum. They are now getting to the point where they think they should have a referendum. In other words they think there is sufficient support to win a referendum. And it is now a question of when it will be called. It could well be later this year.

MM So they could be in at the start of the Euro.

AB They could be.

MM Do they meet the other criteria?

AB Easily.

MM What is the point of their doubt on defence? That sounds rather a curious opt-out to me, for a tiny country.

AB Yes, they have had nuclear concerns at various stages and again they don't want to be rushed into anything where they don't have some control over what develops.

MM Yes, it's hard to see them with their own defence policy...

AB And I think the second thing is they are firm members of NATO, because they are basically Atlantisists rather than Europeans. They can see that, from little Danish point of view, to have the Americans holding the ring is better than finding themselves in Europe where they may be smothered. So they prefer the NATO context which gives them more air, than the European one.

MM How about their relations with Germany?

AB Well they have a good relationship with Germany in terms of trade because Germany is their major trading partner but they have memories of the war and they are concerned I think that one day Germany may overrun Denmark not least with their summer homes if not physically...

MM But they all go there to shop anyway, don't they?

AB The Danes or the Germans?

MM Well, I am not sure which way it is but...

AB The Germans go to Denmark to have their holidays and so the Danes have arranged that they are not allowed to buy Danish property, Danish holiday homes. I don't think the Danes go to Germany particularly. They certainly might buy a lot of their goods there, in terms of clothing and household goods, but they import it.

MM I had understood there was some tremendous traffic, just across the border...

AB Well, I am sure there is, but the border is small and Danes travel a lot in all directions. Yes, I am sure there is plenty of traffic.

MM But it's not really significant?

AB Significant but it's not the only place to which they go.

MM Did you enjoy your time there?

AB Yes, very much. Travelled all over the country, to Greenland and to the Faeroe Islands. That was partly because the one maritime boundary still to be drawn around the British Isles was the one technically between the UK and Denmark. Actually between the UK and the Faeroe Islands. And that line was extremely sensitive because it would run through a lot of potential oil fields. Negotiating that line has taken twenty-one years. The Danish government had realised how difficult it was for them, sitting in Copenhagen to negotiate when the Faeroese had most to lose, so they handed the negotiations over to the Faeroese. The Faeroese being islanders were extremely suspicious of everything and so bringing them to the table in an attempt to get them to sign anything was hard work. I was involved in that in one way or another...

MM Were you in the front line for the British negotiations?

AB We had a negotiating team when we got down to the heavy negotiations but of course the work around the negotiations was important and so there was some of that to be done in Copenhagen and certainly some to be done on Torshavn in the Faeroe Islands.

MM Where were our negotiators?

AB They were in London. They would come over for the day or whatever. Eventually the negotiations were brought to a satisfactory conclusion last spring so agreement was signed. Now all is sweetness and light and I think that is the last significant difference between Denmark and the UK removed.

MM What goes on in Greenland?

AB Both Greenland and the Faeroe Islands each have a population of 45 thousand so they are very small in terms of population and in Greenland that is spread over a huge area. When one stops to think that Greenland is the equivalent a landmass running from Oslo to Rome then you

realise what size you are dealing with.

MM Yes, but it must have a huge economic potential?

AB It may have. They are only touching the outer surface of their potential at the moment and of course that big ice field in the centre is still almost unexplored.

There are two or three little towns on the west coast of Greenland and two in the south which are the main centres from which things are done, mainly fishing, there may be some oil to be found up there and there could be one or two other things, minerals, but in large quantities, not yet.

MM Do we have any problems with the Danes over fishing?

AB We have had problems with the Danes over fishing because they, like us, find it is a contracting industry and the contraction is painful. So, yes there have been problems. But I think basically the relationship has gone fairly well and they were delighted when the new government came in in 1997 because as Social Democrats they thought they knew a lot of the British team. I don't think the Danish government could accept they were on all fours with the Third Way. They see it as a bit too close to the market but nevertheless they have their contacts and they feel happier with the Labour party. So the period after that was easier, in a sense, for me. There were visits by the Secretary of State and also by the Prime Minister which we valued.

MM When the current government came into power the attitude appeared to be quite strongly pro-European. That has slightly withered since then, did that...

AB Well, at the time I left it was only beginning to look like that and there was a very strong push on the defence side. The Danes saw the British as a centre in this debate and I think they felt that there was still a lot of energy within our European policy, that was up until the end of last summer (1999). Since then there must have been some disappointment but it hasn't played right through. Our EU Presidency for instance, in 1998 went very well and was widely regarded in Denmark as a success.

MM Are they well informed about what happens in this country?

AB Yes, terribly. I'm quite amazed by the amount of press coverage. You couldn't see a newspaper any day without seeing a considerable amount about Britain. They maintain correspondents over here. They send back a lot of stuff. They maintain interest in what is going on. There is a lot of coverage.

MM I suppose in the sense that public opinion follows the lead given by Germany in what the papers say is actually pretty important.

AB I think it is helpful. There is a streak in the Dane, an obstinate individualism, that nobody is going to tell him what to do or how to do it. The journalist is going to be slightly better off than a politician perhaps but not absolutely. But yes, it is important.

MM And, unfortunately, unhelpful.

AB Well, a lot of press that is coming back from Britain is good. They do play up some of the stories which are side issues, when there are positive developments they spot them and pay attention to them. So I think the overall picture coming through is positive. I think Denmark would like to see that happening. We take Denmark too much for granted. This is a country which is not large. It is our neighbour, it's a potential ally which thinks in very much the same ways as we do and whether it's agriculture or the single market it is very much the same as us. The Danes would like to see us active and inside the EU debate, because they would feel happier siding with us and coming in behind us than leaving it to the French and Germans to dominate.

MM Do you think that many other countries would agree with the Danes on that?

AB Yes. I think if we were at the centre of the European debate there would be strong potential Nordic support.

MM Yes, well let's hope that we seize the nettle.

AB Yes, I think it is important that we should do so. We should not leave it too long.

MM Is there anything else you would like to add to that account.

AB Perhaps I should finish by saying that one of the last things I was involved in in Denmark was that I had the chance to push for a State visit, and in fact the Danish Queen has just made that State visit with some success I think. There was quite a lot in the press which is unusual. So that was a good way to finish.

MM Even though in the time of your successor, 'twas ever thus.

AB That's right. One can't be too hard on that, one has to accept it.

MM But it is wonderful to set up something like that because State visits do have a very considerable impact.

AB That was the thinking behind it. I felt there needed to be something tangible which the Danes could see linked us at the present time.

MM Well thank you very much indeed for that. Could I just ask one little question relating to your very early days when you were called in to be Resident Clerk and Duncan Sandys was the Minister, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations presumably at that time. How did you find him to deal with?

AB I had very little dealing with him at that time.

MM It was just on that one occasion?

AB Yes.

MM OK, thank you very much for that.