Around Europe
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Opening up the miracle of the European Parliament

QCEA wanted to know more about certain procedures inside the European Parliament (EP) in order to make its workings more transparent to our supporters and to make our work there more effective. As far as we could see, there was a lack of comprehensive knowledge about the Parliament's exact working procedures amongst a wide range of Brussels-based organisations, ours included. After much research, we found an incredibly simple solution: A book answering all of our questions! It is a book with the very unimaginative title of "The European Parliament" - but nevertheless one that we can really recommend to anyone who wants to find out how the EP works.

The authors, Richard Corbett, MEP for Yorkshire and the Humber, Francis Jacobs, former Head of Unit responsible for the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection Committee, and Dr. Michael Shackleton, former Head of Unit responsible for conciliations and co-decision, first published this book in 1990 and since then they have updated it regularly. The 7th and latest edition was published in June 2007. They have all worked in the European Parliament for a long time and are very familiar with its structures.

The book is divided into three main sections: the framework; the actors and working structures; and the powers of the Parliament.

The first section describes the way MEPs are elected, the European Parliament's historical background, and covers the official location and the languages of the EP.

The second section is much longer than the first, and deals with a whole range of subjects: It first describes the profile of current MEPs and goes on to deal with the political groupings and leadership structures. It also looks at the various working configurations in the Parliamentary structures, such as committees and inter-parliamentary delegations. This gives a deep insight into the Parliament's work and its different instruments, particularly where the committees are concerned. Less well-known structures such as intergroups and the Parliament's secretariat are also described.

The third section then goes on to deal with decision-making procedures. Besides the four classic legislative procedures (Consultation, Co-decision, Cooperation, and Assent), it contains chapters on budget procedures and the powers of appointment and dismissal with regard to the European Commission and other key actors.

A long chapter deals with the scrutiny and control instruments of the Parliament, such as declarations, questions and own-initiative reports. It ends with the election results in all previous elections to the EP and a substantial bibliography.

The book is very detailed and outlines all technical, procedural questions regarding the European Parliament. Unlike almost all academic literature on this subject, it is intended for professionals working in the area, and is written in clear, accessible language. It should be considered as one of the definitive books on the European Parliament and an absolute must for anyone new to Brussels who wants to gain comprehensive knowledge of the EP quickly.

Lucas Guttenberg

The European Parliament, 7th edition by Richard Corbett MEP, Francis Jacobs and Michael Shackleton, published by John Harper Publishing 2007, ISBN 978-0-9551144-7-2

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Money, money, money – the EU budget under scrutiny

When the EU Member States and the European Parliament agreed the medium-term financial framework for 2007 to 2013 way back in 2005, this proved to be a difficult task, which nearly overran the time available and was acrimonious for most of the 2 years during which the discussions took place.

One of the reasons why agreement could finally be reached was the fact that a review of the EU budget was foreseen for 2008/9; this was not envisaged as just another round of talking numbers but a thorough 'root and branch' review. All lines were to be open for discussion both on the income and on the expenditure side.

The review has now begun with an initial public consultation which was launched in the second half of 2007 and which runs until 15 April 2008. QCEA is committed to commenting on this consultation and contributing to the developing discussion. This is part of our regular engagement with the institutional development work at EU level.

We have produced a set of 5 Briefing Papers which look at the following aspects of this process:

1. The consultation – background, purpose, remit and timetable
2. The EU budget – how is it structured?
3. Key issues for the consultation
4. Questions raised in the consultation
5. The 'health check' of the Common Agricultural Policy.

These are now on our website (**www.quakers.org/qcea**) and for those who don't have access to the internet we can supply them in print form by post or by fax.

We would like anyone who feels that they would like to contribute to the response QCEA will make to the consultation, to write to us (by e-mail, fax or post) with comments on any aspects of the review. Don't feel that you have to comment on the specific questions raised by the consultation; we will submit at least one set of comments which will raise questions about the way the consultation questions are structured and will identify issues which we think should have been included but are not.

Deadline for making your submissions to QCEA is: 15 March 2008; all submissions should be addressed to Sara Erlandsson (e-mail: serlandsson@qcea.org) or at our normal address or fax number.

Martina Weitsch

A big step, but sometimes not far enough

The political impact of the EU Fundamental Rights Charter

In the last issue, we discussed the judicial impact of the Charter. Here we consider the political impact, which is a different discussion altogether. In the Charter, European social and human rights are brought together in one document for the first time. The non-discrimination of disadvantaged groups is mentioned in a very detailed way. For the first time, children's rights appear as a separate issue. Also for the first time, some classic social rights find their full acceptance in a human rights document. And these are only a few examples.

The part on non-discrimination is strong and unique. It covers nearly all forms of discrimination, including for the first time sexual orientation as an issue in its own right. This is a clear message to sections of some of Europe's societies where homophobia is still widespread.

The Charter describes the fundamental values on which the EU's work is based. Politically, the inclusion of the issues mentioned above among others indicates that the European Union has recognised the many changes that have taken place within Europe's societies over recent years and has demonstrated its desire to give due consideration to Europe's societal realities. In its political statements, the Charter goes further than the present European constitutions, such as e.g. the German fundamental law or the French constitution.

However, the parents of the Charter have failed to go further in a lot of policy areas:

For example, the common policy on asylum needs a binding basis and a European definition for a humane asylum regime. The European Union is facing the problem of 'illegal' immigration – a problem that will not decrease in the coming years - without a common value to base a common approach on. Consequently, the Charter's corresponding clause appears decidedly

inadequate.

The data protection provisions are very weak – a worrying point at a time when the Union is giving considerable amounts of data on passengers flying to the US to authorities there.

Other than a general statement calling for a high level of environmental protection, ecological responsibility does not appear in the Charter. At a time when the world is facing climate change and where the EU claims to be leading the struggle against it, a stronger and more certain provision would have been more appropriate.

But in general, QCEA sees the Charter as a big step in the right direction because it gives the EU - for the first time - a binding human rights dimension. This does not distract us from discussing and trying to improve every provision of the Charter.

In light of this, we encourage the United Kingdom and Poland to join the club. The citizens of these countries should also benefit from the protection and political support that this Charter provides. The Charter could also become Europe's most important export, especially in the accession processes and in the European Neighbourhood Policy. For this objective, it is necessary that all EU Member States stand unified behind the provisions of the Charter. Only in this way can the EU appear credible as a force for human rights.

Lucas Guttenberg

Sara Erlandsson joins QCEA

I knew that I would work in the development field ever since I was a young child. I lived in Zimbabwe and learnt how lucky I was to have been born in Sweden. To this end I studied media and communications as well as international development cooperation with a focus on Africa. It might seem like a strange combination, but the communication part is more like a tool, a way to work with the issues. And if people don't know what's happening in the world they won't get the chance to try and do something about it.

Before coming to QCEA I worked for ECDPM (European Centre for Development Policy Management) in the Netherlands, which made me further realise what a big player the European Union is in development work (in Sweden the EU is still not such a big deal, being on the periphery) and that sparked an interest in working in Brussels.

My biggest interest is travelling and meeting people from different cultures and with different experiences. Apart from Africa I have also spent time in Pakistan and Japan, both with similarities to Africa and Europe respectively, but still poles apart. I am really looking forward to discovering Brussels, with its mix of goodies from all over the world.

I am new to the world of Quakers, but have received a very warm welcome and am very happy to have been given the opportunity to play a part in Quaker House and in the important work QCEA is doing in Brussels.

My biggest project at QCEA will involve studying how the European Commission delivers aid in conflict-affected countries. I look forward to this and to other challenges that the year will bring.

Sara Erlandsson

QCEA STUDY TOUR
29 March - 6 April 2008

The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) Study Tour provides the perfect opportunity to learn, discuss and reflect on what Europe means to you. The Study Tour includes visits to various European Institutions in Brussels and Luxembourg; meetings with MEPs; informative sessions with NGOs; and interactive discussions about security, peace, justice and human rights. We guarantee eight days of learning and fun about all things European!

For more information, or to apply online now, why not visit our website?
www.quaker.org/qcea/studytour/index.html
or email **studytours@qcea.org**

Calum Shaw joins QCEA

In my opinion QCEA is a matter of belief and action. One can believe and believe and believe until the handsomely subsidised cows come home, but sometimes it is not enough. Sometimes action must follow if beliefs are to become reality.

I believe in Quakerism and its approach and I believe in Europe; both as a continent with a peaceful future and as a socio-political project. But how can I hold any hope of either of them even slightly resembling the beliefs I hold if I am not prepared to offer my drop to the ocean?

So I could say I felt duty bound to apply for the post. I could say it was a simple question of acting on my beliefs; of putting my faith into action. However, if I did, I could be accused of bending the truth, because the post is attractive for much more besides. Indeed, as the year unfolds I will be presented with a variety of opportunities.

I will have the opportunity to contribute to and publish a piece of research on enlargement in the Western Balkans; to learn some French; and of course to eat lots of Belgian chocolate to name just three. Moreover, I should confess that my sense of duty was also influenced by the city's contributions to Art Nouveau and the prospect of being introduced to all the 'world-wise' diplomatic types Liz and Martina know.

I only hope that over the year I will be able to contribute to QCEA's on-going progress and development as much as it will surely contribute to mine.

Calum Shaw

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