



Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

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Europe - A Peace Project or a Peace Process?

On 11 September 2012, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office organised a roundtable discussion at Quaker House Brussels on 'the European Union as a Peace Project: Defending, learning from and applying our history'. Martina Weitsch spoke on 'Reviving the idea of Europe as a peace project: challenges for peace activists':

William Penn, a very early Quaker, who established a government based on peace in Pennsylvania, wrote an essay in 1693 entitled 'an essay towards the present and future peace of Europe'. This was a reaction to the wars then raging in Europe. His idea was in essence that the representatives of the various entities then making up Europe were to meet regularly to discuss and resolve any disagreements; he envisaged sanctions that could be applied to any of them if they either failed to bring such disagreements before these meetings or who failed to implement the decisions in a timely manner. It was a document of its time. But it was also a document well ahead of its time. The idea did not fly in 1693.

In 1945 Europe had finally managed to completely destroy itself. Two massive wars within the space of less than 50 years had devastated the continent.

European leaders in the early 1950s had a vision which was not so different from that of William Penn: to find a way of getting European nations round the table and to sort out their differences in non-violent ways. They decided that economic cooperation was the way to do it. But the driving force at the root of the European project was the determination never to allow wars to destroy Europe again.

The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950 made a number of key points which reinforces this:

"World peace cannot be safeguarded without the **making of creative efforts** proportionate to the dangers which threaten it."

"Europe will not be made all at once, or according to

a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first **create a de facto solidarity.**" "The pooling of coal and steel production... will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims."

The last of these points: **pooling the drivers of war is a game changer** is one of the really important lessons. We can see that the project has worked. But at the time, this was not a foregone conclusion. Of the six countries which first made up the Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community, four had been on one side of WWII and the other two had been on the other. The willingness to engage with people who had been sworn enemies was the first step

in the right direction.

Peacemakers throughout Europe, ordinary citizens in political parties, in churches, in trade unions, who had had more than enough of war and destruction, were very much supporting the move towards this vision: to prevent war in the future.

Today, it is hard to find such enthusiasm for Europe as a peace project. I have heard it said by senior decision-makers: 'But today, peace is a little passé'. Though it is shocking to hear this, I think it is also correct in so far as the generations for whom the wars of the 20th century in Europe are mere pages in a school history book do not understand the magnitude of the change that has been brought about: there has been no active fighting between EU Member States at any time since 1950; we no longer have visa requirements to travel from one country to another within the EU; we no longer need work permits to work in one another's countries; now, we travel freely across 26 countries in Europe and in 17 countries we can pay with the same currency. Such change matters because people begin to think of citizens of other countries as not so different from themselves; as people with whom we can imagine solidarity.

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But there have been violent conflicts in parts of the EU throughout its history: the Basque country and Northern Ireland are two examples of such conflict. There are ongoing conflicts between majority and minority populations in many parts of the EU: the treatment of Roma, of people with a migration background, of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in many of the EU MS all show that there is still the potential for violent conflict to bubble to the surface.

The EU (and the Council of Europe which has made a significant contribution to building peace and understanding and solidarity in Europe) - in their efforts to combat racism and xenophobia - have done a lot to keep such conflicts as non-violent as possible.

But...we need to remind ourselves that there has to be solidarity. So far, progress has been achieved in times of prosperity. The impact of the financial and economic crisis on the response of citizens and some Member State governments to the EU shows how fragile a peace project Europe is. As the EU has grown through successive enlargements - in some cases bringing countries into the EU that had a much lower standard of living than the old Member States - hostility towards both people from those countries coming west to seek economic improvement and to the sharing of EU resources has been evident.

The rise of the political right and of the Euro sceptics in many Member States all teach us that the project is far from finished. Indeed, we should see Europe not so much as a peace project but as a peace process which needs to be worked on over the long term and which is not only not finished yet but may never be completely finished. It is about developing and maintaining a mindset rather than achieving specific outcomes.

Part of the reason why this matters is because of the role the EU plays on the international stage. Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union says in its paragraph 1: **'The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values, and the well-being of its peoples'**.

It does not specify where the peace is to be promoted - the implication is that it aims to promote peace everywhere in the world. That makes sense because if there is violent conflict or war anywhere in the world, it will have implications for the well-being of everyone, including the peoples of Europe.

It states - in its Article 2 - what its values are: respect



Roundtable discussion at Quaker House: Photo: J Liebl, EPLO

for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

We have a long way to go in Europe to make the point that human rights are indivisible and that justice will only exist for anyone when it exists for everyone. The EU has much to do to be consistent in applying respect for human rights to partners in other countries.

The recent review of the European Neighbourhood Policy rightly proposes to give 'more for more' but does not accept that this must also mean 'less for less'. This is illustrated by the fact that the EU - whilst wringing its hands about the Palestine/Israel conflict - continues to enhance economic relations with the Government of Israel in return for that Government completely ignoring the EU's stance on human rights, peace and justice.

If the EU wants to be seen as a credible actor in promoting peace, if the EU wants other countries to embrace the EU peace process as a model, then the EU needs to be more credible not only in its history but in its present. If the EU can step up and become that coherent and therefore credible actor for peace then it will be equal to the vision and the promise of its founders.

Peace activists also have an important role to play. First and foremost, we should remember that forgetting our history is bound to be an expensive mistake but mere words are not enough. It is vital that peace activists reveal the roots of conflict within our own societies and find ways of addressing them.

There are many conflicts within our societies which have left deep scars; the miners' strike of the 1980s in the UK; the race riots in Rostock in 1992; the attacks on public transport networks in Madrid in 2003 and London in 2005; all these are examples of the kind of situations within Europe which show that we are a long way from true solidarity.



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A quote from another famous Quaker, John Woolman, illustrates the importance of starting on our doorstep:

‘May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.’

The treasures we may need to look upon (i.e. question) are our unsustainable lifestyles; the fact that we live quite happily with inequality both in the context of our own countries and even more so in a global context.

It therefore seems to me that the European Union and European citizens have to get back to basics - to examine every one of the EU’s policies - internal and external - to see if the roots of conflict lie within them or whether such roots of conflict are being addressed positively.

The European Union has spearheaded a true commitment to equality and yet there is evidence that we are again moving towards greater inequality in Europe. Peace activists need to embrace the call for equality right across society and make sure that

policies at EU and national level are not allowed to increase inequality further.

To sum up then, the agenda for the Europe peace process into the future is to:

- Recover the history and the historical lessons that the peacebuilding project Europe contains
- Bring those lessons to the attention of the coming generations so that we make sure there is no way back from the peacebuilding project Europe
- Engage in active solidarity within our towns and cities and our countries and across Europe
- Challenge decision-makers about any policies and legislation that present the possibility of increasing conflict between different groups in the population or the possibility of increasing inequalities
- Challenge decision-makers to be coherent and consistent in the application of their agreed values to their relations with other countries.

Martina Weitsch

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to examine alternatives to imprisonment

In 2010 QCEA published a detailed report on its research into the use of alternatives to imprisonment in the member states of the Council of Europe. We then spent some time contacting MPs with an interest in criminal justice and who sit in the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) of the Council of Europe to encourage them to take the matter further.



Jean-Charles Gardetto, MP
photo: Council of Europe website

It is therefore gratifying to see that PACE has asked its Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee to produce a report on this subject. The process started on 22 June 2011 with a motion for resolution submitted by Jean-Charles Gardetto (Monaco/EPP),

supported by a number of other members of the Parliamentary Assembly, asking that such a report be written, debated and recommendations made.

On 13 December 2011 the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee appointed Nataša Vučković, a

member of the socialist group in the Assembly from Serbia, as the Rapporteur.

The next stage in the process is a Committee hearing with experts on the subject due to take place in Paris before the end of the year. There is no firm date for the completion

of the report or indeed its debate in the Assembly, but it has to be completed before October 2013. QCEA will follow the matter with interest, hoping that some of the key recommendations from our report, especially those on restorative justice and circles of support and accountability, are reflected in the recommendations proposed by the Rapporteur.



Nataša Vučković, MP
photo: Council of Europe website

Liz Scurfield



Members of the European Parliament Approve Major EU-Israel Trade Agreement

The Additional Protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an EC-Israel Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) is designed to facilitate the increased import of Israeli pharmaceuticals into the EU market by allowing exporters to certify their products only once for both markets.



European Parliament: photo QCEA

The Council of the European Union agreed to this Additional Protocol in 2010. It needed European Parliament consent.

The Committee for Foreign Affairs voiced concerns about the lack of control the EU would have in ensuring that this agreement would not be abused in order to bring pharmaceutical products into the EU from illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Despite the concerns, the Committee gave its opinion in June and recommended that consent be given provided that certain safeguards were in place which had been asked for from the Commissioner for Trade.

On 18 September 2012, the International Trade Committee in the European Parliament voted in favour of consenting to the Protocol by a narrow margin and against the recommendation of the Chair of the Committee. There will be a vote in the plenary, which we will try to influence. For now, economic expediency has won again over human rights and justice.

Liz Scurfield

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