



What are Quakers doing at the EU?

There is a wide variety of non-governmental organisations in Brussels and in Strasbourg. Many are the EU advocacy offices of global organisations. Some are faith groups promoting religious tolerance or the rights of the members of their own faith. There are a great many commercial lobbyists - the Transparency Register, a public register of the organisations active in contacting the European Commission and the European Parliament, lists over 8000 organisations. Half of these are commercial lobbyists and another thousand are professional advisers and lawyers. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) make up only a quarter of the organisations registered to lobby the EU institutions.

QCEA is small fry in this sea of lobbying organisations. We represent a small faith group with only about 20,000 members. The European membership of several other churches is several thousand times as large. So what are we doing here?

As Quakers, our faith is based on the conviction that we can all have direct experience of God's presence and discern God's will for us and for the world. Since our origins in 17th century England we have sought to live out our testimonies to truth, peace, equality, and simplicity. The Religious Society of Friends is recognised as an historic peace church: the challenge of how to honour the people on all sides of conflicts continues to be a living one. The staff here at the QCEA office in Brussels keep in mind that we are not simply an interest group lobbying the EU: we are people speaking to other people who happen to work in EU institutions.

A stakeholder is someone who has an interest in a project. If we think of the EU as such a project, almost everyone in the world has an interest, whether as a citizen of an EU Member State or a citizen of a third country affected by EU policies.

Stakeholders take action in different ways. Some attend meetings and call for the institutions to achieve a certain high standard. This is necessary: the presentation of a radical alternative reminds us all that things do not have to be as they are. One crucial dimension of stakeholder or civil society participation in policy-making is the totally different view, the one that cracks open our understanding of how things should be and brings us all to a different place, where we can see new ways forward. The promotion of restorative justice might be an example of this approach.

The people working for QCEA get to know the people with whom we are in dialogue, and to understand their situation. They are not enemies but people with their own reasons for doing the work they do. They are often striving for similar goals. We make suggestions based on our own expertise and observations, about how common goals might be achieved. And very often our suggestions are taken on board. Friendly conversations can bring us all to a better shared understanding.

We also work in partnership with other NGOs in several more or less formal networks. One example is the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), a collaboration of more than forty human rights organisations working at the EU level. Last year QCEA played a significant part in an HRDN campaign in which candidates for the European Parliament pledged to promote human rights (see stand4humanrights.org); our ongoing



relationships with those who were elected as MEPs means we can discuss opportunities for the Parliament to stand for human rights both inside and outside the EU.

The stand4humanrights campaign was promoted by QCEA staff and supporters - we wrote e-mails and so did many of you who had signed up to receive QCEA action alerts. The work continues for our staff in Brussels. We are able to converse with MEPs about human rights issues during meetings of the Friends of Human Rights and Democracy group, for example

Transparency is a crucial element of democratic governance. QCEA recently joined with 44 other NGOs to call for increased transparency in the revision of the European Commission's own guidelines on impact assessment. The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, is an active contributor to the promotion of transparency on many fronts, from the negotiations for the EU-US free trade deal (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or TTIP) to the Commission's expert groups, which often seem to be biased in favour of commercial interests.

QCEA aims to work with our partners and the people in the institutions here, to promote fundamental values of peace, human rights, democratic governance, sustainability, and economic justice. We do this by working alongside the many people who have similar aims. We welcome your support: your prayers, your time, your responses to our action alerts, and your subscriptions and donations. Thank you!

Alexandra Bosbeer

Faith is certainly not to be tied up in a tight parcel of 'I believes'. It is a path along which I have to walk into further truth.
- Damaris Parker-Rhodes 1985

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