



**Quaker  
Council for  
European  
Affairs**

# Around Europe

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# REMAIN but be more constructive!



The Quaker Council for European Affairs is advocating for the United Kingdom to remain in the European Union, and moreover for it to become a more active and supportive member. QCEA's governing Council met in February to discuss the forthcoming referendum.

“Recognising that there are different views regarding Europe among individuals and Meetings, the QCEA Council wishes to remind Friends that the EU is an organization founded to promote peace, solidarity, and community in Europe, and as such it needs all countries to work together to make it a better Europe for all,” part of the minute reads.

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# News

## QCEA calls on UK to stay (continued from page 1)

Since 1979 QCEA has offered a Quaker critique of EU policy, and has been increasingly concerned about its trade and military policy. Advocating for policy change, is however, part of our normal engagement with all levels of government. Our supporters are citizens who recognise their responsibility to be involved, not only in local and national affairs, but internationally as well.

The QCEA Council also called for the UK, should it opt to stay in the EU, to play a more constructive role at the European institutions. QCEA have often been frustrated by the UK's disengaged or even disruptive approach to common European action on important issues, such as the circular economy or food banks. Similarly, in 2014, the UK government tried to block the candidate for Commission President proposed by the party that won the most seats in the European Parliament.

Where it is engaged, the UK is often demanding policies that put a just, peaceful and sustainable Europe at risk. For example, by being a strong

champion of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and for EU economic support for arms industries.

In advance of the QCEA meeting, members considered a paper by Peter Reid, of QCEA's British Committee. It raised concerns that, "The ethical and moral dimensions to EU membership are in danger of being overlooked behind all the economics and politics". Quakers have a long history of promoting international cooperation and the nonviolent resolution of conflict.

In 1693, William Penn published, 'An Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe'. He called for a European Parliament or other body that could represent the territories of Europe to help them to settle disputes without the recourse to war. Unfortunately, millions of people were to die in European wars before his vision could be realised. Penn's essay was republished by QCEA in 1992, with a forward from the then President of the European Parliament, Egon Klepsch.

Andrew Lane

## Alternatives to Violence Project in Quaker House

In November, grass-roots peacebuilder and Kenyan Quaker Cornelius Ambiah (see page 9) lead AVP taster workshops in Quaker House, Brussels

The sessions provided an opportunity for staff from the European institutions, civil society organisations and the local Quaker Meeting to learn about AVP together. Nonviolent communication is a practical tool, but could it have wider policy implications if it was used by people in power?



Cornelius Ambiah from Nairobi Yearly Meeting leads AVP in Quaker House, Brussels.

## TTIP investment court rejected by German judges

German Judges have rejected the European Commission plans for investment courts under the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The German Association of Judges (DRB) has issued a statement saying it “sees neither a legal basis nor a need for such a court.” The European Commission proposed the Investment Court System (ICS) as an improved, more transparent alternative to the Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) which was heavily criticised by European citizens and civil society.

The judges criticised the limits a new investor court would place on national courts, and the EU Court of Justice, and moreover stated simply that creating “special courts for certain groups of litigants” is a mistake. They also questioned the legal independence of the process for appointing the courts’ judges, saying it does not meet international standards.

Following the similar opinion of the European Association of Judges in November 2015, the judges

view is a victory for anti-ISDS campaigners, and presents the Commission’s plans for ICS with an uphill struggle.

Meanwhile, County Clare in Ireland has become the first Irish local authority to declare itself a TTIP free zone, following a number of authorities in the UK, the Netherlands, Barcelona and Brussels.

George Thurley



## Peacebuilding book launched

In December 2015, QCEA hosted a discussion on the state of peacebuilding in the Western Balkans, and how this has been affected by the increase in refugees travelling through the region in 2015. The meeting provided an opportunity to hear the experience of three peacebuilders, Goran Božičević, Zorica Trifunovic and Goran Bubalo, who served as Quaker Peace representatives. Between 2004 and 2009 they worked together on 'Dealing with the Past', a programme of Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW). The discussion revealed that many of the root causes of the post-Yugoslav wars have not yet been addressed.

### To Trust A Spark

The event was also used to launch a new book on the history of Quaker projects during and after the Yugoslav wars: the challenges and the lessons



(From L-R) Andrew Lane, Zorica Trifunovic, Goran Božičević, Sally Markwell, Goran Bubalo and Alan Pleydell.

learned. Sally Markwell, clerk of the Quaker Post-Yugoslav Peace Link, spoke about 'To Trust A Spark' by Anne Bennett. The book's title reflects the experimental nature of the programme, as QPSW had supported work defined and led by local people. For more information visit: [www.postyugoslavpeacelink.com](http://www.postyugoslavpeacelink.com).

Andrew Lane



# Reclaiming security

## Workshops discuss use of the word 'security'

There is an urgent need to challenge a dangerous narrative that dominates international affairs. European governments think security is achieved by dominating others. They think it is about state power and containing threats with military force.

They are encouraged to think this way by some powerful groups who benefit from Europe's continued use of military forces and industries. For some people, there are huge profits to be made. But for most people, and for the planet, Europe's obsession with military power reduces their security.

A growing number of initiatives are working for change, and these have been discussed at two European Quaker gatherings in recent months.

### Peace and Service Consultation

In November, in the days after the Paris murders, the Peace and Service Consultation of European Quakers met near Brussels. These events were very much in the minds of participants, particularly as the Brussels authorities declared the city to be on 'lock-down' mid-way through the gathering.

QCEA led a discussion on security and how the concept was being misused to limit the policy debate to a narrow set of violent policy responses. The Peace and Service Consultation considered

these issues through the weekend, and published a statement calling for an end to policies that contributed to a cycle of violence. "We need to move away from expensive, indiscriminate and ineffective military power and stop fuelling war and the spread of arms... Sustainable and shared security can be created only by addressing the root causes of violence," the statement read.

### QCEA-QPSW Conference

In December, 110 people took part in the joint QCEA - Quaker Peace and Social Witness conference in Brussels. Two workshops were held on the concept of security. They considered examples of when the term security had been evoked by people in power to restrict the public debate on a particular issue, and the policy options available to deal with it.

One participant said, "If violent extremism gets worse when Europe builds walls, and sells bombs, then why do governments describe this as 'security policy'. Surely it is 'insecurity' policy."

Participants heard about the EU's Internal Security Strategy and its Common Security and Defence Policy, that prioritise counter-productive military spending and support for arms companies. Meanwhile, conflict prevention and peacebuilding are starved of resources.

Andrew Lane

## European Forum on Armed Drones

On 14 January 2016 QCEA hosted a strategy workshop in Brussels for the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD). Fourteen people attended, representing eleven different peace, arms control, and human rights organisations from Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK (see photograph).

The purpose of this workshop was to discuss how European civil society organisations can work together to change the policies of European governments and EU institutions on armed drones. The workshop participants pooled their knowledge of European and national politics, and discussed

joint objectives and strategies for the group, and opportunities for advocacy.

At present, while the EU has an official policy of supporting the development of military drone technology, there is no policy agreed at the EU level on the use of armed drones. With this technology making it easier than ever for governments to resort to violence, and with drone strikes being "normalised" by the media, this is an increasingly important issue. EFAD provides a mechanism for different civil society organisations to work together for policy reform.

Tim Harman

## EU militarism workshops at QCEA-QPSW conference

Is the EU seeking to build peace on earth? Or to increase Europe's military strength? Actually, the answer is both! As a Quaker working in peace advocacy for QCEA, I am aware just how odd this sounds. At the December 2015 QCEA/QPSW conference I offered a workshop to help the Quaker community to engage with this seeming paradox. The workshop was entitled "The EU: peace project or military alliance?"

On the one hand (I explained), European integration was originally intended to bring peace to a war-torn continent. In the first half of the twentieth century there were two world wars that tore Europe apart. Nowadays a war between (say) France and Germany would be unthinkable. The EU won the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize for its success in uniting Europe in peace. Moreover, the EU now seeks to extend peace beyond its borders. Among other initiatives, the EU funds a foreign aid scheme called the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, with a budget of 2.3 billion euro over a seven-year period. This money goes to fund a range of peacebuilding projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

But on the other hand, the political integration of the EU has led to an increasing amount of military cooperation between EU Member States. It is an agreed EU policy for the Member States to cooperate to increase their military capabilities, both for "security" reasons and for economic

reasons (the arms industry is considered to create jobs and growth). A special Brussels-based body, the European Defence Agency, facilitates this cooperation. There are four agreed military technology priorities for the EU: drones, air-to-air refuelling, satellite communications, and cybersecurity. And apart from this, there are also a number of EU joint military operations, where the armed forces of various Member States work together under common command.

I offered my workshop twice during the conference, with around fifteen Quakers participating each time. The participants had a range of reactions. Some seemed shocked by how militaristic the EU has become, with at least one participant feeling swayed towards Euroscepticism. Others were interested in looking at how Quakers can engage positively with the EU. How can we speak truth to the EU's power? Do we, as a peace church, have a particular witness to offer?

With the EU becoming increasingly influential in world affairs, this is an important discussion for us Quakers to have. EU militarism is driven, in large part, by the militaristic attitudes of national politicians. As a faith community we need to increase our awareness of the EU's policies, so that we can hold our politicians to account, and promote a politics of peace.

Tim Harman



Participants at the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) workshop in January (article left)

# Just relationships

## GM Food: a useful tool or a hindrance to peace, integrity and sustainability?

Genetically Modified (GM) food is a divisive issue that attracts passionate views on all sides. To some it is a scientific miracle held back by superstition; to others an abomination that causes almost every ailment you care to name. The truth, of course, lies somewhere between the two, but is it an issue for Quaker concern?

GM Freeze is the UK umbrella campaign for a suspension of the use of GM in food and farming. Our members hold many and varied views but all agree that our food should be produced responsibly, fairly and sustainably and that, as currently employed, GM denies rather than upholds those values.

The vast majority of GM crops are herbicide tolerant, which means they can withstand spraying with powerful weed killers. They support some of the most environmentally damaging farming practices in the world, reducing biodiversity and promoting the spread of industrial farming.

GM crops are patented so the farmers who grow them are not in control. They cannot save seed each year and are locked into contracts with multinational corporations which sell not just the seeds but also the weed killers they are designed to work alongside.

We are told that GM will feed the hungry but we already produce enough food for 14 billion people - twice the world's population. People are hungry because they are poor and because the world's resources are not shared equally. The solutions lie



Research has shown that Monarch butterfly populations will be devastated by herbicide tolerant genetically modified crop farming.

in food sovereignty, respect for traditional wisdom, and equality on a global scale; not high-tech monocultures (single crop regimes) controlled from the global north.

Like most food and agriculture law, the cultivation and sale of GM crops is largely controlled at the European level. GM ingredients must be labelled in our food and, as a result, are a relatively rare sight in our shops. However, imported GM animal feed does not have to be declared on the meat, eggs and dairy products it goes to produce, and is consequently very widely used throughout Europe.

Only one GM crop is grown commercially in Europe because GM crops must be authorised by the EU and many countries consistently vote against authorising the crops. However, recent legislation allows member states to ban authorised GM crops on their own territory. This is good news for the seventeen countries and four regions that have taken up the opportunity to "opt out" but it could actually speed



up the arrival of more GM crops in those countries that support the technology.

Those promoting GM like to focus on its theoretical potential to increase yield, help us adapt to climate change, or add nutrients to the foods that people like to eat. But those crops don't exist yet. The GM crops fed to our farm animals are the ones that have already caused a 90% decline in the Monarch butterfly population, led to the creation of "super-weeds" that can not be killed by pesticides, and increased the power wielded by some of the biggest

chemical corporations in the world.

The technology is not to blame, of course. The fault lies in humanity's belief that, with enough scientific knowledge, we can overcome nature without consequence. Perhaps one day GM techniques could be used to uphold Quaker testimonies of equality, integrity and sustainability. However, the exact opposite is true today and that is why saying no to GM is very much a part of my Quaker journey.

Liz O'Neill, Director of GM Freeze

## Human rights treaties threatened

The Council of Europe's most senior official has warned that international human rights treaties are being undermined.

At a meeting with NGOs in January, Thorbjorn Jagland, explained that some governments were considering action that would reduce the reach of European human rights law within their own countries. Thorbjorn Jagland, a former Norwegian Prime Minister, has been the Council of Europe's Secretary-General since 2009, responsible for the overall strategic management of the organisation.

The Council of Europe was formed in 1949 to promote human rights and democracy in Europe, on the basis of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Convention has been ratified by every European country, with the exception of Europe's only dictatorship, Belarus.

These countries submit themselves to adhering to rulings of the court that enforces the convention, the European Court of Human Rights. This means that unlike similar UN conventions, individual citizens have a court to which they can bring cases, and see their Convention rights protected.

Of the 47 countries who have signed the Convention (and are therefore the member states of the Council of Europe), Thorbjorn Jagland raised concerns about action in 5 countries, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Russia, Norway and Azerbaijan.

Thorbjorn Jagland explained that it is because of international human rights treaties, that the majority in a particular country cannot make laws

that undermine the human rights of minority groups. Human rights treaties help prevent Europe returning to the nationalism of the past, he explained.

He told NGOs that it would be useful to have another protocol explaining what democracy really means, for some our members. However, there is no appetite for that in member states. At the moment the Council of Europe is an institution on the defensive.

### Letting us down

**Switzerland:** There is expected to be a referendum on the role of international treaties versus national laws.

**United Kingdom and Russia:** Both countries are considering measures that would give a domestic court the authority to reject European Court of Human Rights judgements.

**Norway:** The national Parliament has recently said that international conventions have to be reformed according to 'new realities', such as the refugee crisis. However, the convention was designed precisely to protect individual rights in difficult times.

**Azerbaijan:** University professor, Ilgar Mammadov remains in prison despite the European Court of Human Rights having ruled that he is a political prisoner and must be released.

## Being a voice for Europe's remand prisoners

In January 2016 QCEA took part in discussions on whether and how the EU should act to reduce the number of people awaiting trial in prison, currently 130,000.

The expert consultation was organised on behalf of the European Commission's Justice department, DG-Justice. In March, DG-Justice will consider whether European-level action is possible.

The consultation asked if the problems of pre-trial detention important enough to justify EU level action. QCEA addressed this question directly, explaining why unnecessary incarceration is damaging to individuals, their families and wider society.



Photo credit: Alberto, Creative Commons 2.0.

The wide variation in the use of pre-trial detention is evidence of its excessive use in some countries. If every country only used pre-trial detention to the same extent as Ireland, Slovenia and Finland, then the number of people awaiting trial in EU prisons would be halved. 65,000 fewer people would be detained.

Of more concern is the second class status given to pre-trial detainees, excluded from mental health support, education and rehabilitation programmes, and permitted less family contact. These issues are explained in more detail in QCEA's report, *Pre-trial detention in the EU*.

### Opportunities for EU action

In a June 2011 Green Paper, Member States recognised a problem but did not have the political will to take EU level action. Five years on and this will still be a difficult issue to get through the College of Commissioners (cabinet of 28 national appointees that lead the European Commission), even before Member states are asked to consider it. This should be surprising given how much money prison costs, compared to alternatives.

A decision to start the process of new legislation

will also be more difficult because of Frans Timmermans' Better Regulation agenda that aims to reduce the amount of EU law. Ideas for legislation must now face tough new impact assessments designed to stop proposals that are perceived as interfering or burdensome.

### Should the EU just agree voluntary guidelines?

The EU has introduced voluntary guidelines on legal aid and safeguarding child suspects, but they are having very little impact. The reason that only voluntary measures could be agreed on these two issues is that there was opposition from a small number individual countries. But this also meant that those very countries took no action in

response to the voluntary guidelines.

Furthermore, alternatives to detention is already an area where voluntary guidelines have already been agreed by non-Eu bodies, such as the Council of Europe and UN.

### What legislative measures might be achievable?

One idea is that decisions to remand someone in custody awaiting trial should include a written record of the evidence that detention is necessary. This would allow a basis for defence lawyers to challenge judges, and could have a significant impact in some countries. This procedure is simple enough that it could be applied across Europe's different legal systems.

The problem of pre-trial detention is part of a much bigger failure of European countries to find alternatives to detention. But changing judicial culture is not easily done from the European-level. Another problem is that some countries have no history of probation. For example, Greece is a country of 11 million people, but only has 42 probation officers. In Italy, Slovakia and Croatia alternatives to detention are barely used at all.

Andrew Lane

## Kenyan peacemaker reflects on the Brussels lockdown

Following last year's murders in Paris and elsewhere, I am presented with feelings of hopelessness. The world is grieving as I grieve with the families who lost their loved one. But I am encouraged in the belief that 'light will always overcome the darkness'. However, in our quest to respond to these senselessness and violent acts we need not decide in sadness, neither should we respond in anger.

In his message to the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7), Christ commends the church for their perseverance and ability to detect wrong-doing amongst them; but he reminds them of their duty to keep the greatest command, that of love. We are very much aware of the anxiety and fear in society, but even as we reflect on the unfolding in France, let us remember that darkness never lights darkness, only light can do that. Our response should be a demonstration that we can collectively seek alternatives to violence, overcoming evil with goodness!

When a city, full of life as Brussels, loses its beauty in a wink; no vehicles, people, cyclists, metros etc and the entire system grounded as a result security threat, we should ask: what is the best response to violent extremism. Deploying heavily armed soldiers will still not guarantee us safety. I cancelled my activities despite the heavy patrols. The city nearly was at standstill.

My community in Nairobi has experienced similar violence. I believe not letting a hateful person decide how I live. Let us focus on building bridges that lead to cohesive societies that are based on unity and trust.

Our response to the Paris murders must be guided by reason and not fear. As reactive and retributive policies breed fear, and in turn exposes us to greater insecurity. The clampdown on peaceful protests planned in Paris during the COP21 climate change negotiations and the recent lock down on Brussels are acts which cause the citizenry to live in fear for their security and safety.

International organized crime, including terrorism, is changing everyday, in many ways becoming more sophisticated. We have seen attacks in many parts of the world, from rural villages, shopping malls and concerts. As these gangs try to provoke us into increasing the cycle of violence, we should be thinking how we can prevent violent extremism, increase intelligence cooperation and be well equipped to avert more of these disasters.



Cornelius meeting EU officials in Brussels

God has given us wisdom. We know life is beautiful and much treasured by God. Let us not bow to pressure to implement self-defeating measures. These will cause more trauma, including to refugees. Creating a climate of fear in Europe will unwittingly multiplying the numbers of violent extremists.

Given all the struggles of the world, I ask what my role is, as a Christian and as a peacemaker. We must recognise that violence in our world is an international disaster and commit ourselves to the social and system change that is needed.

Let us not focus much on defensive tactics, but use reasoning as a way to come up with sustainable solutions that help realize peace across the globe. We must question the reactionary policies of governments, but also question ourselves. What is my role in integration and advocating for cohesion within my community?

**Cornelius Ambiah, Nairobi Yearly Meeting**



## Israel and Palestine: an economic perspective



Photo credit: Peter Barwick, CC licence 2.0

In 2005 James Wolfensohn became the Middle East Special Envoy of the Quartet (UN, US, EU and Russia). He is Australian born and had previously served ten years as President of the World Bank. He had become a naturalised US citizen, maintaining the practice of always appointing an American to run the Bank and a European to run the International Monetary Fund.

His brief as Special Envoy was to work on the economic underpinning of the two state solution in what was then seen as an opportunity to build security for the Palestinians and Israelis. He set to with enthusiasm and vigour. One of his memorable remarks was that so many unemployed Palestinian young men was a major impediment to peace. He only lasted eleven months in the job, resigning in frustration at the inability to make progress. His replacement was former UK prime minister Tony Blair, who undertook the role until 2015.

Today, economics is again under the spotlight with a research study by the Rand Corporation 'The Costs of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict'. However, his study deserves to be better known by policy makers and others engaging with the Israel / Palestine situation.

The study looks at the net costs and benefits to both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities and economies under five scenarios:

- Continuing impasse
- A two state solution
- Unilateral withdrawal by the Israeli government
- Uncoordinated unilateral withdrawal
- Non-violent resistance
- Violent uprising

The two state solution is the best outcome economically whilst a return to violence would have the most profoundly negative consequences. Overall, the gain from a two state solution is much greater for the Israeli economy than for the Palestinian. However on a per capital basis the gain is much greater for Palestinians than for Israelis,

estimated at 36% for the average Palestinian against 5% for the average Israeli. This is due to the Palestinian economy starting from a much lower base. Particular costs of continuing impasse are Israeli Government restrictions on the movement of labour and the destruction of Palestinian property.

The unilateral withdrawal scenarios are seen as less beneficial than the two state solution, primarily because reduced opportunities for Palestinians to work in Israel would offset some of the gains to the Palestinian economy. One assumption on violent uprising is that the Palestinian authority collapses and the Israeli government has to shoulder some or all of the costs. Certain assumptions are also made about the international community and what costs it would be willing to cover under different scenarios, e.g. continuing military aid to Israel, humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and possible settlor re-location.

Whilst primarily about the economics of the situation, the report briefly covers security issues and the socio-psychological dimensions, i.e. mental health.

The report was all the more effective for being written in the unemotional language of economics. It underlined what everyone knows, that the prospects of anything better than continuing impasse are slim. It also vividly brought home the costs of that trajectory in the lives of those most affected and in the lost opportunities for everyone. James Wolfensohn's experience shows how little has changed over the last ten years, we can all hope that the story will be more positive ten years from now. The report will remain useful for reference as each new crisis unfolds.

**Simon Bond, QCEA British Committee**

The research study *Costs of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* is available online at:

[www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR740-1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR740-1.html)

## Ireland hosts week of QCEA events

Andrew Lane is the new representative at Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) in Brussels. Andrew visited Friends in Ireland from the 9th to 16th January. He spoke with Friends in six Meetings: Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Dublin and Lisburn.

This was the first project of the new QCEA Support Group, or Ireland Yearly Meeting. Similar groups already exist in Britain and the Netherlands.

It is important that Friends know QCEA is our representation in Brussels and advocates for our concerns in the European Union.

Amongst Irish Friends there is a general sense of goodwill towards QCEA, but a lack of knowledge about the work of QCEA and a sense of not knowing how to make contact to bring a concern forward. Andrew Lane is aware of this problem and the need to engage Irish Friends in the work of QCEA.

QCEA is currently evaluating how it can improve to better to serve European Friends be they individual Friends, Preparative or Local Meetings, Monthly or Regional Meetings or Nationally at Yearly Meeting level. Irish Friends have an important input into this advocacy work and it is vital that Friends focus on their role in this.

Communication is a two way process and we need to turn it from passive to active. Information needs to flow in both directions. Without that two way process neither Irish Friends nor QCEA know how to engage with each other.

Andrew's visit was particularly important because it began the process of building contact between people. That contact is central to how Friends relate to each other - it is also part of the Irish culture. The QCEA support group was aware that whilst Friends support QCEA, there was a serious need for real life contact. Hence the importance of Andrew's visit.

Previously contact with QCEA had been presentations at Ireland Yearly Meeting and the occasional visit to smaller Meetings. This visit was a concerted effort on the part of the QCEA Representative to engage with individual Friends by visiting and talking with a number of Preparative and Monthly Meetings.

Individual Friends and individual Meetings are the primary resource for Yearly Meeting. They bring their concerns to it. Without them, Yearly Meeting cannot express concerns and without these concerns, QCEA cannot function.



(L-R) Seán McCrum, Paul Musiol, Loretta O'Brien, Rachel Cave and Margrit Grey at the QPSW-QCEA conference in December 2015

Hence Andrew addressed two issues. He outlined what QCEA does and engaged Friends with QCEA's current phase of transition and development. He also had the opportunity to engage directly with a wide variety of Friends and get to know their thinking and what concerns were important to them.

QCEA is part of a larger network of NGOs in Brussels. Over the course of his visit, Andrew was able to offer Friends with particular concerns useful advice from QCEA's and European Friends' experience in dealing with similar problems. The work by European Friends relating to the current refugee crisis is a good example of assistance which can be helpful.

**Loretta O'Brien, Margrit Grey, Rachel Cave, Martin Leavy and Seán McCrum  
(Ireland Yearly Meeting QCEA Support Group)**

## Churches and MEPs meet on fossil fuel disinvestment



MEPs with faith representatives at the European Parliament, January 2016. Photo credit: CEC

In January, QCEA and the Council of European Churches (CEC) met with MEPs to discuss disinvestment (or divestment) from fossil fuels. The meeting was chaired by Reinhard Bütikofer, a Green MEP from Germany.

An increasing number of faith groups are considering disinvestment (selling their investments in the fossil fuel industry). In October 2013 Quakers in Britain decided to divest, followed by the World body of Quakers in 2015. QCEA spoke about what led to these decisions, and suggested action that could be taken at a European-level. Quaker MEP Jude Kirton-Darling took part in the same meeting. Echoing our contribution, she said "You cannot achieve political change without changing the narrative. In that, churches can play a crucial role."

QCEA suggested that faith groups should not just consider the issue at a corporate level, but could also support individual members of faith communities to divest at a personal level (e.g. asking employers about pension schemes).

Andrew Lane

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### *Quakers for Europe*

In January, an independent Quaker group launched their campaign to keep the UK in the European Union. They held an event in Oxford Friends Meeting House, which included MEPs Jude Kirton-Darling, Molly Scott-Cato and Catherine Bearder speaking by video.

So far, the group has also published a 12-page campaign booklet.

You can find out more about the campaign at:  
[www.QuakersforEurope.com](http://www.QuakersforEurope.com),  
or by following the group on twitter at @Quakers4Europe.



## Around Europe

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