



Quaker  
Council for  
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# Polarised & politicised



EUROPEAN ELECTIONS SPECIAL EDITION

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are gone. Is this an opportunity or a crisis?

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## Austria's far-right fling ends in scandal

↑ *Heinz-Christian Strache, a far-right politician who recently stood down as Austria's Vice-Chancellor amid scandal.*  
PHOTO: CHRISTIAN JANSKY / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (CC)

Austria's right-wing coalition government has collapsed after the Vice-Chancellor was recorded offering to sell state assets to a person whom he believed to be a close relation of a Russian oligarch.

Heinz-Christian Strache, who also led the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) until the scandal emerged, was caught on a hidden camera offering government contracts to Russian businesses in return for campaign funding. The recording also showed Sprache explaining how to hide such payments from authorities, as well as discussing how Austria's national broadcaster and a major national newspaper could be converted into government mouthpieces. The scandal has become known as the "Ibiza Affair" after the location of the meeting, which took place in 2017. The source of the recording remains unknown.

In response to the revelations, Austria's centre-right Chancellor Sebastian Kurz declared that "enough is enough" and dissolved his coalition with the FPÖ, calling a snap election in response to continued public protest whilst defending the coalition's record. The vote will likely be held this September.

With just days until the European elections, it was uncertain how the Ibiza Affair would affect Austrians' voting behaviour. Yet despite the misdeeds of his far-right coalition partner, Kurz's own party performed well at the ballot box – a result attributed to both his personal popularity and his hard line on migration.

One sign of hope from Austria recently was the coming together of young people from various religious backgrounds to repair and guard an exhibition of portraits of Holocaust survivors. The photographs were displayed in central Vienna but were slashed by far-right activists. Representatives from Catholic, Jewish and Muslim youth groups took turns holding vigils to prevent further damage.

## EU and US continue to differ over Iran as tensions rise

As US rhetoric towards Iran continues to become more bellicose, European politicians have continued to sound a more cautious tone as they seek to salvage the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear deal after the American withdrawal last year.

"We are living in a crucial, delicate moment where the most relevant and responsible attitude to take is that of maximum restraint and avoiding any escalation on a military side," according to the EU's High Representative Federica Mogherini, speaking on May 13. The EU has pursued diplomatic relations with Iran according to the terms of the JCPOA, despite the Trump administration having reinstated sanctions and recent concerns over Iranian missile tests.

American intelligence has suggested that "Iran might be planning attacks on American people and facilities in the region," according to *Politico* – a claim denied by Tehran, which accused the US President of "genocidal language" after making threats on Twitter.

## Ukraine's new President sworn in – then calls election

Ukraine's newly-elected President Volodymyr Zelenskiy – who was an actor and comedian before being swept to office in April – dissolved the country's parliament just moments after being inaugurated on May 20. Ukraine's lawmakers now have two months left to serve before a snap election, and the new President urged them use their remaining time in office to tackle corruption.



## NEWS FROM Quaker House in Brussels

Since 1979, the Quaker Council for European Affairs has worked to bring a vision based on the Quaker commitment to peace, justice and equality to Europe and its institutions.

## QCEA's message of love reaches 1 million voters

For the past few months, QCEA has been running a campaign against anti-migrant hate speech on the internet in the context of the European elections. **#ChooseRespect** was created in response to the increasingly harsh public discourse around migrants and refugees, particularly the rise in xenophobic hatred on social media.

We created a website which was full of resources aimed at responding constructively to anti-migrant hate speech – defined generally as language which incites violence or dehumanises a group of people. This included a "myth-buster" page which debunked some commonly-held myths about migration to Europe, as well as advice on how to build a more positive narrative around the issue both online and offline.

As the European elections approached, we took our campaign to Twitter, calling out examples of xenophobia by MEPs and sending out messages of positivity and love to Europe's voters. By the end of the campaign we had reached 1.1 million Twitter users across the EU – a spectacular achievement for a small NGO of which we're very proud.

The Twitter campaign has now finished, at least for the time being, but the associated website and its resources are still available via the link below.

[www.ChooseRespect.eu](http://www.ChooseRespect.eu)



## Photo exhibition gives faces and voices to women on the run at the heart of EU policymaking

In the first week of April, QCEA and the Swiss NGO Action for Women held an exhibition of photographic portraits taken of and by migrant women. Following a week on display in Quaker House Brussels the photographs were exhibited at the European Union's Committee of the Regions.

The exhibition was visited by the family of Pawel Adamowicz (the mayor of Gdansk, murdered on stage earlier this year), a delegation of Polish MEPs and local government politicians from around Europe.

QCEA's Kate McNally, who worked with Action for women to bring the exhibition to Brussels, said, "Whilst many migration policies made in Brussels, their stories are rarely told here. We've been proud to work with Action for Women and the Committee of the Regions to share the images the images of migrating women as they wanted to be seen: beautiful, accomplished, powerful. Migrants and refugees are stereotyped and misrepresented in public discourse. This exhibition is an opportunity for them to have their say."

Magdalena Adamowicz (surviving her husband Pawel) said, "His murder would not have happened if it were not for the prevalence of hate speech". Naming the venue after Pawel Adamowicz, the President of the Committee of the Regions said, "We must all be united in diversity".

The SEEN exhibition is the result of a photographic workshop held at Action for Women's Athena Centre for Women on the Aegean island of Chios. The workshops, led by Zurich based photographer Mardiana Sani, resulted in a dignified representation of this uprooted, transitory state as something powerful, courageous and humane. The pieces were first exhibited at the Action for Women Centre in Chios.

← QCEA and Action for Women's photo exhibition in the EU's Committee of the Regions attracted substantial interest.  
PHOTO: ANDREW LANE

# The next European Parliament

The results of the European elections are in, and their implications for the next five years of EU policymaking are significant. Here's an overview of how Europe voted and an initial analysis of what it could mean.

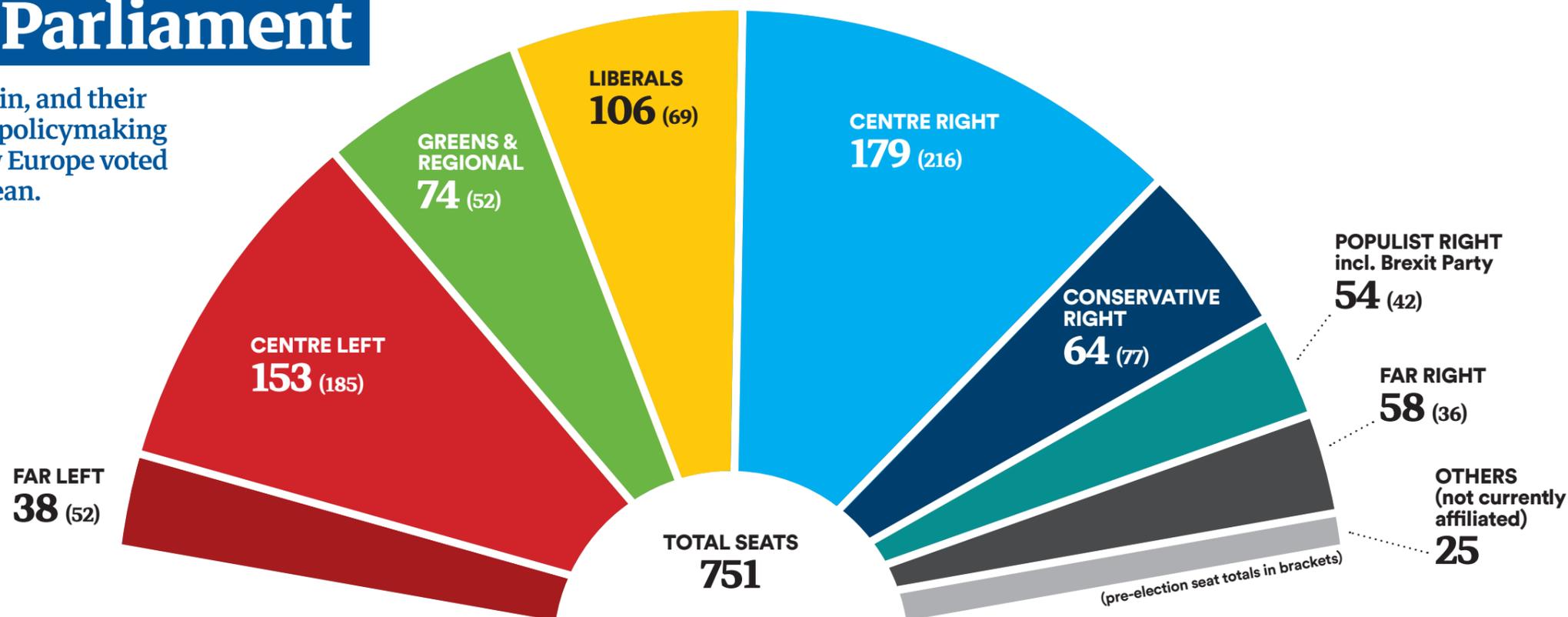
The political face of Europe has changed greatly since the EU citizens last went to the ballot boxes to elect the European Parliament in 2014. Five years ago, it was arguably economics which dominated our politics, with the consequences of the financial crash and the subsequent eurozone crisis still fresh in the minds of Europe's policymakers and voters alike.

Today, however, our politics is less concerned with the economic minutiae of bail-outs and debt ceilings and is instead consumed by fundamental questions of identity and belonging. The reasons for this are numerous and interlinked: the mixed social and economic outcomes of globalisation, a sense of distance from power, migration on a large scale and the role of social media in political discourse.

In a world where wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of just a few men, public anger is certainly justified – even if it has been marshalled and cultivated in order to propel a corrosive political project, namely authoritarian populism. It's perhaps therefore of little surprise that the results of this year's European elections mark a success for such forces, who grew their share of the vote in many countries.

However, while pre-vote polling suggested that populists and nationalists could win up to a third of seats in the European Parliament, in the end they managed somewhere around 28%. On a happier note, Europe's greens performed exceptionally well and will occupy almost 10% of seats. Liberal centrists also performed better than expected, winning support from pro-Europeans disillusioned with traditional parties. Populists, liberals and greens now all look set to be potential kingmakers in the new Parliament.

It's not yet clear how this result will manifest itself in terms of parliamentary arrangements, as the negotiations to form "groups" in the European Parliament will only just be getting underway as we go to print. But one thing is clear: this result marks a fundamental change in European politics which will have a significant impact on the EU over the next five years. Here's what we know so far – and what it could mean for the policies we care about as Quakers.



## The two major centrist groups have lost their majority for the first time

For decades, the European Parliament has been dominated by two political groups: the centre-left Socialists & Democrats and the centre-right European People's Party. Although they differed on many topics, the two blocs tended towards consensus politics as a way to move things forward. To some this represented moderation and stability; to others, a cosy, mutually-beneficial arrangement which excluded other views.

In any case, this longstanding centrist duopoly has been broken by these election results. The two groups have lost their joint majority, largely to the benefit of populists, greens and liberal centrists. **The "old" parties will now be forced to take into account the views of these smaller groups in order to achieve consensus.**

This is a positive development in theory, but in practice it means that a small number of MEPs can now block parliamentary progress. Having failed to master the balance of power, this may be the Plan B for the populist right, whose anti-EU message would be bolstered by chaos and instability in Brussels.

## Crucial political action on climate change and migration now hangs in the balance

**Over the next five years, the European Parliament will have a vital role to play in determining the EU's response to these issues,** and many new MEPs could prove hostile to progressive, humane responses. However, unprecedented success for the greens means that there is an ecological counterweight to the climate-sceptic right which may yet prove crucial.

Perhaps the first big decision before the new European Parliament will be whether or not to approve the EU's budget for the next seven years. It's still under negotiation, but looks set to include worrying increases in military spending and border controls in response to perceived security threats on Europe's frontiers. (See [www.qcea.org/mff](http://www.qcea.org/mff) for info.)

It remains to be seen how populist parties will respond to these challenging developments. Will they slam the brakes on what could be perceived as a nascent "EU military"? Will anti-migration MEPs wave the budget through in the name of "border protection"? And how susceptible will they be to arms industry lobbying?

## Europeans are more polarised – and more politicised

The collapse in support for the two main centrist parties consolidates the sense that Europeans are increasingly aligning themselves according to new ideologies which transcend the old economic notions of left and right. Instead, it appears that voters are divided according to their worldview – between those who favour progressive, open societies and others who take comfort from a strong sense of national identity in a confusing globalised world.

It's also clear that Europeans are increasingly engaged in EU politics. The last decade has been dominated by issues with a clear European dimension, namely the Euro crisis, migration and the climate crisis. The relatively strong turnout at this year's election demonstrates that voters have grasped the importance of making their voices heard in Brussels – if only in order to make a cry of protest.

The longevity of these trends as political forces remains to be seen, but these results suggest that – at least in the short term – **European politics will be defined by values and identity as much as economics and old affiliations.**

## The elections in numbers

**751**

Number of seats in the European Parliament

**50.95%**

Turnout – this is up by 8% from 2014, despite regional variations

**4**

Days of voting across the EU

**21 years**

Age of the youngest MEP (Kira Peter-Hansen, Denmark)

**39%**

% of women MEPs – up from 36% in 2014

**May 2024**

Probable date of the next European elections (usually last week of May)

# Who's who?

The European Parliament has hundreds of MEPs, but a few key players will play leading roles in the big political decisions to come. Here we take a look at the characters who may define the next five years of EU policymaking.

## President of the Parliament



As Presidents of the Commission and Council respectively, Jean-Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk enjoyed high visibility for the last five years. But the European Parliament also has a President – currently Antonio Tajani, whose mandate ends this summer.

Presidents of the Parliament are themselves MEPs, and are elected by their fellow parliamentarians for a term of two and a half years. In this way, they are similar to the "speaker" in many national parliaments. For decades, the centre-left and centre-right parties have monopolised the presidency by agreeing to vote for each other's candidates in turn – but with their joint majority now gone, this arrangement is much less certain for at least the next two appointments.

Whoever the next President is, they will have a vital role to play in enforcing the rules of procedure, which may prove crucial in managing a group of MEPs who seem particularly keen to rock the boat.

## Nathalie Loiseau

THE CENTRIST INSIDER



Nathalie Loiseau was France's Europe Minister until March, when she stood down to lead the European list for Emmanuel Macron's *En Marche* party. 2019 marks the inaugural EU ballot for the movement, whose leader has been bogged down in the *gilets jaunes* protests for much of the campaign. However, they still managed to achieve 22% of the vote, securing Loiseau a seat in Brussels.

Her political credentials – including a major role in the Brexit negotiations and her proximity to one of the Europe's most pro-EU leaders – will make Loiseau a key player in the next few years. *En Marche*'s MEPs are likely to be seen as ardent defenders of the centre, but will they be seen as beacons of moderation or out of touch with today's distaste for the politics of old?

She says: "This election is simple. Do we want to be divided and face the US and China alone, or do we prefer to unite in order to build a common future?"

## Jordan Bardella

THE YOUNG NATIONALIST



At just 23 years old, the head of Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* list is among the youngest MEPs entering parliament. Bardella – whose family has roots in Italy – enjoys close links to Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, who has become the unofficial coordinator of Europe's populist right parties in recent months. His connections mean he is likely to be influential in European politics for some time to come.

Bardella rose quickly through the ranks of his party, firstly via the youth wing, and is an adept communicator on social media where he led a migration-focused election campaign. He has also rallied support among some elements of the *gilets jaunes* movement. His party won 25% of the French vote, putting them in first place.

He says: "We predicted the ravages of uncontrolled immigration. We warned about the dangers of globalisation. Our only problem is that we were right."

## Nigel Farage

THE BREXIT POPULIST



Nigel Farage, well-known British eurosceptic politician and MEP for twenty years, essentially "won" the European elections in the United Kingdom under the banner of his new Brexit Party, which was formed in response to frustration at Britain's delayed departure from the EU. They got 30% of the vote.

Farage has been clear that he intends to continue to use his speaking time in parliament for political grandstanding. However, it remains to be seen how long he will actually be in parliament given Brexit is set to take place before the end of the year. In any case, the strong result for his party – and the collapse of the vote for his old party, UKIP – is testament to Farage's enduring personal popularity.

He says: "Brexit was the first brick that was knocked out of the establishment wall. I think frankly, when it comes to chaos, you ain't seen nothing yet."

## Ska Keller

LEADING THE GREEN WAVE



One of the more positive stories of European politics in recent times has been the sharp rise in support for green parties in countries like Germany, France and Luxembourg. It would seem that the US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement – not to mention Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg's public advocacy – have boosted support for environmentally-friendly politics. A green vote is also seen as a more progressive form of protest vote in much of Europe.

Ska Keller, already an MEP and co-President of the Green group in the European Parliament, is also known for her anti-corruption efforts. All these credentials make her a prominent figure at a time when the EU will have to grapple with both climate change and public scepticism about the European institutions.

She says: "We offer real solutions and hope for a better future, not hate and division. Dear friends, we are the real alternative!"

## Magid Magid

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



Magid Magid is a British-Somali activist and politician who has been elected as an MEP for the Green Party, representing his home region of Yorkshire and the Humber. He previously served as Lord Mayor of Sheffield, a ceremonial post to which he brought a unique and tongue-in-cheek charm, "banning" Donald Trump from the city and inviting local children to decorate the city's Christmas tree.

He told *The Guardian* that he hopes to offer an "antidote to the politics of fear" for as long as he serves in the parliament before Brexit, and will surely stand in stark contrast to Nigel Farage in the debating chamber in Brussels. Magid is the first green MEP to be elected by his constituency.

He says: "Today is about a Green Wave cascading through Europe & landing on the shores of Yorkshire for the first time. We're just getting started."

## What happens after Brexit?

In February 2018, the European Parliament agreed how the seventy-three seats currently allocated to British MEPs will be redistributed. 27 of these will be distributed among some existing member states who thus far were under-represented in the current arrangement. The others will be held "in reserve" for use by potential new EU members. As such, at least for now, the number of MEPs will fall from 751 to 705 – if and when the UK finally withdraws.

## Who are your MEPs?

Wherever you live in the EU, you are represented by multiple MEPs – often drawn from a variety of parties. Some EU member states, such as the UK and Poland, are split into constituencies and their MEPs therefore represent regions as opposed to their entire countries.

You can contact your MEPs about issues of concern to you, in much the same way as you might write a letter to your representative in a national parliament. Indeed, we recommend it! If you're not sure where to start, why not ask them about their thoughts on the EU's new budget, which is currently under negotiation. It proposes worrying increases in spending on militarisation and strict border controls, and all MEPs will be asked to vote on it at some point in the next year. For more information about this issue see our dedicated webpage at [www.qcea.org/mff](http://www.qcea.org/mff)

To find out who your (new) MEPs are, how to contact them and keep track of what they're working on, you can visit the European Parliament's website via the link below. As the next parliamentary session gets going, these webpages will also be filled with transparency-related information such as financial interest declarations.

[europarl.europa.eu/meps](http://europarl.europa.eu/meps)



## Peace in action

PHOTO: ELLIS BROOKS

It's been a busy spring for QCEA's Peace Programme, whose team have been travelling around Europe to make the case for nonviolence and peacebuilding. Here's an overview of some of their recent work.

### QCEA launches *Building Peace Together* in Paris

On 2 April QCEA organised a launch event of the French version of the report *Building Peace Together* in Paris in partnership with the Université Catholique de Paris (UCP). The event took the name of our report *Construire la Paix Ensemble* and welcomed over 70 people. Cécile Dubernet – who teaches a course on civilian peacebuilding interventions at the UCP – introduced the event by providing a snapshot of her course, deemed an innovative peacebuilding tool by one of the participants.

France has always played an important role in the field of peace and security in the world, particularly through its permanent position on the United Nations Security Council and as a member of the European Union. The organisation of the Paris Forum for Peace in November 2018 confirmed its desire to position itself as a major player in peace issues. Nevertheless, peace – both in France, at European and international levels – requires concrete approaches adapted to each context. At the same time, the exchange and sharing of new perspectives and practices between actors from different fields is essential to the spread of peace.

The aim of the event that took place at the UCP in April was to promote the use of peacebuilding as a first response in addressing security challenges. The discussion explored how members of civil society, academics, government officials, representatives of international organisations can better collaborate to implement national and international peacebuilding strategies.

The Secretary General of the Paris Peace Forum provided welcoming remarks, an opportunity for participants to engage with the newly-created French initiative. A variety of speakers from government, NGOs and academia then spoke of the role of France and international organisations in building peace. The French ministries of development and foreign affairs were represented by two officials who provided different accounts of the role of France in peace and security issues. Rachel Scott, from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), reinforced the importance of "togetherness" in building peace and highlighted the need for more attention to peacebuilding. Interpeace, a civil society organisation with programmes in different parts of the world, shared some concrete examples of peacebuilding on the ground, like Libya. Finally, Oxfam made the link between peace and climate change and pointed to the dangers of French arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

Representatives of French peace movements further highlighted the links between French arms exports and the ongoing conflict in Yemen, an issue that is receiving increasing attention amongst civil society organisations. The discussion also covered the role of women in peace processes and the need for further involvement of the private sector. Other issues raised were peace education, intercultural dialogue and the links between democracy and peace.

The dynamic discussion was moderated by a journalist, Tatiana Mossot. It was covered in the English programme of *Radio France International* the following day. French and Belgian Quakers present that day also actively participated in the discussion.

### QCEA makes the case for peace education at the EU

On 14 May, QCEA and Interpeace, an organisation delivering peacebuilding in the field, made the case for peace education for conflict prevention at the EU. At an "infopoint" session at the EU Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DG DEVCO), QCEA presented the findings of its recent report, *Peace Education: Making the case*. Forty-eight people attended the event in person and more viewed it online.

After introductory remarks by Annica Floren, the Deputy Head of Unit for Culture, Education, Health at DG DEVCO, QCEA helped define peace education as a peacebuilding tool that is relevant both inside and outside Europe. In her presentation, Olivia Caeymaex, QCEA's Peace Programme Lead, showed how peace education was anchored in European and international policies such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Security Council Resolution on youth, peace and security. Interpeace then presented a project on peace education in Central Africa. Together, we therefore brought theoretical and practical evidence of peace education's efficacy to policymakers.

Two colleagues from the UK's Quaker Peace and Social Witness visited Brussels on this occasion. They were able to share some of their work on peace education in the UK at the infopoint. They also met with several organisations working on peace education around the world, such as Search for Common Ground and Pax Cristi Flanders.

QCEA and QPSW received positive feedback on their work and the event, and look forward to more opportunities to work together to advance peace education as a peacebuilding tool. Conversations between the two offices on future collaboration in this area of work are ongoing, including on how to bring Quakers together to share their historical knowledge.



↑ From left: Clémence Buchet-Couzy (QCEA), Ellis Brooks and Isabel Cartwright (QPSW) and Olivia Caeymaex (QCEA).

PHOTO: MAJLINDA AGAJ / DG DEVCO

### QCEA signs joint letters on peace and security funding

On 13 May, QCEA and thirteen other civil society organisations signed a joint letter expressing their deep concern about the EU's proposal for a European Peace Facility (EPF), a Commission proposal of €10.5 billion to finance operational actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) that have military or defence implications.

The letter expresses disapproval that granting weapons and ammunition as currently planned under the proposal, funding soldiers' salaries, or strengthening the combat capabilities of third-country militaries, would lead to further peace and security. It highlights the risks associated with such an approach and urges foreign ministers to take a step back first to discuss in-depth the political parameters and added value of the EPF proposal – particularly the training and equipment component of third-country militaries before the legal text is considered further.

The second letter QCEA signed is related to funding for the UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16) on peace, justice and institutions. At the 2019 High-Level Political Forum in July, governments will come together at the United Nations headquarters in New York to review their progress implementing commitments under SDG16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To help them measure progress, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and participating governments are defining a new statistical measure called 'Total Official Support for Sustainable Development' (TOSSD).

There is renewed debate over whether – and under what circumstances – peacekeeping, disarmament, criminal justice and other military-security assistance should be considered part of financing for SDG16 and wider sustainable development efforts. This submission provides a perspective from 22 organisations with expert knowledge on peace and sustainable development, offering a number of discussion points on these issues backed by evidence and recommendations. It urges the OECD and participating governments to take a cautious approach to including military-security assistance as part of TOSSD – ruling out the inclusion of assistance where there is a credible risk of negatively impacting efforts to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies through the 2030 Agenda.

Keep up to date with our peace work at [www.qcea.org/peace](http://www.qcea.org/peace)

# thinking about peace

QCEA's new Peace Programme Assistant **Clémence Buchet--Couzy** reflects on her experience in building bridges between faith groups, and looks forward to her work with QCEA.



I joined QCEA in April 2019, as the new Peace Programme Assistant, at a very exciting yet challenging time for peacebuilding in Europe. I have a joint master's degree in Conflict and Development from Sciences Po Lille, where I studied mediation, human rights, transitional justice, conflict resolution.

Prior to working for QCEA I contributed to Search For Common Ground's conflict transformation and social cohesion work in Lebanon. I had the opportunity to contribute to projects focusing on various topics such as inclusive governance, gender issues, peace education, youth and cultural heritage and as well as the involvement of private sector in peacebuilding. "Prior I was working for the French youth interfaith movement, *Coexister*, which aims at creating links between young people with different religious backgrounds, in order to promote a new model of social cohesion in France. Thanks to this experience I learned a lot about the differences between religions and religious discrimination in the world, in France in particular. At *Coexister* I had the opportunity to intervene in educational and academic environments in order to raise awareness about religious diversity, active interfaith coexistence, nonviolence and how to deal with difference. I remain engaged with *Coexister* on a voluntary basis.

Also, I have research experience thanks to my work within the Center for International Crisis and Conflict Studies (CECRI) in Belgium. I contributed to the "Memory and conflict resolution" programme, where I explored different issues such as the notion of commemoration, the link between reconciliation and

power-sharing or the place of victims in post-conflict justice processes. Thanks to this experience I studied different conflict and reconciliation situations such as Rwanda, South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

These experiences, confirmed my wish to work in the peacebuilding field at the European (Union) level. I truly believe that much can be achieved at this level. For all these reasons, and many others, I am very happy to start contributing to the tremendous work of QCEA.

During my time here I will support different projects, notably our work on peace education and on gender and peacebuilding. I will also be in charge of our partnership with the Young Professionals in Foreign Policy, with whom I will co-organise a series of events focusing on different peacebuilding tools. I will also work to implement a monitoring and evaluation system across programmes, in order to assess the impact of our activities. Finally, I will have the chance to cooperate with young Quakers while supporting the work of EMEYF (European and Middle-East Young Friends). I am very exciting by all these different projects and look forward to my year within QCEA.

You can contact Clémence at [clemence.buchetcouzy@qcea.org](mailto:clemence.buchetcouzy@qcea.org)



## Brexit, the EU and you

QCEA Study Tour 26—31 March 2019

Recent QCEA Study Tour participant **Elspeth Wollen**, of Oxford and Swindon Quakers, writes about her experience of an informative week in Brussels.

Quaker diplomacy at the heart of Europe was how Andrew Lane, of the Quaker Council for European Affairs, summarised the role of the team at Quaker House Brussels, on the first morning of the special 'Brexit' Study Tour. With thirty participants, this was the largest tour run by QCEA and was timed to cover the day the UK was to leave the European Union after over 40 years of membership.

We had come to learn more about the work of the EU in the current political context, to reflect on European cooperation and to be together to witness against the separation, isolation and hate crime that is on the rise across Europe. Leading our sessions and outings was Martin Leng from QCEA, and Maud Grainger, Woodbrooke's Faith in Action Tutor.

A talk entitled 'Borderlands', by QCEA General Assembly member Phil Gaskell, covered the turbulent history of Western Europe where most borders are quite recent and even now borders, states and languages are not totally aligned. We were prompted to think about frontiers and identities: how do we see, and name, ourselves and 'others'?

In his introduction to the EU, Martin reminded us of its origin in the Schuman Declaration (1950) that aimed to integrate the coal and steel industries of Germany and France following the Europe-wide devastation of World War 2. The idea was to make a future war between the countries of Europe impossible. It is often forgotten that the EU developed primarily as a peace project; later the six founding countries extended their cooperation to other economic sectors. While visiting the European Commission, we were privileged to see the Nobel Peace Prize, awarded to the EU in 2012 for advancing reconciliation, peace and democracy in Europe for over six decades.

The preparation at Quaker House, and presentations by guides at the headquarters of the Commission, Council and Parliament, gave us an excellent understanding of the roles of these three institutions and how they work together.

We learned that the Commission, the EU's civil service, is a collegiate body whose 28 commissioners are independent of their member states. It proposes legislation (and the budget) but cannot pass laws. The legislative process is shared between the European Parliament – currently 751 MEPs directly elected by their citizens – and the Council of the EU – ministers from each EU country who are authorised to commit their governments. Commissioners, including the President who serves for 5 years, are voted on by the Parliament, which can refuse a name.

It was exciting to see inside the debating chamber, or 'hemicycle', where MEPs have their assigned seats, arranged in eight broad political groupings. Their election within member states by proportional representation means that minority parties are represented: hence prior to the recent election the UK had three Green Party MEPs (now seven), one of whom is a Quaker. Smaller countries are over-represented in numbers of MEPs e.g. Malta has 6, UK has 73, to encourage more powerful states to listen to weaker ones. Therefore, the ability to compromise and willingness to cross political groupings are vital – for that reason negotiations are likely to be politer and more constructive than in our own parliament! Just a short walk from the EU Commission with its colourful flags outside (28 at the time of writing), is sited Quaker House: home of Brussels local meeting and of QCEA, founded 40 years ago to bring a Quaker vision of peace and human rights to Europe and its institutions. With only 6 staff and 200 active supporters, the work and witness of QCEA is impressive.

Olivia Caeymaex explained how QCEA seeks to bring a new approach to the daunting security challenges that Europe faces today. In recent years, the EU has been increasing its military spending and rhetoric. QCEA offers an alternative: its new publication, *Building Peace Together*, is a comprehensive 'toolkit' of workable, non-military initiatives to address conflict prevention and resolution in a sustainable, nonviolent manner.

*continued overleaf*

continued

Quaker House offers a safe space in which sensitive discussions can take place in a non-judgemental atmosphere. This 'quiet diplomacy' enables decision-makers, who might not otherwise have met, to come together and to speak off the record.

Kate McNally explained how QCEA brought young adult Serbs and Croats together over several days - they ended up friends - and of a unique pilot project, 'Helping the Helpers', that supports volunteers suffering trauma through their work with asylum seekers and refugees.

QCEA has published a detailed and thoroughly researched Human Rights Programme Report on 'Child Immigration Detention in Europe' (updated version Sep. 2018).

Their latest campaign, 'Choose Respect', aims to counter anti-migrant hate speech, which is increasing across Europe (including in Britain since the Referendum). This is essential work ahead of the European Parliament elections, in which right-wing 'populist' movements look set to make significant gains. (See *Around Europe* issue 380 for how individual Quakers can get involved.)

We had a presentation on The Council of Europe (not to be confused with The Council of the EU), from which the UK is not withdrawing. This body, with 47 member states, is responsible for the European Convention of Human Rights which protects our fundamental freedoms. QCEA is one of the international NGOs (non-governmental organisations) with an official role within The Council.

On the final morning of the Study Tour, gratitude was expressed for all we had experienced and for the work of QCEA. As one participant said, whatever the UK's future relationship with the EU, "We have in Brussels, in QCEA, a light that is shining and will continue to shine in Europe...as a channel into Europe and an expression of that feeling of a European identity."

Friends, QCEA needs our help: money, active supporters, subscribers to its newsletter around Europe and awareness raising in Meetings, so that it can continue to 'speak truth to power' in these challenging times.

To donate to QCEA quickly and securely please visit [www.qcea.org/donate](http://www.qcea.org/donate)



## Race and Privilege in Europe

Friends have a growing awareness of a deeply rooted injustice that affects many aspects of our lives, often in ways that are difficult to see. For white people, understanding what it really means to be white can be one of the most challenging and important journeys of our lives. However, it is not an easy journey to begin.

The Quaker Council for European Affairs has updated and extended our guide to race and privilege in Europe. To receive a copy for you or your Meeting please email a postal address to [humanrights@qcea.org](mailto:humanrights@qcea.org)



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