



The consultation - background, purpose, remit and timetable

Introduction

The budget of the European Union is an important tool of the European Union and its institutions to implement its policies. It has often been criticised for various reasons. Popular complaints and criticisms include:

1. The budget is not transparent
2. The budget is not democratically controlled
3. The budget is not properly managed and the management is not accountable
4. The budget is targeted at the wrong things - the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) stands out in this context
5. The contribution of Member States to the budget is uneven and unfair

As a result, and as a part of the negotiations regarding the Financial Perspectives 2007-2013, the decision makers decided in 2006 to undertake a *'full, wide ranging review covering all aspects of EU spending, including the CAP, and of resources, including the UK rebate, to report in 2008/9'*¹. In September 2007 the Commission launched a public consultation to prepare for the review, in which all interested parties are invited to contribute.

The budget of the European Union is an important part of the constitutional architecture and structure. This review is therefore an important element of a whole range of discussions on European constitutional debates including the discussions of the Convention on the future of Europe (2001-2003), the Constitutional Treaty, and the recently agreed Reform Treaty. QCEA has followed each of these debates in some detail and contributed to the earlier phase of them with the publication *'Values Matter - Quakers Reflect on Europe'*².

QCEA has also published several series of Briefing Papers on issues relating to this debate which are available on our website. They might be useful to fill in some of the background to these issues.³

The present set of briefing papers is a further contribution by QCEA to this debate and intended to engage Quakers and those in sympathy with Quakers across Europe in the debate and thereby develop a coherent Quaker response to this consultation.

The Consultation

The European Commission launched the consultation on 12 September 2007 with the publication of a Communication entitled: *'Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe: A Public Consultation Paper in view of the 2008/2009 Budget Review'*⁴.

¹ Declaration no 3 annexed to the Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and sound financial management - OJ C 139, 14.6.2006, as quoted in Communication from the Commission: Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe, SEC (2007) 1188 final

² Accessible in pdf format at: <http://www.quaker.org/qcea/spiritualvalues/valuesmatter.pdf>

³ Accessible at: <http://www.quaker.org/qcea/foe.htm>

⁴ Accessible at: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/library/issue_paper/consultation_paper_en.pdf

The consultation also has a website⁵ which has a substantial amount of information about the EU budget as it is now and other useful links including the opportunity to read what others have already said in response to the consultation. As with a number of other Commission consultations, a structured format for responses has been developed and that, too, can be downloaded from the site. The consultation results will feed into the next stage of the review process.

The process

September 2007 to April 2008	Public Consultation
November 2007	Presidency Initiative - debates in European and National Parliaments
Spring 2008	Political Conference with the European Parliament: initial analysis of the results of the consultation
Spring 2008	Commission starts preparing reform proposals
2008/9	Commission presents reform proposal
2009/10	Discussion and endorsement by the EU Institutions
2010/11	Commission Proposal for the next Financial Framework

What will QCEA do?

We (QCEA) are producing a set of briefing papers of which this is the first. These will address:

1. The consultation - background, purpose, remit and timetable (Briefing Paper 1)
2. The EU budget - how is it structured (income and expenditure)
3. Key issues for the consultation
4. Questions raised in the consultation
5. The 'health check' of the Common Agricultural Policy

We will then actively seek comments from Quakers and Attenders to specific questions which we feel need to be responded to in the context of the consultation. We will pull those together and submit a response to the consultation. As the consultation phase closes in April 2008, we will seek to have a contribution ready and submitted 4 weeks before the end of the consultation period.

After April, we will follow the progress of the review and the development of the Commission Proposal and engage on the basis of the key advocacy messages which we will have summarised in our response to the consultation.

Throughout the process, we will keep Quakers and Attenders and other interested people informed of this through our newsletter *Around Europe* and through our website.

⁵ Accessible at: http://ec.europa.eu/budget/reform/index_en.htm