



Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

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Fair Trials International Highlight the Shocking Truth of Pre-Trial Detention



Foreign prisoners can face terrible pre-trial detention conditions in Europe. CC BY-SA Aapo Haapanden

On an unusually bright and sunny November lunchtime, Fair Trials International (FTI) gathered together MEPs, lawyers, NGOs, and other interested parties to discuss the dark and gloomy state of excessive and under-regulated pre-trial detention across much of the EU. FTI is a casework-based charity working to protect the rights of people facing charges abroad. They produced a report comparing the use of pre-trial detention in fifteen Member States and have found cases of this supposed measure of last resort being used and abused habitually.

The impassioned tone of the discussion was set by Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe, who highlighted the wide-ranging human consequences of pre-trial detention and the devastating effects of 'misuse' of the European Arrest Warrant (EAW). Commissioner Hammarberg pointed to slow, lengthy trials; the conditions in pre-trial detention facilities (which are often worse than in other prisons); and the failure of most Member States to implement effective alternatives. These issues were given a human face as we heard testimonies from FTI clients affected by abuses of pre-trial detention and the EAW.

Among these was the story of Andrew Symeou - a 22 year-old from London who spent over ten months in detention in Greece (including six months in the maximum-security Korydallos prison which holds

extremely dangerous convicts) awaiting trial on a manslaughter charge. He was extradited by the UK authorities despite evidence of police brutality, a flawed prosecution case, and human rights abuses. Mr Symeou was eventually cleared of all charges, but the devastating effects of his ordeal, such as the loss of the family business and the memory of his experiences, are not so easily erased.

Equally distressing was the case of Mr and Mrs Hörchner who were present at the event. Robert Hörchner was left with mental and physical scars after spending ten months in a Polish prison where he was subjected to overcrowded conditions, repeated attacks from cellmates and guards, and very limited access to information about his case. Mrs Hörchner spoke very powerfully about the devastating emotional trauma felt not only by the detainees but also their loved ones who fight, often with little help except for FTI, for a just and swift trial. In both cases, the detainees were denied release pending trial on the basis that, as foreign nationals, they posed an increased flight risk and that neither showed remorse for crimes which they stringently denied.

These cases are not shocking exceptions: they highlight a dreadfully real and increasingly critical problem. Within the EU there are 4 500 citizens held in foreign prisons across Europe in pre-trial detention at any one time. In fact, 25 per cent of all EU detainees have not yet been convicted of any crime and in 2009 over a quarter of these were foreign nationals. The risk of detention in a foreign country is also increasing as European internal borders become more easily and frequently crossed.

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While there were differences among the panel as to exactly how such proposals should work in practice, there were several key areas of unanimity. These included the issue of mutual trust on which both the EAW and the detention of foreign nationals rely. Judith Sargentini MEP phrased the problem succinctly: 'trust is good but control is better'. Mutual trust works when there are generally accepted standards among Member States. However, as the FTI report highlighted, this is not the case. For example, the Bulgarian prison population is currently at 160 per cent, while in Spain suspects can be held for up to four years without being convicted of any crime. Clearly, these practices cannot rest on mutual trust alone while there is such disregard for human rights.

So what does the future look like for European extradition laws? Progress has been made. In the UK, for example, after several of FTI's clients spoke to Parliament earlier this year about their experiences, the Joint Committee on Human Rights began pressing the Government to make changes to extradition laws

at both national and EU level. At EU level, the European Commission this year published a Green Paper on detention and mutual recognition among Member States which is currently being hotly discussed in Brussels. QCEA has commented extensively on this Green Paper in our blog and newsletter and will continue to monitor its progress and implementation. There is also an important Council Framework Decision (2008/909/JHA) due to come into operation at the time of publication which allows Member States to transfer prisoners convicted in other countries to serve their sentence in their country of nationality.

Providing that the shocking stories of people like Andrew Symeou and Robert Hörchner continue to be heard and the focus remains the fundamental assumption of innocence until guilt is proven, the future will hopefully be brighter.

Cat Hellewell

Energy Savings Potential Continues to be Greatly Underutilised

If someone said there is an energy source which offers all this:

saves millions of Euros, no wastage, less fuel poverty, a massive boost to innovation in low-carbon industries and services, the creation of millions of valuable jobs, lowers bills, no imports from questionable countries, inexhaustible, economic stability, addresses social inequalities, enhances quality of life, reduces greenhouse emissions, increases competitiveness, improved health, and better education

...would you support it? You'd be mad not to. Energy efficiency offers all these, and is demonstratively the fastest, cheapest, most effective, flexible and safest way of getting our greenhouse gas emissions down. But you'd never know it, as it isn't given the urgency, impetus, and visibility it deserves. Not only is energy saving and efficiency improvement the credible policy strategy needed for speeding up Europe's low-carbon transformation, but it would also restore public faith in our decision-making bodies, because of the many

societal, ecological and economic benefits it affords. There is no downside to energy efficiency - everybody wins.



It is possible to reduce the amount of energy used in buildings by 80 per cent with existing technologies. CC by SA Unicellular

Unfortunately, the window of opportunity to easily transform our communities to be low-carbon is rapidly closing. According to the International Energy Agency, not only are we a long way from avoiding irreversible climate change, but if our fossil fuel infrastructure is not rapidly changed (as in the next five years), the world will lose forever the chance to avoid what scientists say is the minimum safety level of a

2°C increase in temperature from pre-industrial levels.

I wish I could tell you that the whole of the European institutions understand this. For many government treasuries, environmental costs are still viewed as a burden, something they want to avoid. They can't seem to comprehend that this transition to a low-carbon community is: 1) inevitable, and 2) a great opportunity. It is already realistic to achieve over 80



per cent of energy savings in the EU building stock, using existing technologies, skilled know-how and intelligent financing. However, the EU is likely to miss its modest 20 per cent energy reduction goals by 2020 by half. In fact, because of its pathetic, cumulative actions to date, the indicative, business-as-usual 20 per cent energy savings objective for 2020, under current policies, will not even be achieved by 2050!

And if some Member States get their way - egged-on by a rapacious fossil fuel industry, there will be no viable alternative to an inescapably insecure, inefficient, and high-carbon future. You see, a very concerted and well-organised effort by Britain and the Netherlands to gut the yet-to-be-published energy efficiency directive of any meaningful substance means precious little energy will actually be saved. Not that the original proposals were all that bold, given the tremendous opportunities afforded by energy efficiency and savings. But after contesting the directive draft with the creation of loopholes, and the attempted deletion of the directive's headline mandatory energy savings targets, it is highly unlikely that even the savings outlined in its very own (weak) impact assessment are probable. Which is a great shame, for if Europe continues to delay the pace of its de-carbonisation agenda, we will miss the most cost-effective opportunity in a generation to clean up our high-carbon, "locked-in" infrastructure.

We desperately need to develop a new, closer relationship with the energy we use, which will encourage us to value our energy more, and to use it less. As energy use accounts for approximately 80 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, we need to urgently examine how efficiently we use, and waste, our energy, rather than simply considering how we replace it.

Although the received wisdom everywhere seems to be that not a tonne of coal, nor a barrel of oil will be left in the ground if money can be made from extracting and burning it, the facts of the matter have not changed - the biggest obstacle to genuine sustainability remains consumer demand. And, sustainable energy security is indistinguishable from a low-carbon future. Although efficiency savings is not enough on its own, the size of the sustainability challenges we face would be dramatically reduced if we urgently embraced this enormous, fortuitous opportunity. The choice of future is ours; what are your political decision-makers actually doing to promote a low-carbon society?

Paul Parrish



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Contact studytours@qcea.org or telephone +32 2234 3062

Two Weeks' Work Experience at QCEA

From 7th to 18th November I was on an internship at the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) in Brussels. On their website QCEA say they "promote Quaker values at the European level." How nice, I told myself, but what does that mean? So I packed my rucksack and got on the train to find out.

In Germany, where I come from, I am involved in young Quaker activities. I lived in a Quaker family in England for 9 months and went to Junior Yearly Meeting in Britain in 2010 and 2011. I was interested

in finding out how the Quakers bring themselves and their values into Europe, how the European institutions work and how QCEA fits into all this.

Brussels is situated right in the heart of Western Europe and is easily accessible by train and plane. Therefore it was suitable for the European Union to have its headquarters here. With politicians come people who want to influence politicians' decisions. Around 70 per cent of these lobbyists work for industry, 20 per cent are employed by states, regions



or public institutions and 10 per cent work for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). QCEA is one of these.

NGO, MEP, QCEA, PA, Reps...not to mention the names of Quaker institutions! It was very confusing at the beginning when I had to clear a way for myself through all the acronyms that everything seemed to have.

Let's see. There are six people working in the office at QCEA. Martina Weitsch and Liz Scurfield are the representatives (reps). There is also Paul Parrish who is the policy and advocacy officer. QCEA takes up to three programme assistants (PAs) per year. They are young people who normally come to QCEA after having finished university and have an interest in politics. This year they are Hannah Slater, Isabel Skrine and Cat Hellewell. They gather information about a particular topic and write articles, blogs, briefing papers and reports. Networking with other NGOs is very important in making their voice louder. QCEA also does representations to diplomats and specialists and asks questions at conferences. They go to the Commission or the European Parliament and talk to politicians about their ideas on how to improve the laws. That's how they bring in their Quaker values. And it is a full-time job, because there is so much that has to be thought of and improved in the European Union.

I translated a briefing paper into German, which was a surprisingly hard job but also taught me a lot. I took part in inductions on the European Union and

the Council of Europe and how QCEA fits into each of these organisms as a whole.

At Britain Yearly Meeting in August 2011 the Quakers decided to become a low-carbon community. Minute 36 reads: "The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community."

To this end I helped QCEA calculate its carbon footprint. This helps by raising the awareness of the amount of greenhouse gases that companies and individuals emit and show whether the efforts made by QCEA to live sustainably make a difference. Sadly it is very hard to get an accurate number; there are too many different aspects that have to be taken into account such as the energy used, and it is hard to decide where to stop and what to take into each number. By trying to be consistent and always applying the same values, we hope to overcome this when calculating it the next time.

I also took part in the FWCC (Friends World Committee for Consultation- another acronym!) Europe and Middle East Section's Peace and Service Consultation where I got to know some of the other peacebuilding projects that Quakers have.

I think it is very important to know what is going on in the world, but also to be able to stay critical and to know that the news does not always tell everything or the truth.

Laurina Pfeiffer

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