



With or without you: The UK, the EU, and peace

In brief

By the end of 2017 the UK will have decided whether or not to remain in the European Union. What impact will this have on peace? The EU was founded as a peace project and has achieved the goal of preventing war between its Member States. What role does it have in promoting peace in the wider world, and how is the UK involved?

Both the UK and the EU are influential international actors with complementary approaches to conflict in fragile states. The EU is sometimes seen as a neutral actor allowing it to provide assistance in countries where UK aid could be perceived as political rather than humanitarian, for example in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen.

Quaker organisations are critical of militarism at both the UK and the EU levels. The UK currently opposes closer integration in many areas of military policy, such as a permanent military headquarters for the EU. EU foreign policy decisions are taken by national heads of government through a unanimous vote, giving the UK an effective veto. If the UK left, it would no longer have this influence (and veto) at the European Council.

Introduction

European integration began as a peace project by harmonising trade in coal and steel—the 'industries of war'—to ensure that war between Member States would become unthinkable and materially impossible. Since then there has been no war between EU Member States (although EU policies have been linked to conflict elsewhere, such as in the former Yugoslavia and more broadly through the European arms trade). The union has grown since it was founded from six to 28 states, the governments of which decide the overall direction of European foreign policy. There is clear potential for the EU to promote peace worldwide, despite the current trend of militarisation. The UK referendum on continued membership of the EU provides a good opportunity to examine the potential impact on peace if the UK were to leave the EU.

Both the UK and the EU have policies that claim to contribute to peacebuilding and the EU is given competence—the power to act—by its Member States in some areas of foreign policy and overseas development assistance. This paper will focus on the EU's role in promoting peace in the wider world, rather than the work done within the EU to promote peace and cooperation between and within Member States.

The word 'peace' is often used to simply mean the absence of war. A more positive understanding of peace takes account of the structures within a society that may cause conflict and builds resilience to help deal with conflict constructively and nonviolently. Peacebuilding therefore works to address the root causes of conflict. A peaceful society is one in which the structures and cultures of violence are no longer considered normal. Rather social structures recognise the need for social justice, encourage the nonviolent resolution of conflict, meet basic human needs and provide equal opportunities for all citizens.



Would a UK exit enhance or reduce the UK's role in building peace?

The UK utilises both hard and soft power in its international relationships and contributes to both civilian missions and military operations worldwide. In terms of soft power, the UK has an extensive network of cultural, diplomatic and humanitarian missions which all contribute to the UK's global presence and influence. They provide different mechanisms, with varying levels of success, for the promotion of peace.

At the UK level there is an integrated government strategy for addressing 'conflict in fragile states'. It is shaped by three ministerial departments: the Department for International Development (DfID), the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). This strategy prioritises statebuilding and peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries and is also intended to help tackle the root causes of conflict.^{[1][2]}

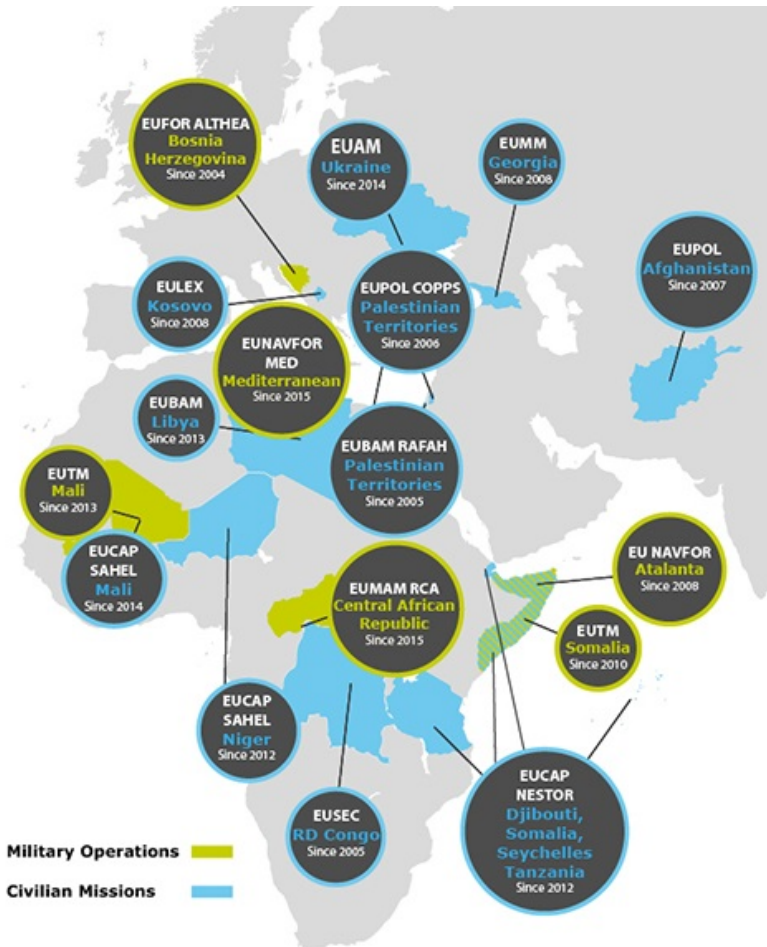
The EU promotes peacebuilding through its foreign policy, development assistance, and as the world's largest trading partner. The EU, along with its Member States, is the world's largest aid donor, collectively spending €58.2 billion in 2014.^[3] In 2013-14 the UK channelled 11.7% of its development and humanitarian aid funding through the European Union. This funding is managed by the European Commission, the EU's civil service, through the European Development Fund.^[4]

Development assistance

The UK Labour government of 1997-2010 focused UK policy on development and humanitarian assistance as both 'the right thing to do' and as part of the so-called 'national interest'. This approach has been maintained through successive governments in the belief that development assistance builds relationships leading to future economic partnerships, as well as helping to stabilise fragile states.^[5] Using the EU as a multilateral partner allows the UK to be part of a collective response to wider development issues, such as assisting with infrastructure projects, and prevent the duplication of programmes with common themes. It also enables the UK to act in regions where it is not currently present or where history may prevent the UK from being able to act effectively on its own.

EU funding supports mediation, confidence building, and transitional justice processes, and it contributes strongly to humanitarian aid and civil protection. No development or humanitarian action escapes criticism: multilateral actors, including the EU, are sometimes accused of inflexibility, excessive paperwork, and poor monitoring and evaluation procedures. The EU is, however, commended by NGOs as a strong contributor to work in fragile states, with plenty of experience in creating progress despite complex regional dynamics. The major benefit to funding humanitarian action through the EU is that it is seen as independent of its Member States and can overcome the challenges posed by former colonial relationships. It is therefore perceived as more politically neutral.^[6] The EU is also able to utilise a wide range of soft power tools through aid, diplomacy, trade, and development to create a more co-ordinated approach in individual countries.

*...[Peace] is a matter of fostering relationships and structures - from personal to international - which are strong and healthy enough to contain conflict when it arises and allow its creative resolution. It is a matter of withdrawing our cooperation from structures which are unjust and exploitative...
- Quaker Home Service, 1989 (Quaker Life and Practice 3.50)*



Current EU CSDP missions. Credit: EEAS

Common Security and Defence Policy

One important aspect of the EU's role in the world is its civilian missions and military operations under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). CSDP also includes other activities such as the development of armed drones. These military and civilian missions are intended to promote international peace and security. QCEA argues that CSDP should be less militaristic and focus more on supporting those local people who are working for nonviolent social change. The majority of these missions have so far been civilian (21 to date) rather than military (11 to date). There are 17 ongoing missions, and the UK helps to finance all 17, as well as contributing personnel to 15. The UK has an effective veto over deployment: a unanimous vote of the Council of the European Union—made up of representatives of Member State governments—is required for all decisions on CSDP mission deployment.

CSDP missions are made up of personnel from EU Member States together with so-called

'third party' states, such as Canada and Norway. EU-led operations are seen by the UK Ministry of Defence as playing a key role in achieving stability whilst avoiding costlier and riskier interventions through NATO or the UN.^[7] It is likely that the UK would continue to cooperate in this way if it left the EU, alongside other non-EU countries. However, a third party state does not have the decision-making role of an EU Member State. The UK would therefore no longer be able to play a part in decision-making processes if it were to leave the EU.

As one of the largest military powers currently in the EU, the UK is one of only five Member States capable of deploying an operational HQ to take command of military CSDP operations. A UK exit could consequently reduce the ability of the European Council to arrange overseas military operations.^[6]

It is difficult to predict the impact of a UK exit on the future development of CSDP. There have been calls for the creation of a standing EU military headquarters, which would be the first step to enhanced military cooperation and the eventual creation of a standing EU army. This is an aspiration of some Member States, including France, but is strongly opposed by the UK government who argue that NATO should be the primary military alliance in Europe.^[8] Not only would this militarisation move the EU quite far from its original peacebuilding goals, but it would further decrease the EU's internationalist spirit. The EU should seek to engage positively with the root causes of international security challenges and not try to protect itself by militarising the countries just beyond its borders.

What might happen?

The EU without the UK

- CSDP missions could continue in a similar fashion, with the UK contributing military and civilian resources to them in the same way [9].
 - Further EU political integration would be possible without the UK which could lead to the creation of additional diplomatic structures that could be used to promote peacebuilding.
 - Further militarisation of the EU could occur due to loss of UK opposition to military headquarters.
- Removal of civilian-military distinctions could damage perception of EU neutrality in external action.

The UK without the EU

- UK could continue involvement in CSDP missions as a third party state, but without being represented at the decision and design stage.
- The UK would remain a NATO member and would continue to influence other aspects of European militarism (21 of the other 27 EU Member States are also in NATO).
- Further militarisation of the EU could render NATO obsolete, with the US and Canada dealing directly with the EU structures, sidelining the UK.
- NATO likely to continue to be seen as a useful but separate alliance, allowing some Member States to maintain their neutrality whilst allowing others to continue hosting US nuclear weapons.

Is the EU becoming more militaristic, and, if it is, should the UK leave?

The EU has been gradually militarising over many years. Militarisation is the normalisation of military approaches to the challenges which countries face. In December 2013 European heads of government met to agree the priorities for CSDP. Agreed priorities included support for the arms trade and the development of armed drones. The 2013 discussions also called for the funding of civilian missions to be simplified so that missions might be launched more quickly as current funding rules make it easier to launch a military operation rather than a civilian mission. This is part of the structural advantage that military 'hard power' solutions have in the EU system. In early 2015 European heads of government were keen to take action on the crisis in the Mediterranean. EUNAVFOR MED—an EU naval operation—was a proposal that could be implemented quickly through direct EU Member State funding.

The militarisation trend is not happening uniquely at the EU level: Member States including the UK have themselves been gradually militarising during the same period. It is therefore unsurprising that domestic policies affect European policy in this area. National militarisation is led by the governments of the day, all of whom sit on the European Council and direct European foreign policy.

European Union Member States include three of the top six arms-trading countries in the world: France, Germany, and the UK. The UK is the largest importer of weapons in the EU, spending \$1.3 billion (about €1 billion) on imports. It is also the second largest exporter, selling \$4.2 billion (about €3.3 billion) of arms in 2014.^[10] The current UK government describes the arms trade as creating jobs and promoting economic growth and therefore an industry to be supported in the national interest. This would be very unlikely to change upon the UK exiting the EU. The UK remains one of only four EU countries in NATO that is planning to meet NATO's target of 2% GDP on defence spending.

Despite being home to countries who profit from the expansion of the arms trade, the European Union has managed to agree a common framework for some limited control of arms exports. These rules are not as strong as they could be but do provide mechanisms to regulate trade in arms that could be used to violate human rights or to breach international humanitarian law. The EU is also able to coordinate arms exports, with Member State governments retaining final control of arms export licensing, limiting the EU's effectiveness in this area.^[11]



Overall, the EU continues to have far more soft-power capacity than military might. The EU has proven itself to be effective at conflict prevention and crisis management. As a global actor, the EU's influence comes from its ability to coordinate different approaches multilaterally and be seen as a neutral actor, more neutral than its constituent Member States may be viewed. Militarisation of the EU is pushed by its Member State governments, and as one of the most militarised countries in the EU, the UK is a large part of that process, despite its euroscepticism preventing symbolic projects, such as a military headquarters.

Isn't the UN enough for peace?

The UK is part of an increasingly globalised and interdependent world. Cooperation between nation states is a necessary part of this and is facilitated in different ways, from bilateral agreements between two states to complex multilateral arrangements. The UK is signed up to and bound by various alliances and treaties. The UK is also an active participant in several international groupings, including NATO, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), G7, the Commonwealth, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In a globalised world and with the diminishing international influence of many European countries, including the UK, regional groupings are the way in which states may continue to advance their interests in the world and contribute to global peace and security through intergovernmental cooperation. Whilst global problems require global solutions, multilateral and regional cooperation can help push for improvements before it reaches global agendas. The EU, along with the United Nations, is one of only two intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) currently capable of launching a comprehensive peace support operation. The EU's capability eases some of the burden on the UN to respond to instability in areas which fall under Europe's sphere of influence such as those countries within the European Neighbourhood Policy (16 countries neighbouring the EU's borders).

European Union Member States are more like-minded than the more diverse range of states that gather at the United Nations. EU Member States are committed to cooperating and engaging with each other. The EU also has the legal authority, given to it by its Member States, to make laws and to enact policy on a broad range of policy areas. This allows the EU to wield considerable global influence. As a regional grouping, the EU has gone much further than any other regional IGO in contributing to peace and security within its neighbourhood.

Neither Europe nor the EU would go away if the UK were to leave the EU. There would be several different options for the form of a future external relationship. In terms of peace, there are compelling reasons for the UK to remain involved in European partnerships, whether inside or outside the EU. Currently the UK and the EU are well aligned in their peacebuilding priorities, and the UK has a direct influence on priority-setting. The UK may continue to be influential outside the EU, but its influence would be limited in its scope and could well depend on how well the UK's withdrawal would be managed and the shape of the UK-EU relationship following a UK exit.

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Notes

- [1] DfID (2010) Building peaceful states and societies: a DfID practice paper. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-peaceful-states-and-societies-a-dfid-practice-paper.
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- [4] DfID (2013) Review of the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union: Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid report, p. 33 Available at: www.gov.uk/review-of-the-balance-of-competences.
- [5] Ibid. p.46. [6] House of Commons Library (2015) Exiting the EU: impact in key UK policy areas. Briefing paper 7213. Available at: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7213>.
- [7] Ibid. p. 111. [8] Ibid. p. 115. [9] Worré, P (2013) The consequences of a British exit from the EU and CSDP: an analytical timeline. ISIS Europe Occasional Paper, January 2013.
- [10] Tovey, A. (2015) Charted: the world's biggest arms importers. The Telegraph, 8 March. www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/industry/defence/11455304/Charted-the-worlds-biggest-arms-importers.html.
- [11] Bromley, M. (2012) The Review of the EU Common Position on Arms Exports. EU Non-Proliferation Consortium no. 7, January 2012



Some food for further thought

There are a number of open questions which might further affect a person's conclusions on the best way to vote in the upcoming referendum. These include:

- If the UK were to leave the EU, what would a new UK-EU relationship look like? What is the plan?
- Would the UK turn more towards NATO or more human security focused Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for peace and security?
- Would the UK continue to channel development assistance through the EU and contribute to CSDP missions?
- What impact might the the absence of the UK have on the influence of French militarism on EU foreign policy, or alternatively on the influence of those small Member States, such as Austria, that promote peacebuilding?
- Will the UK be happy to contribute to EU military and civilian missions without being at the decision-making table? Will it call for new structures or EU reform from the outside?

Now if the sovereign princes of Europe, who represent that society or independent state of men that was previous to the obligations of society, would for the same reason that engaged men first into society, viz, love of peace and order, agree to meet by their stated deputies in a general diet, estates, or parliament, and there establish rules of justice for sovereign princes to observe one to another...

-William Penn, 1693

(BYM Quaker Faith & Practice 24.44)

Further reading

House of Commons Library (2015) Exiting the EU: impact in key UK policy areas. Briefing paper 7213. Also Exiting the EU: UK reform proposals, legal impact and alternatives to membership. Briefing paper 7214.

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The 'With or without you' series aims to provide information on topics relevant to Quaker concerns, to help UK citizens prepare for the upcoming referendum on remaining in the EU.

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