



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

A European Quaker contribution following the Conference of European Churches (CEC) open letter on the future of Europe - May 2017

1. Responding to the CEC open letter

1.1 We wish to express our gratitude to CEC for taking this initiative, and encouraging the consideration of the important issue of the future of Europe to its member churches, and to those, like us, who are organisations in partnership. We value the opportunity for dialogue with fellow Christians, and hope earnestly for a higher public profile for our individual communities' Gospel-led witness, especially when this takes different forms and emphases. Christians should witness to the value of diversity in the way we work together, and reach out to others with respect and humility.

1.2 We particularly value that the open letter *“reaffirms its understanding of the EU as a community of values pursuing human dignity, peace, reconciliation, justice, the rule of law, democracy, the respect for human rights, solidarity and sustainability”*, and that it *“encourages CEC Member Churches and all Christians in Europe to step up efforts in making such Christian virtues as respect for others, solidarity, diaconia and building up a community more visible in public life.”* We appreciate the theological principles of Christian diaconia (service) and koinonia (fellowship) as the foundational blocks for community life, from the small scale, to the largest, always affirming the value of every human life as bearing God's image, and of life itself in all its forms, as the expression of God's creative power. In Quaker experience and practice we have come to understand our peace witness as a special form of diaconia. Because of the understanding of and commitment to the nonviolent call of the Gospel, Quakers renounce violence and military force. Thus we have been freed to explore other ways of dealing with conflict, crisis and develop methods of interventions and conflict transformation that help to uphold the peace witness.

1.3 We share the commitment in the Charta Oecumenica that *“On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail.”* We also agree that it is not enough to look solely to the countries within the European Union, but it is necessary to look beyond the current borders to understand the pressures the European project is facing and its context. We agree that global economic and environmental problems need globally coordinated solutions, but are only too painfully aware of how difficult it is to achieve such co-ordination – we would like to offer some examples of our own experience in this respect further on in this response.

1.4 It is true that *“different opinions exist on specific policy questions and on how to organise ourselves in Europe. Also on bigger issues such as to stay in or leave the European Union or the Council of Europe, Christians find themselves on different sides of the divide”*. We experience this within our own Quaker communities in different countries in Europe. However, we believe that no compromise can be made on issues of *“respect for human dignity, peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation, solidarity, and sustainability”*. These values are enshrined in Article 2 (The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-

discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail) and 3 (1. The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples) of the consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union.

1.5 In the coming years Europe will have to decide on the course of security and defence issues including their place in its relationships with other parts of the world. Churches should be adding their voice to these discussions and speak truth to power – the truth that is laid before us in the Sermon on the Mount. The message reminds us that hatred destroys both the fabric of society and the soul of its people. It is a tested practical knowledge through the churches diaconia at home and abroad and would be an answer to the cry of our fellow Christian brothers and sisters living in areas of conflict to hold our governments and companies accountable.

1.6 We must indeed acknowledge that the economic model embraced and developed by the European Union has not benefited all citizens, and has resulted in feelings of disenchantment that are fuelling current discontent and more nationalistic perspectives. The growing gap between rich and poor within countries and between countries in Europe and more so at a global level has caused deep unrest and is experienced as unjust. These needs have to be addressed, and hope for a better, more egalitarian system, fostered¹. We wish to see the development and advocacy of new and radically different economic models that put the well-being of human and other forms of life, and the preservation of the environment, ahead of exploitation for profit.

1.7 We concur that the European Union has brought about a number of important achievements, including *“the unification of most of Europe in peace and freedom since the Second World War and for the first time since the Middle Ages, is a major historical achievement. Also in the area of human rights, progress has been made. The European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Social Charter and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are all milestones for Europe. The European project, in its various manifestations, stands as an example of what can be done through reconciliation, stability and prosperity.”*

1.8 We welcome the statement that *“Solidarity with refugees is a consequence of Christian faith and our commitment to working towards a just and compassionate society. Therefore, the present predicament of refugees and migrants is a matter of grave concern for CEC.”* The situation is of great concern to Quakers too, who have been engaging at different levels and in different countries with direct relief and advocacy on behalf of refugees and migrants. We as people of faith have a special responsibility to point to reasons for migration and flight in Europe, which more often than not cause and contribute to an increase in arms production and trade, unjust economic structures and climate change, mostly caused by the wealthy few.

1.9 We agree that *“Transparency and listening to citizens are of crucial importance for the future of Europe.”* Furthermore, we advocate personal responsibility in educating oneself on the reality of public life. We commend to other CEC churches the Advice of Friends in Britain, who remind each other: *“Remember your responsibilities as a citizen for the conduct of local, national, and international affairs. Do not shrink from the time and effort your involvement may demand.”* Attitudes towards European institutions are often based on prejudice and mistrust, even ignorance. When this is the case, such attitudes need to be challenged. This is not to deny the democratic deficits which still exist and need to be addressed, as the CEC open letter acknowledges.

1.10 We welcome the recognition of the contribution of non-Christian faith traditions and philosophies, particularly Judaism and Islam, to the culture and development of Europe historically, and in the present. Inter-faith solidarity and community building need to be explicit commitments and this should not stop with the Abrahamic faiths.

1.11 We share the concerns about the increasing reliance by the European Union on military solutions to the problems that beset it. In addition, we are very worried about the European Union's support for the arms industry through the European Defence Action Plan, and its moves to divert €100 million EUR from the Development Cooperation

1 Cf. Dommen, Edward, "A Peaceable Economy", Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2014.

Instrument to the Instrument for Stability and Peace for the military capacity building of forces in countries with ineffective governance and poor human rights adherence records. We are very wary of moves to prioritise the armament sector within the new Skills Agenda for Europe. This would see a most unwelcome change in the use of the Erasmus programme, thus far limited to civilian projects. These developments are alarming, and run contrary to the founding principles of the European Union and Council of Europe. Quakers in Switzerland, for instance, are also concerned about the evident willingness of the Swiss authorities to tolerate the export of Swiss arms to places where they feed armed conflict and where there is the possibility that corruption may be involved. We hope churches will speak out against these.

1.12 As well as saying no to these developments, it is our responsibility to advocate for more resources in people and funds to develop shared security concepts that eschew militarism and are rooted in Human Rights, participation, and respect for each other and in the development of effective peacebuilding and non-military shared security structures.

2. An analysis of issues from a Quaker perspective

2.1 As we look forward to the 15th CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad, Serbia, in 2018, we encourage greater clarity in differentiating the European Union from the Council of Europe. The latter is a broader institution, which hopefully will endure even if the political entity of the European Union weakens or flounders. It is the principles of dialogue, cooperation, human rights and solidarity that we would wish to focus on at all times, and not necessarily the institutions themselves. In other words, the institutions are only worthy of support if they deliver on their principles, and not in their own right.

2.2 We have a concern about the current use of 'terrorism' and 'terror' as terms of summary condemnation. They serve to justify increasing and intrusive "security" measures and to normalise the erosion of civil liberties. 'Terrorism' feeds on alienation, humiliation, and exclusion; it can be an expression of despair. It can be seen as the outcome of a failure of koinonia on the part of society as a whole. It calls for more energetic diakonia to foster an inclusion which rejoices in diversity. Thorough application of the founding values of the Council of Europe recapitulated in Article 2 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty of the European Union (see paragraph 1.4) can provide an essential antidote to this form of organised violence. The European institutions and governments at all levels down to local authorities must ensure that there is the funding and civil-space for community groups, lay or religious, social services, educators and families to support such diakonia. The forces which drive people to resort to violence can be structural, rooted in social and economic injustice. Some forms of them are European in scope; indeed the EU has in the past applied policies which dealt effectively with some of them, with the aid of the structural and other regional and sectoral funds. Such policies should be pursued with renewed vigour.

2.3 We also believe that there needs to be a much more explicit reference to the Churches' historical complicity in, and contemporary tendency to foster, nationalism, touched on in the paragraph that mentions *"some keywords to keep in mind are: crusades, wars over and between religions, inquisition, patriarchal structures, persecutions of witches, colonisation, slave trade and slavery, racism and fascism."* We believe a stronger call to repentance is needed here, and the acceptance of mutual accountability in our only too human fallibility.

2.4 We cannot escape our complicity in the many terrible wars that devastated our continent for centuries. We know that many churches have increasingly identified with their home nations more deeply than with the Universal calling of the Gospel. This should be a source of deep sadness for those who stand in the spirit of the Reformation. It is our firm conviction that the Church must be permitted to be the Church. It must serve no other imperative than those declared by Christ. A national Church always falls into the

trap that Christians are born rather than made. We cannot 'become Christians' through some national culture or formal set of institutions, but only if we accept the leadings of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). Yet the ultimate failure of the Reformation to truly renew the Church can be seen in the way the early Protestant Churches (those of Luther and Calvin respectively) continued to accept the compatibility of Christianity with the use of repressive force. We hope that the current ecumenical endeavour, and true servant leadership from Catholic, Orthodox and Reformed churches, will finally eschew force, and embrace fully Jesus' nonviolent teachings.

2.5 Another sad legacy of Christianity in Europe has been the scourge of anti-Semitism, which we cannot ignore, as its toxic consequences haunt Europe and the Middle East to this day. Once again we need acknowledgement, repentance, and a commitment not to repeat the errors of the past, by, for instance, allowing Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism to go unchallenged in our day.

3. A contribution from Quaker tradition and experience

3.1 Peace lies at the root of Quaker beliefs as it does of the European ideal. The Quaker movement originated in Britain in the middle of the 17th century, at a time of civil war that was largely religious in its expression but which was entwined with economic exploitation and ethnic oppression. The Quaker Peace Declaration following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 is a founding document of this religious movement. "*We do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any{person} with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.*" We would wholeheartedly welcome the repudiation of "Just War" doctrines by fellow Christians in favour of articulating and practising "Just Peace", and non-violence, as recently expressed by his Holiness Pope Francis in his message for the celebration of the 50th World Day of Peace on 1st January 2017. This statement could not be more timely, and we unite with it most gladly.

3.2 In the early 18th century the French Royal Army conducted a war of repression against the Protestants in the Cévennes. Some of the Protestants published an open letter to their fellows, "Remember that the crimes and violence of your enemies do not authorise you to commit similar ones... Blind as you are, have you forgotten that the real Christian is never permitted to return evil for evil... Know that it is to violate all civil and moral laws to use arms against your enemies, and that it is an enormous crime and an unimaginable blasphemy to dare to claim that you are inspired by the Holy Spirit in all your works..."² The document is one of the founding narratives of French Quakers.

3.3 William Penn, one of the founding figures of the Quaker movement, published in 1693 *An essay towards the present and future peace of Europe by the establishment of an European dyet, parliament or estates*. In this pioneering piece, a European parliament was to serve as a means towards the peace of Europe. A few years later a French translation appeared. It may well have been the work of L'abbé de St Pierre as part of the preparations for his own *Project to render peace perpetual in Europe*, published in 1713-16³. St Pierre's work in due course inspired Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795).

3.4 Penn's Diet was composed of representatives of States. His contemporary and correlative John Bellers drafted a similar proposal in his *Some Reasons for a European State*⁴. No less aware than Penn of the active role of religion in European wars, Bellers explicitly included in his scheme "*a proposal for a general council or convocation*

2 Translated by Edouard Dommen from a document entitled *Letter written on 7 January 1703 by the fanatics of Languedoc nicknamed Quakers to the Protestants in revolt or Camisards of the Cévennes*.

3 Daniel Sabbagh, *William Penn et l'Abbe de Saint-Pierre: Le Chaînon Manquant*, "Revue de synthèse", janvier-mars 1997, pp. 83-105

4 Roderick Pace & Peter van den Dungen, *John Bellers, Some Reasons for an European State. Facsimile of the original essay of 1710*. Tercentenary edition, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2010

*of all the different religious persuasions in Christendom ... that they may be good subjects and neighbours, though of different apprehensions of the way to heaven"*⁵.

3.5 For Quakers, Europe is not just a market, however common; it aspires to be a community at peace at least with itself and, better still, with the world.

4. Some examples of faithful witness

4.1 Although we are a very small community, we have often felt called to pioneer radical, counter-cultural witness. Issues such as gender equality, anti-slavery, social reform, conscientious objection to war, have been some of the defining campaigns of our history. As well as issues, a way of working that is distinctive has been developed over the centuries. This centres on presence, the establishment, for instance, of Quaker houses in hostile locations to facilitate mutual dialogue. So it was that a Quaker presence was established in Berlin in the 1920s, which has endured through the Weimer Republic, the Nazi regime and later found itself on the Eastern side of the Berlin wall. Similarly, Quaker House in Geneva, established in the days of the League of Nations, is now part of the Quaker United Nations Offices (the other being in New York), which facilitates encounters between diplomats of different countries and persuasions to build confidence and mutual trust. Other examples are Quaker House in Belfast, which played an important role in the years that led to the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, Friends House Moscow, and the Quaker schools that are still at the heart of the community in Brummana, Lebanon, and Ramallah, Palestine.

4.2 Part of our contribution to the European-level polity has been Quaker House Brussels, home of the Quaker Council for European Affairs for almost 40 years. Through our presence we encourage realistic and practical alternatives to violent policies. The culture of EU foreign policy institutions is increasingly one of 'crisis management' rather than prevention. One opportunity that the EU could seize is to integrate conflict prevention into EU policies on trade and international development. The EU has diplomatic power through EU delegations across the world. However, EU delegations rarely prioritise conflict prevention, or have sufficient related expertise within their staff.

4.3 These experiences are grounded in the invitation by one of our founders, George Fox, to "*answer that of God in everyone*", that is, to avoid the tendency to oppose and demonise those who are different from ourselves, or with whom we disagree, but always acknowledge the divine presence and dignity they embody, and the potential for grace and transformation to manifest in them, as in us. Trust in God's loving purposes, not the power of our arguments, is the way to connect even with the most unlikely of interlocutors.

4.4 As well as a vision for the future of Europe, we need to have connectivity to enable us to respond to foreseen and unforeseen developments. Quakers have a long-established practice of identifying and testing concerns, and acting on these to bring relief in emergency situations. An example of this is the Kindertransport⁶ in 1938/39, which was undertaken by Friends and others at the same time as the Europe & Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation was established. This illustrates the practical use of a network, and reaching out to other human beings in need, regardless of faith affiliation.

4.5 We offer the fruit of this experience in the humble hope that it may inspire and encourage, just as we ourselves are inspired and encouraged by the many faithful lives and practices from other traditions, and the natural peace of all humanity.

5 The two foregoing paragraphs draw liberally on Peter van den Dungen, "The plans for European peace by Quaker authors William Penn (1693) and John Bellers (1710) "*Araucaria. Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades*, año 16, no 32. Segundo semestre de 2014. Pp. 53-67

6 <http://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-history/quakers-and-the-kindertransport>

5. A statement of what we wish to see emerge from this ecumenical work

5.1 We hope that this may be indeed a "*Kairos moment - a crucial moment of truth - for the future of Europe.*" We believe that the Christian churches can and should offer hope and leadership in living in the light of "Good News" of liberation from economic and ideological oppression, from fear and mistrust of others, from reliance on violence as the means of settling the legitimate and inevitable tensions of living together in community. As people of faith we need to pledge our loyalty and worship only to our Creator, and expose the false gods of markets, wealth at the expense of exploitation of others and the earth's resources, security through military might. We need to recognise, encourage and uphold each other, and offer the hand of friendship to those of other faiths - or none - especially when they are in need of protection and succour. We must praise, preserve and build on those institutions that further God's purposes for creation, and resist, bravely if necessary, the powers that would oppress our fellow human beings, even at significant cost to ourselves. We must follow Jesus' example of love in action, and learn from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God.