# Quakers

## for

# Europe

*Our Commissioner is chosen by our Prime Minister*

**European Commission**

*28 Commissions, one per Member Nation*

Day-to-day running of the EU, proposing EU laws, ensuring legislation is implemented.

*We directly elect our MEPs*

**European Parliament**

*751 MEPs directly elected by European citizens*

Represents citizens in each member nation. Scrutinises draft EU laws, approves EU budget.

# The four main sections of the European Union

**European Council**

*(the EU Summit)*

*Head of State or Government of all 28 Member Nations*

Provides executive power. Appoints the EU President, Commission President, Commissioners and President.

*Our Prime Minister is part of this group*

**Council of the European Union**

*(Council of Ministers)*

*Government ministers from the 28 Member Nations*

Represents governments of Member Nations. Approves/adopts EU laws.

*UK Secretaries of State attend these meetings*

*The European Union also contains the* **Court of Justice of the European Union***, the* **European Central Bank** *and the* **European Court of Auditors**

*But the* **European Court of Human Rights** *is* <u>not</u> *part of the European Union*

## This decision

The upcoming referendum about whether the UK should remain a member of the European Union (EU) is one of the most important decisions of our time. The consequences of the decision, especially a vote to leave the EU, are profound for both the UK and for the rest of Europe.

This booklet focuses on issues and arguments that aren't being covered in the main referendum debate. We believe that this referendum is about much more than economic pluses and minuses. Our focus is not on 'how much do we get out of Europe', but rather on the principles which underpin the European project.

As Quakers, we believe in *'that of God in everyone'* and want to see a Europe which is peaceful, compassionate, open and just in its dealings within the EU and throughout the whole world. We hope to bring a Quaker voice to the debate.

We recognise that the EU is not perfect and has flaws that need to be addressed – but we believe the most effective way to encourage change is to stay in, strengthen our relationships and win the argument by persuasion rather than threats.

*Quakers for Europe* is not a formal body within Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) or any other group. We are a group of individuals acting in our personal capacities, who passionately hope that the UK will remain a member of the European Union.

## How to help

We hope to organise events, which will be announced on quakersforeurope.com.

It would help us to have both practical and financial support. To find out how to donate or to offer help, please email quakersforeurope@gmail.com.

## Origins of Quakers and Europe

In 1693, the early Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania William Penn published his idea of a Europe-wide Parliament, where the rulers of each country could meet to discuss and resolve their differences without resorting to war. His vision, set out in *An essay towards the present and future peace of Europe*, can be seen in today's European Union.

## Some achievements of the EU

Many of the benefits of the EU are now seen as normal and taken for granted. They include:

- More than 50 years of peace, stability and prosperity, which have improved the living stands of millions of Europeans.

- Supported 13 former dictatorships in Western and Eastern Europe to become democracies.

- Freedom for all EU citizens to live and work abroad in Europe and help to study in other European countries.

- Free movement of people, money, goods and services.

- Some of the highest consumer safety and environmental standards in the world.

- Common foreign and security policy giving a greater voice in world affairs.

- Support for European countries and regions in industrial decline.

- EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights underpins all EU law, promoting human rights, dignity, freedom and the rule of law.

EU motto: ***United in Diversity***

## Equality, justice and community

A founding principle of the EU is that all European citizens are equal and have equal rights to live and work across the continent. This is taken up by millions, both British and other EU nationals: in 2014, there were 2.34 million people from other EU countries living in the UK and 1.8 million UK citizens living in other EU countries.

The EU works to ensure all its nations and regions are equally developed and gives funding for this. For many years Wales and Northern Ireland received large amounts of support and other UK areas have also been given assistance, such as to build needed infrastructure. This would not continue if the UK leaves.

The EU has spoken out strongly in favour of human rights globally, supporting the freedom to follow one's conscience and practice one's beliefs that have been Quaker concerns since the beginnings of the Religious Society of Friends.

*"This [European] Parliament is the heart of democracy at the EU level. It will always be on the side of the people, working to improve the daily lives of hundreds of millions of Europeans. The European Parliament will work in a dignified and fair manner based on respect and non-discrimination."*

Martin Schulz,
President of the European Parliament

The EU has been a powerful force restraining over-mighty corporations including Microsoft and Google and forcing them to change their ways. It has managed this when the UK

alone has not because of its size and its global importance to the world economy: companies cannot ignore the EU and therefore have to abide by its rules.

## Peace

*"There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end."*
*James Nayler 1660*

The European Union is one of the most successful peace projects in history. It was founded with the aim of building such close links between its members that war between them would become impossible and unthinkable. This has held true over the years and none of the 28 member states, containing 503 million citizens, has fought each other since joining the EU.

The Quaker peace testimony is central to our witness. But pacifism is not enough. We remember the words of William Penn: "True godliness don't turn men (sic) out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it".

We see and regret a trend towards militarisation both in the UK and in the European institutions. We believe that the best way to counter these steps towards militarisation is to stay engaged and convince others of our position.

*"The European Union is the world's most successful invention for advancing peace."*

John Bruton,
Former Irish Prime Minister

The UK, though it is one of the most militaristic EU member states, has also been a brake on increasing the military role of the EU as the UK government

wants such matters decided at the national level.

Yet there are also many pro-peace efforts embedded in the EU. These include analysing new projects for their likely impact on conflict, and initiatives supporting non-violent conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and nation-building in countries devastated by fighting. Such initiatives don't make the headlines but do improve life for thousands, if not millions of people around the world.

## Sustainability

*"We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will."*
        *Advices and queries 42*

British Quakers are committed to becoming a sustainable, low carbon community, and are working to achieve this among ourselves and in the wider world. The EU has been a leader in pushing for emissions reductions globally and its voice has been strengthened because it speaks as one. Britain's influence in global climate policy would be greatly diminished if it acted alone; but within the EU, where it is a major player, it has had a positive influence for many years, encouraging bolder steps.

> *"We must incorporate climate change into all the choices we make. It costs a lot to invest in a non-carbon future, but (ignoring the problem) costs a lot in human suffering."*
>
> Connie Hedegaard, Former EU Commissioner for Climate Action

Emission reduction requirements imposed by the EU on all its member states are more powerful than the UK's self-imposed carbon goals because they cannot be overturned by a new British government. This is increasingly

important, as the UK government appears to be stepping back from measures to reduce climate change at home.

But climate change is not the only concern. Nature and pollution do not respect country borders, so our responses need to be multi-national if we want to be effective. EU rules on birds and water have helped to clean Britain's beaches, while European recycling requirements were what led to the green bins we now have in every household.

## Truth and transparency

*"If pressure is brought upon you to lower your standard of integrity, are you prepared to resist it?"*
*Advices and queries 38*

There is a lot of misrepresentation and outright lies told about the EU. It gets used as a scapegoat by governments across Europe, who pin the blame on the EU for unpopular policies. Whenever a Prime Minister comes out of an EU summit and says "Europe made us do it", they fail to add that they personally have just signed up to whatever they are complaining about.

*"Europe's destiny is no longer determined through secret diplomacy by just a few. Rather, all 28 member states work together as equal partners and in cooperation with the European institutions to shape Europe – for the good of citizens."*

Angela Merkel,
German Chancellor

The EU is probably more transparent and accountable now than it has ever been. The European Parliament, which is directly elected by and accountable to the citizens of Europe, scrutinises and must approve every new European law before it can

be passed. Ordinary citizens can force debates on issues by signing petitions (1,000,000 signatures from across 7 or more EU countries are needed). So many details of what is happening in the European institutions are published that the problem is more about having too much information, not too little.

## Simplicity

*"A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength."*
*Advices and queries 41*

At the UK's insistence, the principle of subsidiarity (taking decisions as close to the people as possible) was built into the EU's treaties.

Some people think of the EU as a source of unnecessary rules coming from the unelected Commission.  But no EU

laws can pass without the agreement of the elected Parliament and of member state governments.

Most of these rules are about having single standards for goods and services.  Leaving the EU would leave us with no voice in developing these but we would still have to follow them to trade freely with the EU.  Leaving would also mean we are no longer protected by the 'social chapter' of the EU: the rules that protect workers from overwork and exploitation, and enable us to benefit from the same protections elsewhere in Europe.

The single set of rules that exist for goods and many services across the EU makes trade far simpler than having to deal with 28 different national regulations.

**Our vision for the EU**

We ask for a European Union which welcomes refugees. We look to the EU to become more democratic and transparent, and less militaristic. We look to the UK to play a supportive role in building a better Europe, along with other member states. We value the practical links the EU gives us to other European countries, which allows us to better understand our neighbours and recognise our shared humanity.

The EU may not be what Quakers would have designed, but it is the result of decades of negotiation, agreement and compromise among European nations. It is a peace process in a continent that was for the last thousand years probably the bloodiest in the world, and peace isn't perfect and peace is messy.

The key question we believe people should ask themselves when they vote is whether we think we will make more progress towards seeing the peaceful, sustainable world we want by being in the EU or out of it.

**Reasons some Quakers have given for wanting the UK to remain in the EU**

• Quakers are about relationship and walking alongside others and building trust. Leaving the EU is like walking away from a relationship we've hardly started to build.
• There are no significant problems in the world that can be solved by countries acting alone.
• Being at the table is better.
• You can't build a better world by walking away.
• Taking a life-changing decision for negative reasons is always a bad move
•We should expand our sense of citizenship so that we see people from Poland or Romania as fellow-citizens too.
• The EU is one of the most successful peace projects in the world and we shouldn't walk away from or destabilise it.

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| *Austria* | *Belgium* | *Bulgaria* | *Croatia* |
| *Cyprus* | *Czech Republic* | *Denmark* | *Estonia* |
| *Finland* | *France* | *Germany* | *Greece* |
| *Hungary* | *Ireland* | *Italy* | *Latvia* |
| *Lithuania* | *Luxembourg* | *Malta* | *Netherlands* |
| *Poland* | *Portugal* | *Romania* | *Slovakia* |
| *Slovenia* | *Spain* | *Sweden* | *UK* |
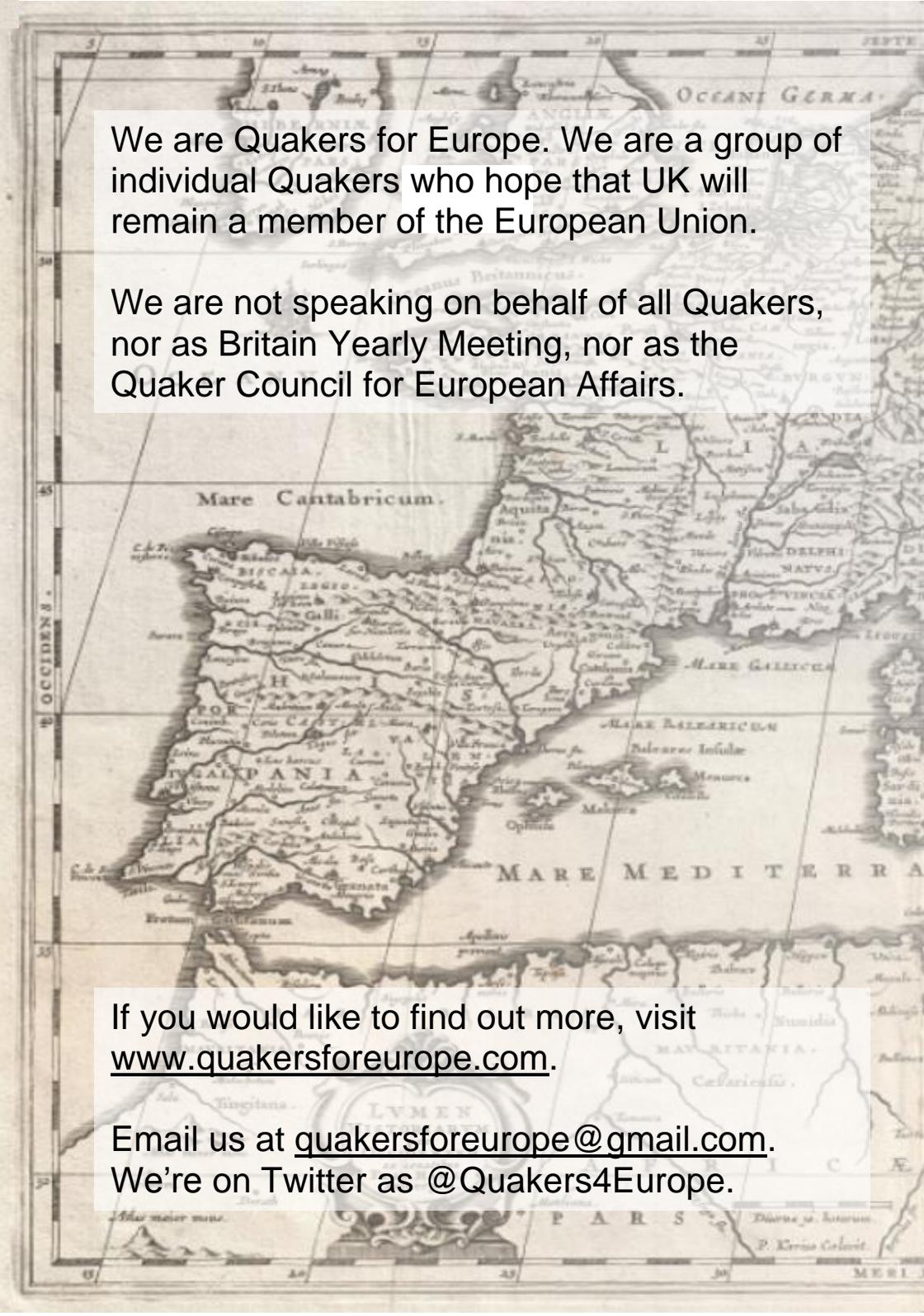
We are Quakers for Europe. We are a group of individual Quakers who hope that UK will remain a member of the European Union.

We are not speaking on behalf of all Quakers, nor as Britain Yearly Meeting, nor as the Quaker Council for European Affairs.

If you would like to find out more, visit www.quakersforeurope.com.

Email us at quakersforeurope@gmail.com. We're on Twitter as @Quakers4Europe.