



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

10 DECEMBER: HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

EBCO in awareness raising tour in Europe: The right to conscientious objection to military service is a human right too!

Brussels, 8 December 2012

With the opportunity of the **Human Rights Day** on **10 December 2012**, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection reminds that the right to conscientious objection to military service is a human right too, and organises an awareness raising tour in Europe, in four countries where some conscientious objectors are still being sentenced to imprisonment: **Armenia** (Yerevan, 8 Dec 2012), **Finland** (Helsinki, 14 Dec 2012), **Greece** (Larisa, 18 Dec 2012) and **Turkey** (Ankara, 28 Dec 2012).

Ten years ago, the **Directorate General of Human Rights of the Council of Europe** underlined that: «*For democratic states that respect rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the right to conscientious objection cannot be seen as a minor issue divorced from the mainstream of protection and promotion, at international level, of human rights.*» (Booklet entitled *Conscientious objection to compulsory military service*, June 2002).

Last year, the **Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights** ruled that conscientious objection to military service, as a manifestation of deeply held religious or other beliefs, is protected under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion), whether or not there are appropriate provisions in national law. (Case of *Bayatyan v Armenia*, 7 July 2011).

Earlier this year, Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, the former **Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights** stated that: «*The right to conscientious objection to military service should be guaranteed in all parts of Europe*» and noted that «*People should not be imprisoned when their religious or other convictions prevent them from doing military service. Instead they should be offered a genuinely civilian alternative. This is now the established European standard, respected in most countries – but there are some unfortunate exceptions*». (Human rights comment, 2 February 2012).

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EBCO was founded in Brussels in 1979 as an umbrella structure for national associations of conscientious objectors in the European countries to promote the right to conscientious objection to preparations for, and participation in, war and any other type of military activity as a fundamental human right. It enjoys participatory status with the Council of Europe since 1998 and is a member of its Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations since 2005. It provides expertise and legal opinions on behalf of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe. It is involved in drawing up the annual report of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament on the application by the Member States of its resolutions on conscientious objection and civilian service, as determined in the "Bandrés Molet & Bindi Resolution" of 1994. It is a full member of the European Youth Forum since 1995.