



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

35 Van Elewyck street, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
www.ebco-beoc.org / ebco@ebco-beoc.org / @ebcobeoc



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

Legalisation, not investigation for the right to conscientious objection in Turkey

Brussels, 15 January 2019

"EBCO is extremely disturbed by the continuing harassment of the activists of the Turkish Association of Conscientious Objection [VR-DER](#). We demand from the Turkish authorities to address the right to conscientious objection with legalisation, not with investigation. Conscientious objection to military service is a right, not a crime", EBCO's President Friedhelm Schneider stated today.



This comes as a response to the [new investigation](#) which has been launched against EBCO's Turkish member association VR-DER because of the posts shared on social media and the website. Furkan Çelik, who owns the domain, and VR-DER Co-Chair attorney Gökhan Soysal deposed at the Prosecutor's Office on January 11th. Speaking to [bianet](#), Soysal stated: *"The Bureau for Combating Cyber Terrorism stumbled upon a news story regarding a conscientious objector who was being tried. They searched for the domain of vicdaniRet.org and reached Furkan Çelik. Now the file has come from the Police Department to the Prosecutor's Office. The Prosecutor's Office, without doing any procedural act on the lawsuit, summoned Furkan Çelik to depose. We went to depose at the Prosecutor's Office. An investigation has been launched into eight news articles. But the charge is not clear. The only charge we know is provocative posts intended not to fulfil the military service duty. Furkan Çelik said he bought the domain when the association was being founded. Both the web page and the social media account was managed by the association and he did not share the posts. I stated that the mentioned posts do not contain an element of a crime. I referred to the ECtHR (European Court of the Human Rights) verdicts on conscientious objection against Turkey. I said that sharing posts intended not to fulfil the military service duty is not a crime but a constitutional right."*

This adds to the [other investigation](#) which was launched in June 2018 against Merve Arkun, VR-DER Co-Chair, because of the activities held on the 15th of May 2016, International Day for Conscientious Objection. Merve Arkun was accused for "making propaganda of the organisation". She went to the anti-terror branch of police headquarters on June 5th and gave a statement with Gökhan Soysal. Arkun had stated: *"Many times, all around the world, conscientious objectors are in anti-war struggle. The declaration of the Conscientious Objectors Association is an anti-war attitude. Conscientious objection is a human right. Though the government is trying to frighten and discourage conscientious objectors and antimilitarists with investigations and trials, this will not be successful. We, who defend life against death, who defend peace against war, are not going to give up telling that conscientious objection is a human right."*

For more information and interviews please contact EBCO President Friedhelm Schneider (+4915204477675; friedhelm.schneider@gmx.de) or EBCO Vice-President Sam Biesemans (+32477268893; sambiesemans@skynet.be)

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.