



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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

Launch of EBCO's Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe in 2018

Brussels, 18 January 2019

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO) introduced today its latest Annual Report "Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe in 2018" at a press conference in Brussels.

"2018 has been a paradoxical year for the world's conscientious objection and anti-militarist movements," writes Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President, in his foreword. *"With the release from prison of all but 13 conscientious objectors in South Korea, the global total of imprisonments, which for decades has been in the hundreds, has shrunk to dozens. The sudden peace with Ethiopia means that Eritrea, the world's most egregious persecutor of conscientious objectors now lacks whatever excuse it ever had, although sadly there has not yet been any sign of change on the ground. Yet in Europe refugee tribunals continue to send conscientious objectors back to countries where they face conscription, if not worse. And populists continue to argue for a return of conscription at home."*

In the press conference itself, Derek Brett, EBCO's Special Representative to the UN, who compiled the Report, made some mention of these wider events, but he of course concentrated on developments in Europe itself. Recently back from the northern part of Cyprus, he started by talking with enthusiasm about the Draft Amendment to the Military Service Act, which although not perfect, marks the first recognition of conscientious objection there. (See recent EBCO press releases; unfolding events in the northern part of Cyprus will be covered in detail in the 2019 Report.) In the whole of Europe, even as most broadly defined by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, only Turkey itself still fails even to acknowledge the right of conscientious objection to military service. And even as the press conference was going on, in Nicosia the Military Court was, in the light of the publication of the Draft Amendment, ordering the release of conscientious objector Halil Karapasaoglu after serving only three days of his twenty-day sentence!

In 2018 conscientious objection was yet again absent from the political agenda of the Council of Europe and the European Union. This is fatal when it affects states which have for decades persecuted and mistreated conscientious objectors.

Azerbaijan promised the Council of Europe on accession in 2001 that it would adopt a law on alternative service in compliance with European standards by January 2003. It has still not done so. To this day Azerbaijani conscientious objectors are imprisoned – the authorities have no fear that the Council of Europe will imminently take effective action to end this severe human rights violation.

Regarding Turkey the situation is similar. The landmark decision pronounced in January 2006 in favour of conscientious objector Osman Murat Ülke by the European Court of Human Rights has not been implemented to this day. Despite a joint submission of EBCO, WRI and IFOR this failure has not been put on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers in 2018.

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.

And the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights claims that the ambiguous wording of paragraph 10.2 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights renders it incompetent to protect the right of conscientious objection to military service. This debate continues...

Fortunately some gleams of hope show that in 2018 the right to refuse to kill did not totally disappear from the awareness of European institutions. In the context of the European Social Charter, the European Committee of Social Rights in October declared admissible a complaint from the European Organisation of Military Associations aimed at obliging Ireland to make legal provision to enable members of its fully-professional armed forces to be released in the event of developing conscientious objections. The following month, the European Youth Forum adopted a comprehensive resolution on the right to conscientious objection to military service, inter alia calling on its member organisations to promote this as a youth right.

The full text of EBCO's Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe in 2018 will be available for downloading at www.ebco-beoc.org/reports from 17.00 Brussels time on Monday 21st January.

For more information and interviews please contact Derek Brett, compiler of the report (+41 4629825) derek.brett@ifor.org;) (English), Sam Biesemans, EBCO Vice-President and Special Representative to the European Institutions (+32 477268893; sambiesemans@skynet.be) (French, Dutch, Italian or English) or Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO President (friedhelm.schneider@bmx.de) (German)



Photo: Derek Brett, compiler of the report (left) and Sam Biesemans, EBCO Vice-President (right) during EBCO's press conference in Brussels today

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