



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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

EBCO strongly condemns the continuous persecution of Greek conscientious objectors

Brussels, 05 June 2013

On Monday 3rd June 2013 Michalis Tolis, a 30-year-old total objector was arrested and brought to the police station of Ioannina. The charge against him is insubordination. He was transferred to Athens and brought before the Military Court of Athens on Tuesday 4th June. The trial was postponed to today, Wednesday 5th June. Alexia Tsouni will observe the trial on behalf of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection.

This is not the first time that a civilian has been arrested and brought before a military court in Greece. Since February 2013 five declared Greek conscientious objectors have been put on trial by the military courts of Greece. *"We are shocked to observe that Greek conscientious objectors are anew confronted with a systematic persecution by military authorities. The obstinate violation of the right of conscientious objection to military service is shameful not only for Greece, but does damage to the credibility of the human rights politics of the European Union as a whole."*, EBCO President Friedhelm Schneider said today.

Michalis Tolis, a conscientious objector on ideological grounds and an active member of the Greek antimilitaristic movement, declared his total objection, along with three other conscientious objectors, on 19th September 2011. Their declaration concludes with the words: *«We refuse to man this murderous machine which exists for preserving your interests inside and outside the field called Greek state. We refuse to be the meat for your bombshells. We refuse to become the numbers for the geostrategic shares during treaties signed for "peace" or "war". We refuse to serve the brutality and further brutalization of this world, either with the growing militarization of everyday's life, during times of "peace", or with our participation in campaigns, ethnic cleansings, genocides, rapes, destructions and murders during times of "war".»*

This incident is another example of the violation of fundamental human rights in Greece and the increasing persecution of Greek conscientious objectors by the military authorities. EBCO notes that the European Court of Human Rights has explicitly recognised that the right to conscientious objection to military service is protected by the Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, on freedom of thought, conscience and religion (case of Bayatyan v. Armenia, application no. 23459/03, decision 01/06/2011).

Furthermore, a conscientious objector, like any other civilian, should never be tried by a military court. This was explicitly ruled by the European Court of Human Rights: it represents a violation of the right to a fair trial (Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights) (case of Ercep v. Turkey, application no. 43965/04, judgement 22/11/2011 and case of Feti Demirtaş v. Turkey, application no. 5260/07, judgment 17/01/2012, where the principle of not trying a civilian before a military court was extended to the situation of a person who had been incorporated in the military against his will).

Greece should immediately release conscientious objector Michalis Tolis and urgently comply with its human rights obligations.

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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.