



# European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

### **Regression and political lack of interest: EBCO criticises failure of European institutions to implement the right to conscientious objection**

Brussels, 14 February 2020

In its **Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2019**, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO) red-flags the multiple discriminations that conscientious objectors to military service continue to undergo in Europe. In the political context of a growing importance attached to European defence cooperation, armament projects and joint military operations, the right to conscientious objection to military service risks to be marginalized instead of being consistently perceived as a human right to be monitored and guaranteed.

***“For numerous conscientious objectors in Europe 2019 has been a year predominantly characterized by regression and political lack of interest to implement the right to conscientious objection in compliance with European human rights standards”,*** EBCO’s President Friedhelm Schneider stated today.

**Turkey** continued to prosecute conscientious objectors and to disrespect the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) pronounced since 2006 in favour of Turkish objectors. **Azerbaijan** did not adopt the law on alternative service promised on the occasion of its accession to the Council of Europe in 2001. In October 2019 the ECtHR decided that Azerbaijan is in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights because of its lack of civilian service as an alternative to military service (Judgement *Mushfig Mammadov and others v. Azerbaijan* of 17/10/2019).

Discrimination against conscientious objectors as part of the current legislation persists inter alia in **Ukraine, Russia** and **Greece**. In September and December 2019 the Swiss Council of States as well as the National Assembly of **Switzerland** argued for an amendment of the Alternative service law aggravating the accession to alternative service by massive restrictions.

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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.

Unfortunately as a result of a change of government in **Greece** and in the Turkish-occupied northern part of **Cyprus** indications of a positive development finally did not prevail in the political process: After a long period of international advocacy work in June 2019 the former Greek Syriza government reduced the discriminatory duration of alternative service from usually 15 to 12 months. In October 2019 the corresponding decree was revoked by the newly-elected Nea Demokratia government so that the alternative service for conscientious objectors continues to be 6 months longer than the military service of most conscripts.

In January 2019 it was sensational news that the Council of Ministers of the Turkish-occupied northern part of Cyprus had submitted to the Parliament a draft law which included the right to conscientious objection. The Parliamentary Committee of Law, Political Affairs and Foreign Relations started to discuss the draft law and had a number of meetings. Unfortunately, after a change of government, the draft law proposal was withdrawn in autumn 2019 and there is no further discussion on the matter.

Besides common difficulties related to the conscientious objection of conscripts, particular problems persist when conscientious objection coincides with the situation of **underaged recruits**, **professional soldiers** and **refugees**.

On the whole it remains a serious problem that, though having signed the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and/or the European Convention of Human Rights, **states can evidently violate the right to conscientious objection with impunity**. The recurrent impression that the disregard of this right is condoned by the European community of states weakens the credibility of European human rights policy altogether. The overview given in EBCO's Annual Report 2019 illustrates once more that **the human right to conscientious objection needs implementation instead of indifference**.

*"In May 2019 EBCO signed as one of 110 organisations the appeal: [Save the European Peace Project](#). Addressed to the members of the incoming European Parliament this appeal embodies a critical assessment of the ongoing militarization of Europe and argues for a European Union that advocates peace and human rights – at home and beyond its borders", EBCO's President Friedhelm Schneider concluded.*

**NOTE: You can find more information in EBCO's Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2019 (available at [www.ebco-beoc.org/](http://www.ebco-beoc.org/))**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND INTERVIEWS** please contact:

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