



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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

UKRAINE: EBCO shocked by the continuation of prosecution and attacks against Ruslan Kotsaba

Criticism of the military is not a crime! Violence is a crime!

Brussels, 23 January 2021

The retrial of Ukrainian journalist, pacifist and conscientious objector Ruslan Kotsaba started yesterday, and what is more, he was attacked by a far-right mob and sprayed with a fire extinguisher with the mob chanting "*Death to the enemies! Ukraine above all!*"

"Following [EBCO's open letter to the Ukrainian authorities on December 8th 2020](#), calling for the dropping of all charges against Ruslan Kotsaba, we were shocked to see that not only his prosecution continues, but also his life is under threat", Alexia Tsouni, EBCO President stated today. "The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection calls for the immediate and unconditional end of the criminal prosecution against Ruslan Kotsaba, and demands that inciters of hatred and violence are held accountable. Criticism of the military is not a crime! Violence is a crime!", she added.

During the trial yesterday, ten of the prosecution's witnesses testified. Next hearings are scheduled on 18 March 2021. Ruslan Kotsaba is prosecuted simply because he publicly expressed his pacifist views. EBCO considers his case a clear politically motivated persecution, in violation of his rights to freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, guaranteed under Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

EBCO expresses solidarity with Ruslan Kotsaba, who has stated "*I'd rather go to jail than to civil war*", and urges the Ukrainian authorities to safeguard that all pacifists in Ukraine, including the activists of EBCO's member organisation Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, are able to freely express their opinions and continue their non-violent activity. EBCO also urges the Ukrainian authorities to safeguard the right to conscientious objection to military service, according to the European and international standards, amongst others the standards set by the European Court of Human Rights.

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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.