



## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

### **EBCO Annual Report 2021 on Conscientious Objection to Military Service: Conscientious objectors in risk in several European countries**

Brussels, 21 March 2022

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection publishes today its **Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2021**, covering the region of **Council of Europe (CoE)**.

*"EBCO's Annual Report concludes that **Europe was not a safe place in 2021** for many conscientious objectors in several countries who faced **prosecution, arrests, trials by military courts, imprisonments, fines, intimidation, attacks, death threats, and discrimination**. These countries include **Turkey** (the only CoE member state who has not yet recognised the right to conscientious objection), and consequently the **Turkish-occupied northern part of Cyprus** (the self-styled "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus"), **Azerbaijan** (where there is still no law on alternative service), **Armenia, Russia, Ukraine, Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, Georgia, Finland, Austria, Switzerland, Estonia, Lithuania, and Belarus** (candidate)", EBCO's President Alexia Tsouni stated today.*

The **human right to conscientious objection to military service** was not high in the European agenda in 2021, although conscription is still enforced in 18 Council of Europe (CoE) Member States. They are: **Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia** (reintroduced in 2017), **Greece, Lithuania** (reintroduced in 2015), **Moldova, Norway, Russia, Sweden** (reintroduced in 2018), **Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine** (reintroduced in 2014), and **Belarus** (candidate).

At the same time **refugees** are not always granted international protection as they should. However; in **Germany**, the asylum application of Beran Mehmet İşçi (from Turkey and of Kurdish origin) was accepted in September 2021 and he was granted the refugee status.

As for the minimum conscription age, although the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict** encourages states to end all recruitment of persons below the age of 18, a disturbing number of European states continues to do this. Worse, some breach the absolute prohibitions in the Optional Protocol by placing servicemen aged under 18 at risk of active deployment, or by allowing conscripts to enlist before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Exceptionally, although not during 2021 which is the scope of this report, a special reference needs to be made to the **Russian invasion in Ukraine** on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022. On the same day EBCO strongly condemned the invasion and called all parties to strictly adhere to

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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.

international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the right to conscientious objection to military service, and to protect civilians, including internally displaced persons and refugees. EBCO urged to end the war with an immediate ceasefire leaving space for negotiation and diplomacy. EBCO stands in solidarity with the pacifist movements in Russia and Ukraine, and shares their statements for peace, non-violence, and conscientious objection, which are indeed **a source of hope and inspiration**:<sup>1</sup>

Statement by the Movement of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service in **Russia**:<sup>2</sup>

*What is happening in Ukraine is a war unleashed by Russia. The Conscientious Objectors Movement condemns the Russian military aggression. And calls on Russia to stop the war. The Conscientious Objectors Movement calls on the Russian soldiers not to participate in hostilities. Do not become war criminals. The Conscientious Objectors Movement calls on all recruits to refuse military service: apply for alternative civilian service, be exempted on medical grounds.*

Statement by the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement in **Ukraine**:<sup>3</sup>

*The Ukrainian Pacifist Movement condemns all military actions by the sides of Russia and Ukraine in the context of the current conflict. We call the leadership of both states and military forces to step back and sit at the negotiation table. Peace in Ukraine and around the world can be achieved only in a non-violent way. War is a crime against humanity. Therefore, we are determined not to support any kind of war and to strive for the removal of all causes of war.*

Given the **ongoing war** and the **anti-war protests**, on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2022 EBCO expressed its respect for and solidarity with all the courageous conscientious objectors, anti-war activists and civilians from all parties to the war and called on Europe to provide them with concrete support. EBCO strongly condemns the Russian invasion of Ukraine as well as NATO's expansion to the east. EBCO calls on the soldiers not to participate in hostilities and on all recruits to refuse military service.<sup>4</sup>

The Annual Report describes the expansion of the mandatory military service in **Ukraine** and the enforcement of conscription without exceptions for conscientious objectors in 2021. The situation deteriorated after the Russian invasion and martial law, with travel ban for almost all men and aggressive military recruitment of foreign students. EBCO regrets about the decision of the Ukrainian government, enforcing total military mobilization, to prohibit all men aged from 18 to 60 to leave the country, which led to discrimination against conscientious objectors to military service, who were deprived of their right to seek refuge abroad.

**NOTE: You can find more information in EBCO's Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2021, including maps and tables, at <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/526>**

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

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.ebco-beoc.org/node/519>

<sup>2</sup> 24/02/2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/stoparmy/posts/2883903101907717>

<sup>3</sup> 24/02/2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/peaceukraine/posts/693464492022473>

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://www.ebco-beoc.org/node/523>

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