



EBCO NEW ANNUAL REPORT ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN EUROPE *A Call to Safeguard the Right to Refuse to Kill and Resist Wars*

Brussels, 5th June 2025

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO) announces the publication of its Annual Report "Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe - 2024". It is available online on the EBCO website (www.ebco-beoc.org).

Executive Summary

EBCO's 2024 Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe is released at a time of **escalating global militarisation**. From the revival of conscription in Europe to the devastating impacts



of ongoing wars, **the protection and empowerment of conscientious objectors is more urgent than ever.**

This year's report documents persistent violations of conscientious objectors' rights - particularly in **Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Türkiye, Cyprus and Greece** - and emerging threats to the right to conscientious objection under the **Council of Europe framework**. Notably, EBCO and its partners took legal action through a collective complaint to **the European Committee of Social Rights** regarding Greece, reflecting

a broader push to enforce protections under the European Social Charter.

As armed conflicts persist in Ukraine and elsewhere, the European Union's push for rearmament - including the proposed €800 billion increase in military spending - threatens peace, democracy, and social equity; the Resolution of the European Parliament dated 2 April 2025, additionally, encourages educational and awareness-raising programs for young people on the importance and knowledge of the armed forces. **Rather than reinforcing common security, such militarisation undermines essential services, increases global instability,** and brings the endless pains of the war system rather than benefits of the peace culture.

Conscientious objection to military service is a fundamental human right which must be protected. It is inherent in the human right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, stated in art. 18 of the Human Rights Declaration, in art. 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in art. 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union - **and, as defined by the European Youth Forum and the UN 75 Human Rights Declaration, is a youth right.**

EBCO remains actively engaged in the international #ObjectWarCampaign, supporting Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian conscientious objectors and advocating for their protection and asylum in EU countries. It calls on the Russian Federation to respect the right to conscientious objection, end conscription and military propaganda, demilitarize education in occupied Ukrainian territories, and pursue full demilitarization. EBCO also urges Ukraine to uphold this right during wartime and to cease the persecution of objectors and their supporters, including EBCO Board member Yuriy Sheliashenko.

We welcome the Venice Commission's clear statement in its amicus curiae opinion, concerning the case of **Dmytro Zelinsky** - that no objector can be forced to bear arms.

We would like to recall the final *Urbi et Orbi* message of the late Pope Francis urging for true disarmament and solidarity, highlighting that the **"weapons" of peace are compassion, justice, and development - not militarisation**. We welcome the first statement of Pope Leo XIV calling for **"unarmed and disarming peace"**.

The report concludes with concrete recommendations: **full recognition of the human right to conscientious objection to military service in all countries, genuine civilian alternative service, asylum and protection for all objectors in danger of being persecuted or forced to participate in armed conflict, and alignment of national laws with international human rights standards**. Furthermore, the report recommends **adequate arrangements for conscientious objectors and nonviolent action in countries' institutional and legal preparations for any kind of emergencies and responses to perceived threats for peace**. It also calls to **prevent militarization of curricula and support peace education**.

Releasing this report, EBCO reiterates that while this report focuses on the Council of Europe region, **we also stand in solidarity with all prisoners of conscience, nonviolent resisters to war and militarization** around the world, **including in Israel/Palestine, Myanmar, Sudan, Colombia** and elsewhere that fall outside the geographical scope of this report.

About the Annual Report

Each year, EBCO publishes its **Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe**, drawing on contributions from **national governments, human rights institutions, NGOs, and solidarity networks**. The report is presented to the **European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly and Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, and relevant state authorities** - each time accompanied by a set of targeted recommendations.

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The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO), founded in Brussels in **1979**, promotes the right to conscientious objection to war and military activity as a fundamental human right. It has held participatory status with the **Council of Europe** since 1998 and has been a member of its **Conference of INGOs** since 2005. Since 2021, EBCO can lodge collective complaints under the European Social Charter. EBCO has also been a full member of **the European Youth Forum** since 1995.