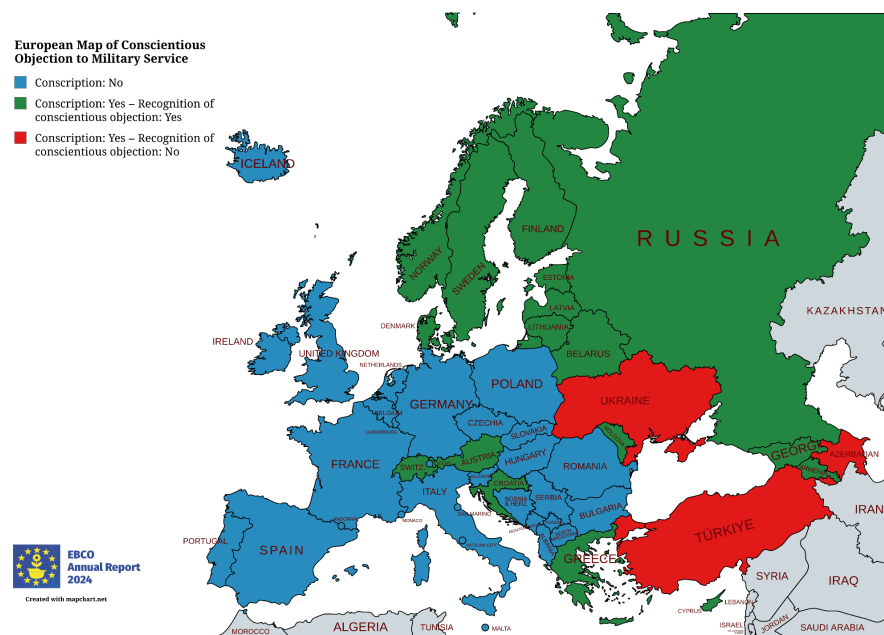




Contribution of EBCO to the UN OHCHR reporting to the UN Human Rights Council on conscientious objection to military service

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.

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 ever¹. In time of escalating global militarisation, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection releases every year the Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe. An archive of annual reports is available at the EBCO website². Our annual reports³ document persistent violations of conscientious objectors' rights — e.g. in Russia⁴, Ukraine⁵, Belarus⁶, Türkiye⁷, Azerbaijan⁸, Cyprus⁹ and Greece¹⁰ — and emerging threats to the right to conscientious objection under the Council of Europe framework.



¹ <https://ebco-beoc.org/press-release/2025-06-05-press-release-ebco-annual-report-2024>

² <https://ebco-beoc.org/reports>

³ Conscientious objection to military service in Europe 2024

https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2025-06-05-EBCO_Annual_Report_2024.pdf ; Conscientious objection to military service in Europe 2023/24

https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/2024-05-15-EBCO_Annual_Report_2023-24.pdf ; Conscientious objection to military service in Europe 2022/23

https://ebco-beoc.org/sites/ebco-beoc.org/files/attachments/2023-05-12-EBCO_Annual_Report_2022-23.pdf

⁴ <https://ebco-beoc.org/russia/2024>

⁵ <https://ebco-beoc.org/ukraine/2024>

⁶ <https://ebco-beoc.org/belarus/2024>

⁷ <https://ebco-beoc.org/turkey/2024>

⁸ <https://ebco-beoc.org/azerbaijan/2023>

⁹ <https://ebco-beoc.org/cyprus/2024>

¹⁰ <https://ebco-beoc.org/greece/2024>

Conscientious objectors to military service in danger

In Türkiye, conscientious objection to military service is still not legally recognized and the consequences for those who refuse to serve in the army are described as “civil death” of conscientious objectors. In a Joint press release with Connection e.V., International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) and War Resisters’ International (WRI) we expressed a deep concern by the ongoing prosecution of conscientious objectors in the self-declared state of “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (TRNC), despite clear rulings from both domestic and international courts affirming their rights. The case of Hasan Rahvancıoğlu highlights the urgent need for legislative reform: he has peacefully and publicly declared his conscientious objection to military service, stated that he will not pay any fines imposed by the court, meaning he faces imprisonment simply for exercising his freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. We call on the authorities in the “TRNC” urgently to amend the Military Service Act so as to recognise the right of conscientious objection to military service, including with regard to reservist service, and to implement the Kanatlı judgement by forthwith ceasing prosecution of conscientious objector.¹¹

Greece¹² presents a punitive alternative service and has not yet taken any action to implement the recommendation of the UN Human Rights Committee that it “should also consider placing the assessment of applications for conscientious objector status under the full control of civilian authorities”.¹³

We are concerned of the Russian Federation’s¹⁴ disproportionate forced mobilization and conscription and lack of recognition of the right to conscientious objection¹⁵, obstruction of human rights work by declaring Artem Klyga a “foreign agent,”¹⁶ imprisonment of Elena Popova, co-founder of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors,¹⁷ forcible imposition of military registration and conscription in occupied territories of Ukraine, pressuring civilians to sign contracts for military service and indoctrinating children militaristically¹⁸.

We are concerned that in Ukraine¹⁹ there are still no effective procedures for conscientious objection claims and no exemption from military duty. Arbitrary detentions, cruel treatment, discrimination and imprisonment of conscientious objectors continues. 15 known prisoners of conscience²⁰ were not released; the Constitutional Court of Ukraine did not manage to consider quickly enough constitutional complaints of conscientious objectors. We note with concern a new mass imprisonment of conscientious objectors including Seventh-day Adventist Andrii Skliar tortured during forcible mobilization²¹ and a provocative call to report in the conscription office on Christmas Eve to Ukrainian Quaker and human rights defender Yurii Sheliashenko²².

¹¹ <https://ebco-beoc.org/turkey/2024> ; for a call to stop persecution of Hasan Rahvancıoğlu in “TRPK”: <https://ebco-beoc.org/press-release/2025-11-24-joint-press-release-stop-prosecuting-hasan-rahvancioglu>

¹² <https://ebco-beoc.org/greece/2024>

¹³ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4454>

¹⁴ <https://ebco-beoc.org/russia/2024>

¹⁵ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4644>

¹⁶ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4660>

¹⁷ https://x.com/mediazona_en/status/1952739158553657496 ; “I’ll probably never see my parents again.” The co-founder of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors fled Russia due to a criminal case. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/roditeley-navernoe-bolshe-ne-uvizhu-soosnovatel'nitsa-dvizheniya-soznatelnyh-otkaz-hikov-sbezhala-iz-rossii-iz-za-ugolovnogo-dela/33648195.html> (in Russian)

¹⁸ <https://en.connection-ev.org/article-4652>

¹⁹ <https://ebco-beoc.org/ukraine/2024>

²⁰ https://en.connection-ev.org/pdfs/59thHRCWRIIDitem10Ukraine_publicupdated-191.pdf ; see also <https://www.civilni.media/331/>

²¹ <https://www.civilni.media/514/>

²² <https://www.civilni.media/524/> ; regarding criminalization of peace and human rights speech and arbitrary prosecution of Yurii Sheliashenko, see also <https://ebco-beoc.org/node/628>

We are also concerned about the increasing number of conscientious objectors who seek for protection abroad because they are at risk of persecution and their life may be in danger in their country of origin. Many cases are pending in European countries and the majority of the decisions are not for granting protection, in violation of the UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection²³.

Recommendations to all European States and beyond:

1. if they have not already done so, to abolish all compulsory military service, and meanwhile refrain from prosecuting or otherwise harassing conscientious objectors, those who support them or advocate conscientious objection, with no further action required from such persons; or –secondly– providing a nonpunitive and non-discriminatory alternative service of purely civilian nature, that must be not subservient to the military system, but designed and managed with participation of conscientious objectors;
2. to recognise in law the right to conscientious objection to military service, including the right to conscientious objection to all forms of mandatory registration, education and training for the purposes of conscription in peacetime and in time of war, and ensure that it is possible for all conscientious objectors to avoid enlistment in the armed forces and for all serving members of the armed forces or reservists to obtain release without penalties should they develop conscientious objections, and that the civil, economic and political rights of conscientious objectors are fully protected;
3. to recognize conscientious objection as a vital part of pluralism and freedom of religions and beliefs in democratic society, ensure awareness of legitimacy of conscientious objection among officials and the public, and ensure non-discrimination of conscientious objectors, who should not be subjected to hate campaigns and should not be presumed guilty in crime of draft evasion, or any other crime, and compelled to prove their innocence;
4. to immediately cease any recruitment into the armed forces of persons aged under 18 and stop any military-type training of such persons;
5. to accept applications for asylum from all persons seeking to escape military service in any country where there is no adequate provision for conscientious objectors, and especially where they are in danger of being otherwise forced to participate in armed conflict;
6. to decrease military expenditure and increase social spending, and to make available to citizens with conscientious objections means of specifying that no part of the taxes which they have personally paid is directed towards military expenditure;
7. to introduce peace education in all parts of the education system and prevent any form of militarisation of curricula;
8. To make adequate arrangements for conscientious objectors and nonviolent action in their institutional and legal preparations for any kind of emergencies and responses to perceived threats for peace, remembering that legitimate scruples of conscience might preclude significant number of civilians from subordinating to military system, and under no circumstances may a conscientious objector to military service be obliged to bear or use arms, even in self-defence of the country.

²³ <https://www.unhcr.org/media/guidelines-international-protection-no-10-claims-refugee-status-related-military-service>