

The Right to Refuse to Kill

Conscientious Objection and Orthodox Church

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Owner & Account-Number
EBCO 001-1076165-26
Bank and Location
FORTIS BANQUE Bruxelles
IBAN
BE59 0011 0761 6526
BIC
GEBABEBB

Imprint:

Publisher:

EBCO International Secretariat

Design and Editing:

Gerd Greune/Tobias Ehlich

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Since EBCO is concentrating its activities on Eastern Europe in recent times, the important question was raised about the relation of CO's and the Orthodox Churches.

To look for an answer, Hans Dijkman, visited Mr. Jim Forest, secretary of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship in June. Here the main points of their conversation.

Jim Forest knows EBCO personally from the time that the International Fellowship of Reconciliation had its headquarter in Brussels, which he worked for then. Relationship between CO's and his organization is an important subject for him. A major problem in this respect for him was that he never met CO's in countries he visited and where Orthodox Churches play a role in society—probably because they sought asylum in other countries he added. He is very much willing to help them and use his contacts in the Orthodox world for their support.

I asked him if the Orthodox Churches are not the churches that always support armies, and oppose those who want to refuse military service.

He explained that many Eastern European Countries have lived during the Ottoman Empire under heavy oppression, during a very long time. Experiences in Greece are the most recent and still vivid



Jim Forest, secretary of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship

This does not mean that Orthodox Churches support violence. They consider war as sinful and tragic. If you, for whatever reason or circumstances, killed a person, you are not allowed to become a priest in the Orthodox Church for the rest of your life, according to church-laws.

In daily life there is support for the army from church-members and clergy. But this does not mean that objection to military service cannot be supported by the church.

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship very much wants to support orthodox CO's, wants to change attitudes, but cannot do so without knowing these CO's in the "orthodox" countries. If EBCO or its member-organizations can give names of those who are looking for support we can organize that and get the clergy interested. In practice this is difficult or impossible when these CO's stand negative or hostile towards the Orthodox Church, for instance when they are Jehova Witness.

Serbia, Greece and Russia

Another example for orthodox pacifism is Patriarch Pavle, as head of the Orthodox Church in Serbia. In Belgrade he interfered when demonstrators and police stood aggressively against each other. He organized a peaceful Church-Procession through their lines, preventing violence. This patriarch certainly is open for contacts. He opposed the Milosovic-regime. But still, the Orthodox Church does not play a key role in Serbian society. After the Ottoman and the Communist period very few people are baptized. It is a secular society with an orthodox history, with people who are indicated as "religious atheists". A more conservative regime is not more church-oriented as other governments.

Moral and pastoral support must be possible to organize for Orthodox-CO's in Russia. This country has pacifism in its history. The Orthodox Peace Fellowship has contacts with the clergy in Russia, and is willing to use its influence.

The Greek Orthodox are very patriotic, proud of overthrowing the Turkish regime. But also here Jim Forest's organization can use its influence and establish contacts with religious leaders - in favor of CO's, especially if they are member of the Orthodox Church.

Continued from page one

My conclusion after talking with Jim Forest is that the Orthodox Churches do not stand differently towards Conscientious Objection to military service compared with Catholic or Protestant Churches.

There is no doubt that the majority of all churches support the army. But all these churches condemn war at the same time. There are always openings and possibilities to gain support for those who, like EBCO, struggle against war, war-participation and war-preparation.

The Orthodox Peace Fellowship is open for contact and cooperation with us.

Their web-site:
www.incommunion.org
E-mail:
incommunion@cs.com

23rd International Conscientious Objection Day

Turkey: On May 15, International Conscientious Objection Day, Turkish objectors and sympathizers celebrated the 'Militourism Festival' – a "tourist trip" to some of the well-known militarist symbols in Istanbul. Around 120 people in three buses got an introduction to historical and political features of these symbols.



Souvenir photo: Card-board with caricature

During their trip through Istanbul, they were escorted by police. Among the sites visited were the war academy, a military hospital, a rifle fac-

tory and several statues of "war heroes". After the sightseeing, a group of five men and five women declared their conscientious objection. At the end, the participants symbolically broke plastic toy rifles.

News from Greece

After the promising end of Lazaros Petromelidis' trial in February—the Navy Court Martial of Thessaloniki transferred the case to a civilian court—it looked like the harassment would start again when he received a letter from the Navy Court Martial of Piraeus, his hometown, to show up at the court for unspecified reason saying that his presence would be obligatory. The local conscription office also demanded a transcript of the trial in Thessaloniki!

Since those demands were without legal basis, Lazaros refused to do what he was asked for and soon both orders were withdrawn.

In the meantime, the Association of Greek COs has been registered as a non-profit organization after existing many years without legal status. Lazaros Petromelidis has been elected first president.

Conscientious objection in Ukraine

As part EBCO's efforts inform about the CO situation in the new neighbor counties, here is a quick overview of the legal conditions in Ukraine, by size and population one of the biggest countries in Europe.

All young men have to serve a mandatory military service, which takes 18 months. In 1991 a law was passed that established civilian service, but like in other countries of the former Soviet Union, the legal provisions present severe shortcomings and are clearly punitive. Most poten-

tial objectors are prohibited from civilian service since only religious motives are accepted. Moreover, the objector has to be a member of one of the following "state-recognized religious communities": Adventists, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Charismatic Christian Church.

As if this would not be enough, the service is 27 months long, nine months more than the regular service. A potential objector has to file a declaration that has to be signed by both a church and a public au-

thority which is then presented to a committee. The only positive aspect is that the ministry of defense has not the supervision of the recognition procedure but the ministry of labor. In the end, 3000 men serve civilian service each year—not much for a country with 55 mill. inhabitants.

But it is positive that many objectors do not serve any service since only 10–20% of all conscripts are called up for military service—similar to the situation in other ex-communist countries.

EBCO initiates appeal for a non-militaristic EU-constitution

At the beginning of May, EBCO published an appeal for changing the European Draft Constitution together with its partner organization IFIAS (Institute for International Assistance and Solidarity).

In the draft treaty establishing a constitution for Europe it reads:



"Member States shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities."
Section I, Article 40.3

EBCO wants to see this corrected to:

"Member States shall undertake progressively to reduce military capabilities worldwide."

The appeal was spread via email and on paper both in English and in German. Several dozen people, among them Member of the European Parliament Jo Leinen, signed the appeal.

Originally it was planned to hand the signatures over to the heads of government at the EU summit in Brussels on June 17, but due to the very high security measures impossible.

You can download EBCO's appeal here:
www.ebco-beoc.org/docs.htm

After the failed reunification — what about CO in Northern Cyprus?

Since the referendum about reunification of the divided island failed in April, Northern Cyprus did not become a part of the European Union on May 1.

Being isolated from the rest of the European community and not forced to fulfill legal standards like concerning human and civil rights, Northern Cyprus remains a vacuum for conscientious objection. There is no right to conscientious objection and the possibility to perform an alternative service—one of the few things that the two parts of the island have in common.

Here we would like to give you a quick impression of the concerning legislation:

The military service in Northern Cyprus is regulated under the Military Service Law No 59/2000. We tried to translate some useful articles of the law, but bare in mind that this is not an official translation.

Article 4 of the Military Law states that "Every citizen of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is responsible of fulfilling his military duty according to this law. If there are extraordinary conditions, upon the approval of the Parliament of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the women at the military age, can be taken to the military services as well."

Another Finnish CO imprisoned

On May 31, Finnish total objector Juha Lehtonen (age 21) started his prison sentence of 197 days. Juha Lehtonen was convicted for refusing to do military or substitute service in March this year.

In a declaration explaining his total objection, Juha Lehtonen wrote that he cannot accept violent institutions like the military. He also refused to do substitute service either, due to the reason that the right to conscientious objection is only recognized in peacetime in Finland. Another reason is that the length of substitute service is punitive (twice as much as military service). Therefore, the civilian service provided was not a true alternative service for Juha.

He is one of 27 total objectors who were imprisoned as of 1st June 2004. Because of that fact, EBCO's member War Resisters' International will focus on Finland during the 2004 Prisoners for Peace Day campaign.

(Madde 4: Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti yurttasi olan her kisi bu Yasa gereginde askerlik ödevini yapmakla yükümlüdür. Olaganüstü durum halinde, Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Cumhuriyet Meclisi'nin onayı ile askerlik çağı içinde bulunan kadınlarda da askerliğe alınabilirler...)

Article 5 of the Military Law states that "The ones who are entitled to Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus citizenship, once proving that they have completed their military service or they have been exempted from military service in their previous citizenship, are not going to be taken to the military services."

(Madde 5: Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti yurttaşlığına geçenlerden eski yurttaşlıklarında askerlik hizmetlerini yerine getirdiklerini veya muaf olduklarını belgelenenler bu yasa uyarınca askere alınmazlar...)

Article 8 of the Military Law states that the ones who are not eligible mentally and physically are exempt from the military service.

(Madde 8: Güvenlik Kuvvetlerinin Kurulus,

Görev ve Yetkileri Yasası uyarınca çıkarılan Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti Devleti Güvenlik Kuvvetleri Komutanlığı Sağlık Yeteneği Tüzüğüne göre aklen veya bedenen askerliğe elverişli olmayanlar askerlikten muaftırlar.)

Article 10 of the Military Law states that "Conscription service period is 15 months... (According to the amendment 59/2003 of the Constitution. This law is applicable as of 1 September 2003 and applies to the ones who are still under the conscription service.)"

(Madde 10: Mükellefiyet hizmet süresi 15 aydır. Ancak insan kaynağının yeterliliğine bağlı olarak bu süre, Güvenlik Kuvvetleri Komutanlığının teklifi, Başbakanlığın önerisi ve Bakanlar Kurulunun kararı ile değiştirilebilir. (Anayasanın 59/2003 sayılı Askerlik (Değişiklik) yasası uyarınca son durumdur. Bu Yasa, 1 Eylül 2003 tarihinden itibaren yürürlüğe girer ve halen mükellefiyet hizmetini yerine getirmekte olanlara da uygulanır.))

According to the same law, the conscription service ages is from 19 to 30.

First US Iraq Veteran sentenced for conscientious objection

At the end of May, US Army staff sergeant Camilo Mejia was sentenced to one year of imprisonment by a military court. He will also be reduced in rank forced to pay a forfeiture of 2/3 of his annual salary plus a bad conduct discharge. The case was decided by a special court martial at Fort Stewart, Georgia. Camilo Mejia was convicted for desertion, although he applied for conscientious objector status.

After returning from his service in Iraq, Camilo Mejia went into hiding after for preparing his conscientious objection application and to get some rest after traumatic experiences. His application is still pending, but it was neglected by the court.

Camilo Mejia is presently being held in police custody at Fort Stewart, and will be transferred to a military prison sometime in the next few



days. It is presently not known if the court will grant him bail while pursuing an appeal. EBCO and War Resisters' International call for letters of support to Camilo Mejia:

Ssg. Camilo Mejia
A Company USAG MED-HOLD 865
Hase Road
Ft. Stewart, GA 31315, USA

Overview - conscription and civilian service in the European Union member states

| EU Member | Conscription (no more conscription since ...) | Duration compulsory military service | Duration alternative service | Remarks/end of conscription |
|-----------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Austria | Yes | 8 months | 12 months | |
| Belgium | No (since 1995) | | | |
| Cyprus | Yes | <i>26 months</i> | <i>Unarmed m. service: 42 months, no alternative service</i> | |
| Czech Republic | Yes | <i>12 months</i> | <i>18 months</i> | 2005 |
| Denmark | Yes | 4 to 12 months, most conscripts | Same as m. service | |
| Estonia | Yes | <i>8 - 11 months</i> | <i>Same as m. service</i> | |
| Finland | Yes | 180 days | 395 days | |
| France | No (since 2001) | | | |
| Germany | Yes | 9 months | 10 months | 9 months from 10/2004 |
| Greece | Yes | 12 months | 30 months | |
| Hungary | Yes | <i>9 months</i> | <i>18 months</i> | 2005 |
| Ireland | No | | | |
| Italy | Yes | 10 months | 10 months | 2005 |
| Latvia | Yes | <i>12 months</i> | 24 months | |
| Lithuania | Yes | <i>12 months</i> | <i>18 months</i> | |
| Luxemburg | No | | | |
| Malta | No | | | |
| Netherlands | No (since 1996) | | | |
| Poland | Yes | <i>12 months</i> | <i>18 months</i> | |
| Portugal | Yes | 4 months | 4 months | 2004 |
| Slovak Republic | Yes | <i>12 months</i> | <i>24 months</i> | 2006 |
| Slovenia | No (since 2003) | | | |
| Spain | No (since 2001) | | | |
| Sweden | Yes | 7,5 months | 7,5 months | |
| UK | No | | | |

In May, Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's delegate to the Council of Europe, compiled a table giving an overview of the conscription and civilian service duration in the member states of the European Union.

At the moment, there is no conscription in 9 EU member states, till 2006 5 more states will abolish or suspend compulsory military (and civilian) service.

In all EU states that continue to base their defence on conscription conscripts can apply for conscientious objector status by compelling religious or moral grounds contradicting the use of arms.

In most EU countries civilian service is performed outside the context of military organisation. 6 EU members lay down the same duration of military and civilian service (as before the end of conscription it was the case in Spain and Slovenia, too). In 5 EU states the excessive length of civilian service represents a severe violation of European Human Rights standards. Right now, Cyprus is the only EU member that does not recognize the right to conscientious objection in any form and has no alternative service for conscripts.