

Report on the youth activities 2002/2003

EBCO Annual Study Session 2002

Title: „Grassroots Work for Conflict Prevention and Peace in South-East Europe“

Date: 16-23 June 2002

Location: European Youth Centre, Strasbourg

Participants: 30

Represented Countries: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Yugoslavia

Outcomes:

EBCO Balkan network activities

EBCO Balkans was registered as a national NGO in Belgrade in December 2002. Since then, it had conducted several activities for young men, e.g.:

"100 COs - Action"

In order to draw the attention of the media to Conscientious Objection and to present the importance of the issue to the government, 100 young conscripts declared through signature that they want to perform civilian service; a list was presented to the Ministry of Defence, as a first step to prove the actual need to make provision for those young men who insist on their constitutional right to CO.

CO Information Network

As polls prove, most young men in former Yugoslavia are completely unaware or poorly informed about their right to refuse military service. EBCO Balkans diffuses information among students, workers and other young men through monthly publications, brochures and legal advice.

Regional Seminars and Conferences

(see below)

EBCO Annual Study Session 2003

Title: "New Challenges for Peace: From the global to the local view"

Date: 9- 16 March 2003

Location: European Youth Centre, Strasbourg

Participants: 29

Represented Countries: Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Macedonia, Norway, Russia, Serbia & Montenegro, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom

Outcomes: The meeting will be a study session aiming to develop ideas for a common strategy for the youth work for peace in Europe. Through the combination of the training and the reflection dimension, we would like to review the agenda of peace work from the youth point of view, with special care on the nature of developments at the local level.

The envisaged programme would lead us to a discussion starting from the classic issues of peace work (conscientious objection to military service, arms trade, etc.), to continue with newer issues (equality, gender, environment, the global war on terrorism). That would produce the global picture of things to be done.

The second step would consist in putting this global agenda in contrast with what the actual daily preoccupations and work of the activists in their local reality are. This would make possible to confront a global approach with another one based on daily work and daily preoccupations of the people, trying to reach an understanding on how to fight for everyone's human rights and on the complexity of it when considering a multicultural environment and a big diversity of situations.

All this evaluative and reflective work would then lead to some prospective thinking on what to do where and on how to integrate the different local realities in a global agenda so that the contradictions among the two ones can be tackled. The global aim is thus to evaluate, rethink and propose new lines of work.

Sarajevo Seminar

Title: „Objecting for Peace in former Yugoslavia“

Date: 26-30 March 2003

Location: Sarajevo, Bosnien & Herzegovina

Participants: 30

Represented Countries: Bosnia & Herzegovina, Germany, Macedonia, Serbia & Montenegro, Spain

Outcomes: On 29th March a public session was held in the Parliamentary building and attended by representatives of the BiH Ministries of Defence and Justice (Federation and Republika Srpska) and representatives from UNDP – United Nations Development Programme, OSCE and the Council of Europe local offices.

Jordi Tolra (EBCO Barcelona) spoke about alternative service, its role in society and compared the situation in former Yugoslavia to the historical development in Spain. Gerd Greune (EBCO Brussels) reminded them of the European standards, The European Parliament resolutions on CO and the Council of Europe decisions. “Key issue is the protection of the individual against requirements enforced by the state (conscription) and this protection is even guaranteed by the state itself,” he said. “This is the revolutionary part of the human rights agenda.”

The representatives of the Ministry of Justice declared support for CO. In addition, they expressed their willingness to support the campaign by facilitating the administrative process of application for Alternative Civilian Service and through improving the legal framework for COs (the army shall not draft COs if their application is not being dealt with by the administration in time).

The Council of Europe representative underlined the fact that the Freedom of conscience and the right of conscientious objection is a key for becoming a member of the Council of Europe family.

Skopje Skopje

Title: „Objection for Peace“

Date: 30 May-1 June 2003

Location: Skopje, Macedonia

Participants: 20

Represented Countries: Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Netherlands, Serbia & Montenegro, Spain

Outcomes: A presentation of the regional network for CO's on the Balkans took place at the beginning of the seminar, for which the press showed much interest.

The seminar also included a discussion about flaws and improvements of the regional network. Several future steps were approved, e.g. holding meetings on a three-month basis, enlarging the administration's capacities and creating a website.

In addition, a common statement towards regional improvement of CO status was considered. After a general debate about the declaration's objectives, a smaller working-group gathered, carving out the final statement. Like most of the seminar, it was drafted and published in Serbo-Croatian.

In addition to that, the event also enabled an exchange about the situation of COs in the participating countries.

Participation in the European Youth Week

Title: „European Youth Week – Youth in Action“

Date: 30 September-1 October 2003

Location: EU-Commission's building DG Education and Culture, Brussels

Participants and Representatives from the European Youth Forum's member organisations

Outcomes: EBCO was represented by its delegate to the Youth Forum, Tobias Ehlich, and a stand in the exhibition. Many young people informed themselves about conscientious objection in Europe and EBCO's work,. In particular, many young men from countries which still have conscription showed interest.