



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

EBCO offended at unprecedented harassment and detention of its activists in Athens and demands explanations and apology from the Greek authorities

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"EBCO is offended at the provocative and outrageous harassment of its activists in Athens and their detention in the General Police Directorate of Attica, after their symbolic peaceful protest against the imprisonment of Turkish Cypriot conscientious objector Murat Kanatli. Two days after this unprecedented event which brings more shame to the EU Presidency, we are still waiting for official explanations and apologies from the Greek authorities. It is a scandal that Greece not only continues to violate the human right of conscientious objection to military service, but moreover intimidates citizens peacefully expressing their international solidarity with imprisoned conscientious objectors", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President stated today. "It is also ironic that the Greek authorities should go to such lengths to stifle a protest against human rights violations in the Turkish-occupied northern part of Cyprus", he added.

On 1st March 2014, six members of EBCO and Amnesty International organised a symbolic peaceful protest in front of the Turkish embassy in Athens to express their solidarity to the Turkish Cypriot conscientious objector and human rights activist Murat Kanatli, who is currently serving 10 days in prison following his refusal, on grounds of conscience, to participate in the annual compulsory military exercises in the northern part of Cyprus. After the protesters opened two banners in front of the Turkish embassy and took some photos, they were stopped and surrounded by policemen. The activists informed the policemen of the reason of their protest and explained that it was merely a matter of taking some photographs showing themselves with the banners in front of the embassy. Not only they were not allowed to leave, but subsequently they were transferred by police cars to the General Police Directorate of Attica, where they were detained for more than two hours, without being given access to their lawyers when they arrived. The only person who was allowed to see them during their detention was Green MEP Nikos Chrysogelos, but he too was not admitted immediately.

"EBCO would like to thank all the activists who participated in the protest in Athens, the lawyers and journalists who mobilised to support them, as well as Green MEP Chrysogelos who visited them while detained and spoke with the Police Chief, and Left MP Vasiliki Katrivanou (SYRIZA) who called and spoke to the Police Chief too", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President added.

Murat Kanatli, an EBCO Board member, had declared his conscientious objection in 2009, stating that his goal is for the human resources of war to dry up and that personally he will not participate in any war, so it is meaningless to participate in any preparation for war. *"If there was a war in Cyprus, I would not take sides. Who are our enemies? Is it anyone who is on the other side of the barbed wire? Are our enemies the friends that we drink coffee with every day in Ledra Street?"* Since then he has refused each year to participate in the annual compulsory military exercises in the northern part of Cyprus. On 25 February 2014 the military court handed down a penalty of 500 Turkish liras or 10 days imprisonment if Kanatli failed to pay the penalty. Upon his refusal to pay the penalty Kanatli was sent to serve 10 days in prison.

More information:

[EBCO shocked at imprisonment of its Board Member Murat Kanatli and demands his immediate and unconditional release](#)

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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.