



European Bureau for Conscientious Objection

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

Shame to the Greek EU Presidency

At least 3 arrests and 3 convictions of Greek conscientious objectors during the Presidency

Brussels, 2 July 2014

"EBCO expresses its deep disappointment at the Greek European Union Presidency as far as it concerns the grave violations of the human rights of conscientious objectors in Greece. It's a shame that during the first semester of 2014, the Greek authorities continued persecuting and convicting conscientious objectors, rejecting several applications for civilian service submitted by conscientious objectors on ideological grounds, and even harassing and detaining peaceful activists", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President stated today.

The statistics speak for themselves. Greece, during its EU Presidency, arrested at least three conscientious objectors (and attempted to arrest at least one more), and convicted at least three conscientious objectors to 32 months imprisonment in total, suspended for 1, 2 or 3 years. In details:

- On 27 February 2014 Haris Ritsios was arrested in Trikala. On 25 June 2014 the Military Court of Athens convicted him on two insubordination charges and sentenced him to 14 months imprisonment suspended for 3 years.
- On 14 March 2014 the Military Court of Athens convicted Michalis Tolis on an insubordination charge and sentenced him to 8 months imprisonment suspended for 1 year.
- On 9 April 2014 Dimitris Hatzivasiliadis was arrested in Athens charged with insubordination.
- On 15 April 2014 Kostas Yiannaros was arrested in Athens charged with insubordination.
- On 13 May 2014 the Military Court of Thessaloniki convicted Dimitris Sotiropoulos on an insubordination charge and sentenced him to 10 months imprisonment suspended for 2 years.
- On 21 May 2014 there was an attempt to arrest Lazaros Petromelidis in Drapetsona for a 5 month imprisonment sentence imposed on him in 2006 on an insubordination charge. Lazaros Petromelidis finally bought off the sentence.

In addition, several conscientious objectors on ideological grounds had their applications for civilian service rejected by the Minister of Defence following negative opinions by the relevant Special Committee of the Ministry of Defence. This unacceptable practice continues and it is a vicious circle. These young persons are then called up for military service, and if they do not enlist, they are repeatedly persecuted, since insubordination is scandalously considered a permanent offence in the Greek legislation. So an endless circle of arrests and penal convictions begins, with suspended imprisonment sentences accompanied with huge administrative penalties of 6000 euros for each insubordination charge.

Last but not least, on 1 March 2014, members of EBCO and Amnesty International were harassed and detained in the General Police Directorate of Attica, after their symbolic peaceful protest in front of the Turkish embassy in Athens against the imprisonment of Turkish Cypriot conscientious objector Murat Kanatli, who was 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.

"It is high time for Greece to abolish the compulsory military service and fully recognise and respect the right to conscientious objection, in line with the European and international standards, without restrictions and obstacles", Friedhelm Schneider, EBCO's President added.

See also:

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.

[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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