



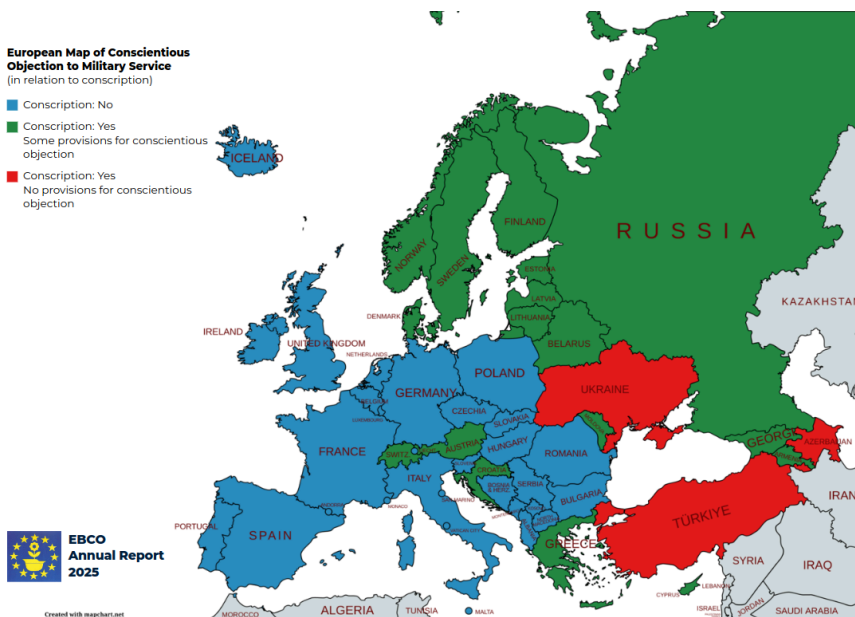
EBCO ANNUAL REPORT ON CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN EUROPE 2025

Brussels, 11th May 2026

The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO) announces the publication of its Annual Report “Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe 2025”. It is available online on the EBCO website (www.ebco-beoc.org).

Foreword

EBCO’s Report is published in a context marked not only by the continued **acceleration of militarisation** across the continent and beyond, but also persistent and widespread violations of international and human rights because of wars.



Increased defence spending, the normalisation of rearmament policies, and the consolidation of security-driven political narratives are progressively narrowing the space for the exercise and protection of fundamental rights, including the right to conscientious objection. At the same time, ongoing armed conflicts and geopolitical tensions are intensifying pressures on individuals who refuse to bear arms, exposing them to prosecution, discrimination, and repression.

Within this evolving landscape, the report documents both the **persistence of structural shortcomings** and a deterioration in the conditions faced by conscientious objectors, draft evaders, and deserters across the Council of Europe area. Legal recognition remains uneven and, in some cases, is being **actively undermined**. Practices of criminalisation, administrative harassment, and social stigmatisation continue to expand, confirming that the right to conscientious objection is far from being fully guaranteed in practice.

A particularly alarming case is the illegal arrest and ongoing persecution of **Yurii Sheliashenko**, Executive Secretary of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement. It represents a critical breach of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, and expression. Widely condemned by international civil society, this case exemplifies the shrinking space for dissent in times of war and highlights the urgent need for European institutions and member states to uphold human rights standards consistently and without exception.

The renewed debates and attempts in several countries to reintroduce conscription further underline the urgency of safeguarding and promoting the right to conscientious objection. In this context, EBCO's engagement within the European Youth Forum acquires particular significance. Through its active role, EBCO contributes to raising awareness among youth organisations and to embedding the recognition of conscientious objection within broader youth policy frameworks. Promoting this right among younger generations is not only a matter of legal protection, but also a strategic investment in a **culture of peace, nonviolence, and democratic participation**.

This report also reflects the continued resilience of the international movement supporting conscientious objectors. Cooperation with civil society organisations, transnational networks, and institutional actors remains essential to ensure protection, including access to asylum and safeguards against persecution. Maintaining and strengthening this ecosystem of solidarity is particularly critical in a context where even humanitarian and human rights actions are increasingly politicised.

Finally, the report formulates a set of **recommendations** addressed to states and European institutions. These include **the full recognition of the right to conscientious objection in all circumstances, the establishment of genuinely civilian and non-punitive alternative services, and the alignment of national legislation with international human rights standards**. Particular reference is made to the standards developed within the Council of Europe system and by United Nations human rights bodies, which provide a clear and authoritative framework for action.

This report stands both as documentation and as a tool for advocacy. In a time increasingly defined by preparation for war, it reaffirms a fundamental principle: **the refusal to participate in war is not only a protected right, but a necessary condition for building a just and lasting peace**.

About the Annual Report

Each year, EBCO publishes its **Annual Report on Conscientious Objection to Military Service in Europe**, drawing on contributions from **national governments, human rights institutions, NGOs, and solidarity networks**. The report is presented to the **European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly and Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, and relevant state authorities** – each time accompanied by a set of targeted recommendations.

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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. It has held participatory status with the **Council of Europe** since 1998 and has been a member of its **Conference of INGOs** since 2005. Since 2021, EBCO can lodge collective complaints under the European Social Charter. EBCO has also been a full member of **the European Youth Forum** since 1995.