



QUAKER COUNCIL FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe: A Review of the Current Situation

Country Report: BELGIUM

Conscription

Belgium was one of the first Western European countries to end conscription. In December 1992 the Law on Conscription was amended and became applicable only to conscripts drafted in 1993 and earlier. The last conscripts were called up for military service in 1993. Since March 1995 the Belgian armed forces consist of professional soldiers only.

Conscription is, in fact, suspended. It may be reinforced during time of war or time of emergency by a government decision.

Conscientious objection

Belgium was one of the last Western European countries to legally recognize the right to conscientious objection in 1965. During the 1990s approx. 2,500 CO applications were made per year, about 98 per cent of which were granted.

In 1992 the Law on Conscientious Objection was amended and only became applicable to men who were born before 1975. Consequently, men who are born after 1975 have no opportunity to claim the right to conscientious objection to military service.

The right to conscientious objection is not included in the Belgian Constitution. In 1995, Belgian peace organisations proposed amending the Constitution to include the right to conscientious objection in it. This proposal was, however, rejected by the Belgian government. Belgian peace organisations have also proposed creating a register of those who want to guarantee their right to conscientious objection in case conscription is reinforced by a government decision. However, the government has not been willing to set up such a register.¹ Consequently, no legal provisions on conscientious objection exist.

There are no legal provisions for the right to conscientious objection for professional soldiers.²

¹ European Bureau for Conscientious Objection/Heinrich Böll Foundation: European Union without Compulsory Military Service - Consequences for Alternative Service, 2000.

² European Bureau for Conscientious Objection/Heinrich Böll Foundation (2000).