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# Antimilitarism and the Hypocrisy of the Greek Cypriot Left (Online Article)

## Historical Note

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## Content

### Antimilitarism and the hypocrisy of the Greek Cypriot Left

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Front page of Haravgi in 1979: Demilitarization in Cyprus, Disarmament Around the World!

On December 5, Neoklis Sylikiotis, an AKEL Member of the European Parliament, [raised the issue](#) of the [imprisonment of Haluk](#) before the European Commission, condemning this serious violation of human rights. The Greens issued a statement praising Haluk's commitment to peace. Earlier this year, when Murat Kanatli was also imprisoned for refusing to participate in reserve drills of the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces, EDEK, together with AKEL, raised the issue with the various European bodies in which they participate.

The Greek Cypriot media provided extensive and supportive coverage of this case, which is unusual for news from the northern part of Cyprus. But both the self-proclaimed Left in the south and the media failed to notice—or rather, deliberately ignored—a very important fact. A fact that, if acknowledged, would not allow them to claim Haluk's (and every Haluk's) moral victory as their own. On the contrary, it would force them to admit that they themselves had suffered a moral defeat.

For while it is true that Haluk and Murat are strong advocates of reunification and have condemned

the Turkish military's occupation of northern Cyprus, their refusal to serve in the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces is by no means limited to this stance. What they refuse is to serve the appalling and rotten system. In a [short video by Haluk's friends](#), he describes militarism as a web that encircles our society, as an inherently sexist system that runs counter to human dignity and individual autonomy. Haluk isn't just against the Turkish army; he's an anti-militarist. As commented on social media, "If, in a reunified Cyprus, we make the mistake of having an army again, we will once more refuse to serve in it."

What does the Greek Cypriot left have to show on the "internal front"? AKEL, EDEK, and the Greens are enthusiastically collaborating with the Right to strengthen legislation against "desertion," threatening to reinstate older provisions they were forced to abandon solely for the sake of accession to the European Union, and they are participating in the vilification of those who refuse to serve in the National Guard. Although this charade is staged twice a year, before each conscription period, it usually does not bring about major changes to the legal framework; however, it reinforces the militarism of our society and the feeling that any man who refuses to take up arms and fight whoever the state designates is inferior: at best, a "coward", although the Left does not always shy away from right-wing rhetoric about "traitors".

How, then, can one explain the anti-militarist stance of the Greek Cypriot left when it comes to Turkish Cypriot conscientious objectors and slogans in favor of peace and reunification (and against NATO, in the case of AKEL), when they do not seem at all concerned about the National Guard and militarism as a whole, but instead actively participate in perpetuating the stigmatization of Cypriots in the south who refuse to take up arms? Or when they try to link the fate of our island to the military-ruled regimes of the eastern Mediterranean and their "first-world" and "second-world" allies, in the name of an "EEZ"? AKEL's tenure in the country's government has not led to any reduction in "defense" spending, keeping Cyprus in the top ten of [Global Militarism Index](#) for the past decade.

Is the National Guard, in the eyes of AKEL, EDEK, and the Greens, really so different from the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces? Is there such a thing as a "good" army, and is the National Guard the shining example of this? We know very well that this is not the case. The National Guard is a breeding ground for sexism, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia. From the (supposedly banned) slogans that conscripts are forced to shout, in which they glorify the rape of Turkish "mothers and sisters" as a war tactic (and as a way to humiliate the Turks, which so clearly demonstrates the belief that a woman is the property of a man—husband, mother, or sister—and that her sexuality can bring shame upon her "owner"), as well as instances of actual training and indoctrination of conscripted youths by officers known to participate in attacks by neo-fascist groups such as ELAM, the Cypriot branch of Golden Dawn. Furthermore, is the forced, dangerous labor in the National Guard any less unacceptable? In this country, we have become so accustomed to glorifying heroes that we've gone so far as to call "heroic" the teenagers killed in military accidents (in peacetime, no less) thereby absolving their employer (i.e., the state) of any responsibility. Equally, we have accepted that reservists may sometimes use their military weapons to enforce what they perceive as a sense of "ownership" over their ex-spouse and/or children (a perception that is ingrained through militaristic structures, as mentioned). Any attempt at even the slightest restructuring of this system is immediately quashed in the name of "operational readiness." Militarism in Cypriot society runs deep, and these examples are merely illustrative.

It is true that in the Republic of Cyprus, only a few years ago, the right to conscientious objection was recognized. But only for the 18-year-olds who are now being drafted, a choice not available in the north; while both armies deny this right to those who have joined the Reserve. The European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, in 2013 [reports on Cyprus](#):

*In the southern part, the Special Rapporteur had the impression that the topic of conscientious*

*objection to military service does not receive much public attention and that the few existing cases have not led to larger public discussion. Those who refuse military service for reasons of conscience are given the option of doing either unarmed military service (special service) or alternative civilian service. Unarmed military service is carried out in the National Guard and conscientious objectors neither carry weapons nor participate in any activities relating to weapons. Unarmed military service is between three and five months longer than the period of time the individual would have to serve in the military service. The alternative civilian service is carried out in the public sector within areas relating to the protection of the environment or in the social sector. Alternative military service is between seven and nine months longer than the period of time for military service. Since 2008, approximately 10 to 12 conscientious objectors each year have reportedly served at various public offices in the southern part.*

Antimilitarists in the south have the “option” to serve a much longer term of service, following a protracted and complicated “evaluation” process, for 8 hours a day and 5 days a week, for nearly 3 years, and this [while they are paid 66% of the National Guard allowance](#), which is calculated based on a base amount of 150–200 euros depending on socioeconomic criteria. There is no doubt that the purpose behind this “alternative” is to punish anti-militarist sentiment, since it forces conscripts to serve the state under degrading conditions for an even longer period of service.

This last point also underscores the class nature of the armed forces in Cyprus as well as around the world, and is the perfect example of the moral defeat of the parliamentary Left when it comes to defending the interests of the working class: they have consented to, and even actively participated in, the creation of a system that subjugates the least privileged members of our capitalist society to the servitude of the state and its military. The most privileged have all the means to evade conscription laws (by using connections or bribing the right people to obtain a medical exemption from military service), they can even endure the punitive alternative service without their quality of life being compromised (the 70 cents per hour for full-time work offered by alternative service certainly cannot be a realistic option for the working class). Once again, it is the oppressed who are forced to perpetuate the very mechanisms of their own oppression. And this is true not only in Cyprus, but worldwide. Other countries with conscription, such as Greece and Turkey, offer the option to “buy out” of military service, once again leaving the poor to serve the militaristic system. The United States uses its otherwise “professional” military as a tool of social policy. For many poor people in America, enlisting in the U.S. Army has become the only way to access affordable higher education, health care, or even to meet their most basic needs.

The self-styled Left very quickly forgot the promises it had made to the working class: demilitarization in Cyprus, disarmament throughout the world. They allied themselves with the liberals and their demand for “a flexible, professional standing army, but conscription as long as we are under the Doctrine of Necessity.” They may have agreed to this, but we do not (and they never even asked us).

We do not recognize any “national duty” in any state. Our only duty is peace.

[Needs Turkish Translation, 3533 \(Website\), Online Articles, Decade 2010-2019, 2014, Undefined Location, AKEL, Militarism](#)

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