

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

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1 June 2010

TUR103453.E

Turkey: Release of biometric passports; requirements for acquiring special or service passports
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In 1 June 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official at the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa reported that Turkey released new biometric passports on 1 June 2010. Several media sources corroborate the plans for releasing Turkish biometric passports on this date (OANA 9 Apr. 2010; Anadolu Agency 26 Mar. 2010; *Hürriyet Daily News* 25 Mar. 2010). According to one media source, the Turkish Interior Minister stated that the biometric passports will be "in line with international standards" (OANA 9 Apr. 2010). Similarly, another media source indicates that the new passports are set to conform to European Union (EU) standards (*Hürriyet Daily News* 25 Mar. 2010). Sources report that biometric passports use electronic technology to verify the identity of a passport-holder (OANA 9 Apr. 2010; *Hürriyet Daily News* 25 Mar. 2010). The Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA) explains that a biometric passport (also known as an e-passport), is a combined paper and electronic passport, with an embedded computer chip that contains details about the passport-holder (9 Apr. 2010).

Some sources indicate that the colour of the new biometric passports issued to ordinary Turkish citizens will be red (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a; OANA 9 Apr. 2010), while another source describes the colour as burgundy (*Hürriyet Daily News* 25 Mar. 2010). Sources report that new diplomatic passports will be black (ibid.; Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a; OANA 9 Apr. 2010).

In 27 April 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa explained that Turkish citizens can apply for the biometric passports at embassies and consulates abroad, but that the applications will be forwarded to the passport centre in Ankara where the biometric passports will be issued (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a). After the passports are produced, they will be sent back to the embassies and consulates for distribution to applicants (ibid.). The Official explained that the measure of issuing all passports from Ankara was put in place in order to prevent fraud (ibid.). One media source similarly reports that the new passports will be printed in the state mint (*Hürriyet Daily News* 25 Mar. 2010).

The Official stated that biometric passports will be valid for ten years (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a). He also indicated that under the biometric passport system, children will be required to have a separate passport from their parents (ibid.).

Sources indicate that old passports can be used during the transition time until 2015 (ibid.; OANA 9 Apr. 2010; *Hürriyet Daily News* 25 Mar. 2010). According to the Istanbul-based *Hürriyet Daily News*, non-biometric Turkish passports are dark blue for ordinary citizens and red for diplomatic passports (ibid.). Old passports were valid for a maximum period of five years (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a; OANA 9 Apr. 2010). The Official noted that under the old passport system, passports were valid from six months to five years; passports with longer durations were more expensive (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a).

In addition to ordinary and diplomatic passports, the Official stated that there will be biometric "special passports" and "service passports" (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a). Special passports (also known as green passports), are for high-ranking government officials who hold a rank of between one and three (where the rank of one is the highest) (ibid.; *Turkish Daily News* 30 Nov. 2005). According to the Official, retired government officials who held a rank of one to three continue to qualify for special passports, including former governmental leaders, former ministers and former members of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a; ibid. 27 April 2010b). In addition, he stated that mayors qualify for special passports, but only during their term of duty (ibid.). The Official indicated that mid-ranking government officials, who

hold a rank of between four and thirteen, qualify for service passports (also known as grey passports) during their employment in the government (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a). He noted that non-governmental workers, such as national athletes and employees of international organizations, do not qualify for special or service passports (ibid. 29 Apr. 2010). The Official believes that biometric passports will continue to be green for special passports and grey for service passports (ibid.).

According to the Official, the benefit of having either a special or service passport is that some countries do not require visas from their holders (ibid. 27 Apr. 2010b). *Turkish Daily News* similarly reports that several countries do not require visas from special passport holders, and notes additional advantages such as a cheaper price and authorization to use the VIP lounges at airports (3 Dec. 2005). Media sources report of agreements between Turkey and other countries whereby visa requirements have been waived for Turkish special and service passport holders, such as with Latvia (Latvian News Agency 30 Dec. 2006; *Dunya* 23 June 2006), Tajikistan (*The Times of Central Asia* 1 June 2009) and Cameroon (APANEWS 17 Mar. 2010).

The Official stated that the spouses and dependent children of those who qualify for diplomatic, special and service passports can also acquire diplomatic, special and service passports (Turkey 27 Apr. 2010a). He noted that male children qualify as dependents until the age of eighteen years, while female children qualify until they get married or start a professional job (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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