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Responses to Information Requests

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26 May 2010

TUR103456.E

Turkey: Whether there is a minimum period of service for volunteer recruits in the military; whether volunteer recruits face any restrictions in obtaining a discharge

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 13 May 2010, an official at the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa stated that there are no volunteer soldiers in the Turkish military, only conscripted soldiers, officers, and non-commissioned officers (NCOs, sergeants). Turkey's submission to the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that article 11 of Law No. 1111 requires that volunteer recruits to the army be at least 18 years of age, but that in practice, voluntary recruitment does not occur because there are a sufficient number of people serving compulsory military service (Turkey 12 Dec. 2007, Para. 18).

Information on the length of service of NCOs varies: the Official stated that NCOs typically serve 20 years (Turkey 13 May 2010), while War Resisters' International (WRI), a London-based organization promoting non-violent action against the causes of war (WRI 24 July 2008), reports that they serve 15 years of obligatory service (WRI 23 Oct. 2008). According to the Official, some low-ranking NCOs are recruited after their compulsory military service, are employed by contract, and receive a salary (Turkey 13 May 2010). *The Eurasia Daily Monitor*, a publication of the Jamestown Foundation, a research institution based in Washington, DC, notes that salaries for NCOs are approximately five times higher than the minimum wage in Turkey when also factoring in benefits (Jamestown Foundation 23 Oct. 2008).

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers notes that admission to Turkish military high schools and preparatory schools for NCOs is voluntary and requires permission of the student's parents; also, students are allowed to withdraw from the school at any time (Child Soldiers 2008). According to the *Defense and Foreign Affairs Handbook*, career NCOs join the military after completing secondary school and enter on long-term enlistments (2006, 2018). Without providing details, the Official noted that NCOs have contractual obligations to serve a minimum amount of time in the military (Turkey 13 May 2010).

The Official stated that there are no professional soldiers in the Turkish military (ibid.). However, other sources indicate that there are professional soldiers (WRI 23 Oct. 2009; *Today's Zaman* 26 May 2009) and specialists (WRI 23 Oct. 2009). According to the Istanbul-based newspaper *Today's Zaman*, the Turkish military has 10,000 professional soldiers, some of which fight in anti-terrorism units (26 May 2009). According to Jamestown Foundation's *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Turkish military leaders announced in 2007 that conscripts assigned to commando units would be replaced by professional privates, NCOs and officers starting in May 2008 (5 May 2008). WRI reports that the Turkish military also employs "specialists" for positions as squad leaders, tank drivers, tank gunners, repairmen, and artillery sergeants (23 Oct. 2008). According to WRI, former conscripted soldiers who have completed their military service can apply to be specialists; they are required to initially serve a 2-year contract, followed by subsequent contracts ranging from 1 to 5 years (WRI 23 Oct. 2008). They can serve until the age of 45 years, after which they can retire with a pension (ibid.).

Information about whether professionals (including officers and NCOs) who voluntarily work in the military face any restrictions in obtaining a discharge could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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.

References

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. 2008. "Turkey." *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*. <<http://www.child-soldiers.org/regions/country?id=218>> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2010]

Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook. 2006. 16th ed. Edited by Gregory R. Copley. "Turkey." Alexandria, Va.: The International Strategic Studies Association.

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Today's Zaman [Istanbul]. 26 May 2009. Ercan Yavuz. "Military Will Not Abandon Draft While Transforming into Professional Army." <<http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-176349-military-will-not-abandon-draft-while-transforming-into-professional-army.html>> [Accessed 17 May 2010]

Turkey. 13 May 2010. Embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Ottawa. Telephone interview with the Vice Consul. _____ . 12 December 2007. "Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 8, Paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. Initial Reports of States Parties Due in 2006." (CRC/C/OPAC/TUR/1). <<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.OPAC.TUR.1.pdf>> [Accessed 11 May 2010]

War Resisters' International (WRI). 23 October 2008. "Country Report and Updates: Turkey." <http://www.wri-irg.org/programmes/world_survey/country_report/en/Turkey> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2010]

_____. 24 July 2008. "About WRI." <http://www.wri-irg.org/network/about_wri> [Accessed 11 May 2010]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Forum 18, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld.

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