
TURKEY

Republic of Turkey

Population: 73.2 million (25.3 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 514,900

Compulsory recruitment age: 19

Voluntary recruitment age: 18

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: ratified 4 May 2004

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, ILO 138, ILO 182

In a state of emergency or partial mobilization, individuals aged 15 and over were apparently liable for service in civil defence forces.

Context

The human rights situation deteriorated in eastern and south-eastern provinces as fighting increased between the security forces and the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). There were attacks on civilians in other areas by armed groups.¹

PKK attacks increased, and claimed as many as 600 lives in 2006.² A unilateral PKK ceasefire in October 2006 did not halt its attacks in response to counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, especially in the south-east. Kurdish separatists were blamed by the security forces for a May 2007 bomb blast that killed six people in the capital, Ankara.³ In April 2007 the chief of general staff called for a military assault on PKK bases in northern Iraq.⁴ In June 2007 the largest operation against PKK fighters in recent years was launched in the south-east amid continuing concerns about a Turkish cross-border attack into Iraq.⁵ Clashes between the PKK and the army increased noticeably in October 2007, heightening fears of a cross-border incursion.⁶

After the security forces killed four PKK members in March 2006, violent protests broke out and four children were among 13 killed during clashes between demonstrators and the security forces in the south-east.⁷

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

According to the constitution, "National service is the right and duty of every Turk" (Article 72). Under Military Law No. 1111, men's liability for military service started in the year they turned 20.⁸ Liability continued to the age of 41, except on grounds of health or disability. Women were not conscripted and could join the armed forces only

after attending military school.⁹ Length of service was 15 months for private soldiers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and 12 months for reserve officers.¹⁰ Students could defer conscription until they had completed higher or vocational education. There was no provision for conscientious objectors.¹¹ In times of mobilization or a state of emergency, individuals liable for military service could be recruited from the age of 19. The Military Code provided for voluntary recruitment to some parts of the armed forces at a minimum age of 18, but the government stated on ratifying the Optional Protocol in 2004 that this was not applied in practice.¹²

Other legislation apparently permitted the deployment of 15- to 18-year-olds in civil defence forces during national emergencies. During a national crisis, the constitution allowed the suspension of rights and freedoms and other extraordinary measures. The National Defence Service Law 3634 stated that "in cases of general or partial mobilization and in preparation of mobilization under a state of emergency, children under the age of 15 ... shall not be held liable".¹³

Military training and military schools

Students at military schools and the NCO preparatory school were not liable for compulsory military service or considered members of the armed forces. Admission to military high schools and preparatory schools for NCOs was voluntary and required parental consent. The minimum entrance age was 13 years, and students could leave at any time. Basic military training and skills were not provided in these schools unless students wanted to become "professional soldiers", in which case they received education on "military courtesy rules, elementary military general culture etc".¹⁴

It was not apparent from the Law on Military Academies whether under-18s were legally prohibited from admission. The Naval Academy had no stated minimum entrance age but candidates could not be over 19 or admitted more than 12 months after leaving secondary-school.¹⁵ Although school leavers could potentially be aged only 17, the Turkish Military Academy's stated objectives implied that candidates had to be over 18. The Academy said that its objectives were to educate and train commissioned officers who had "necessary military qualities with developed leadership qualities" or "a BS degree on the scientific branches determined in accordance with the needs of related Service", and to provide postgraduate education related to service needs.¹⁶ Information from the Air Force Academy referred to undergraduate and postgraduate education but made no reference to age.¹⁷

War colleges for all branches of the armed forces were open to graduates who had completed their minimum two-year tactical-

level command and staff duties, and a National Security College provided senior officer training.¹⁸

Armed groups

The government continued to organize, arm and pay the Village Guards, a civil defence force numbering 60,000 and mainly concentrated in the south-east as part of its security operations there.¹⁹ It was not known whether there were under-18s in these paramilitary forces.

It was not known how many PKK fighters were under 18. Recruitment of under-18s of both sexes had been reported in 2003.²⁰ The PKK was believed to have used children in its forces since 1994, and was believed in 1998 to have had 3,000 child soldiers, more than 10 per cent of them girls, in its forces based in Iraq and operating in south-east Turkey.²¹ Some estimates put the number of PKK fighters in northern Iraq as high as 10,000, a third of them women.²² However, the Turkish military estimated that 3,800 were based in Iraq and that up to 2,300 were operating inside Turkey.²³

1 *Amnesty International Report 2007*.

2 US Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2006, www.state.gov.

3 “Kurds implicated in Ankara bomb attack”, *Independent*, 23 May 2007, <http://news.independent.co.uk>.

4 “Turkish general calls for military assault in Iraq”, *Financial Times*, 13 April 2007, www.ft.com/cms.

5 einnews.com, Kurdistan Workers Party News, www.einnews.com.

6 “Dozens die in Turkey border clash”, BBC News, 21 October 2007.

7 Amnesty International, “Turkey: Recent violations must be investigated”, 13 April 2006, Public Statement, AI Index Number EUR 44/005/2006.

8 Initial report of Turkey to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc. CRC/C/51/Add.4, 8 August 2000.

9 All About Turkey, “Turkish Army”, www.allaboutturkey.com.

10 Initial report of Turkey on implementation of the Optional Protocol, UN Doc. CRC/C/OPAC/TUR/1, undated.

11 Quaker Council for European Affairs, “Turkey”, *The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe*, 2005, www.wri-irg.org.

12 Declarations and reservations to the Optional Protocol, www2.ohchr.org.

13 Initial report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, above note 8.

14 Initial report on the Optional Protocol, above note 10.

15 Turkish Naval Academy, Admission, www.dho.edu.tr.

16 The general objective of the Turkish Military Academy, www.kho.edu.tr.

17 Turkish Air Force Academy, www.hho.edu.tr.

18 Turkish War Colleges, www.harpak.tsk.mil.tr.

19 “Local guards divide Turkish Kurds”, BBC News, 4 August 2006.

20 “Daughters of the revolution”, *Observer*, 1 May 2003, <http://observer.guardian.co.uk>.

21 Center for Defense Information, Terrorism project, “Children used as soldiers in Iraq”, 18 November 2002, www.cdi.org.

22 Katie Scott, “Awaiting the invasion”, Guardian Unlimited, undated, accessed on 18 July 2007, www.guardian.co.uk/weekendphotoprize/story/0,,1776811,00.html.

23 AP, “Turkey troops head to Iraq border”, CNN, 30 May 2007, <http://edition.cnn.com>.