
BULGARIA

Republic of Bulgaria

Population: 8.0 million (1.5 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 51,000

Compulsory recruitment age: 18 (conscription to be phased out)

Voluntary recruitment age: 18

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: ratified 12 February 2002

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC, ILO 138, ILO 182

There were no reports of under-18s in the armed forces.

Context

There were no significant improvements in respect of basic human rights with police ill-treatment and torture of detainees, including some children of the Roma community, widely reported. However, two important new laws relating to the establishment of an Office of an Ombudsman and anti-discrimination offered future safeguards.¹ The Bulgarian government supported the US-led intervention in Iraq and permitted the use of a military airport near Bourgas, on the Black Sea, for Iraq operations. On 29 March 2004 Bulgaria became a member of NATO.²

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

The 1991 constitution provides for conscription, stating that "To defend the country shall be a duty and a matter of honour of every Bulgarian citizen" (Article 59).³

Military service lasts nine months, six months for graduates. The present legal basis for conscription is believed to be the 1995 Law on Defence and Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria, as amended in 1998. All Bulgarian men are liable for compulsory military service between the ages of 18 and 30. The minimum age for voluntary recruitment is also 18.⁴ Military service is governed by the 1996 Regulations on Regular Military Service and the 1998 Edict 265 on Civil Defence Regulations.⁵ Alternative non-military service is allowed, under the 1999 Law for the Replacement of Military Obligations with Alternative Service. A special commission under the Ministry of Labour handles applications for alternative service, which is for 24 months.⁶

The armed forces are currently undergoing reform. In 2002 the government approved an Updated Plan for the Build-Up and Organization

of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria by 2004. This plan, which envisaged phasing out conscription by 2010, has since been incorporated into a defence modernization plan for the period 2002 to 2015.⁷

Military training and military schools

Applicants to military colleges must have a high school diploma but there are no specific age requirements. However, high school graduates under the age of 18 may enter military schools until they are old enough to perform military service. Students are also sent to military colleges in other countries.⁸

In its declaration on ratifying the Optional Protocol in February 2002 Bulgaria stated that "Persons who have not come of age shall be trained at military schools subject to the conclusion of a training agreement to be signed by them with the consent of their parents or guardians. Having come of age, the trainees shall sign a training agreement on a regular military duty".⁹

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- 1 *Amnesty International Report 2004*, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/engindex>.
 - 2 NATO update, *Seven new members join NATO*, 29 March 2004, <http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2004/03-march/e0329a.htm>.
 - 3 Constitution, at Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, <http://www.constcourt.bg/constcourt>.
 - 4 Initial report of Bulgaria to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UN Doc. CRC/C/8/Add.29, 12 October 1995, <http://www.ohchr.org>; Communication from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 May 2004.
 - 5 Information from Ministry of Defence website, <http://www.md.government.bg>.
 - 6 Communication from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, op. cit.
 - 7 Ministry of Defence, <http://www.md.government.bg> (Reform of armed forces); NATO interview with head of mission of Republic of Bulgaria to NATO, 27 October 2003, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2003/s031027a.htm>.
 - 8 Communication from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, op. cit.
 - 9 Declarations and reservations to the Optional Protocol, <http://www.ohchr.org>.