



Issue description

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Issue of: Conscription

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Introduction

Conscription is compulsory enrolment for service in a country's armed forces. The first known instance of the draft dates back to the time of the Egyptian Old Kingdom (27th century BC). The modern system of national conscription dates back to the French Revolution in the 1790s, where it became the basis of a very large and powerful military. Later on this system was copied by many European nations.

During the World Wars the range of eligible ages for conscripting was expanded. Nazi Germany also conscripted children as young as 16 years old, while both Britain and the Soviet Union conscripted women.

Now, in the 21st century, many states no longer conscript soldiers but many of these still reserve the power to resume it during wartime or times of crises. Countries involved in wars or instate rivalries are much more likely to implement draft. The attitude of countries towards the issue is highly various among the world, because of its controversy.

The issue is open for discussion for a wide range of reasons. It is mostly accused of the fact that it is gender-based and sexist and also because it is involuntary. The proponents of the draft consider it as ways of instilling maturity in young adults, moreover they also believe that it is more financially beneficial for less-educated young men to participate in conscription, as opposed to participating in the highly competitive job market with a higher education.

The question of conscription is a highly controversial issue of our time concerning basic human rights therefore the cooperation among Member States is extremely necessary in order to achieve the aim of global balance.

Definition of Key Terms

Conscription: the compulsory enrolment for service in a country's armed forces.

Draft: another term when referring to conscription.

Conscientious objector: People who are firmly against conscription and their personal beliefs are incompatible with military service or any role in an armed force.

NATO: An intergovernmental military alliance between 29 North American and European countries. The organization implements the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949.



procedure with these people is not widely exercised globally. The understanding of the case of such people, and the tolerant dealing with such cases can bring us one step closer towards solving the issue.

In modern times, the developed countries do not always find draft appealing and instead they are favouring voluntary armies. This is more society-friendly and more liberal than using conscription, however, we cannot forget about the fact that these voluntary armies have a much smaller capacity. It can be very disadvantageous during war time against a country using the draft. On the other hand, they can be more motivated and more skilful than the ones which have been compulsorily enrolled. The point is that this unfair rivalry between countries either favouring liberty or culture and patriotism is a barrier in the precession of the solution of the issue.

The question of conscription is also needed to be discussed in terms of gender-equality and sexism. Because of the gender-based nature of the draft many people are against it. They believe that even if women are physically not as skilled as men, they could fulfil specialist roles which do not require specific physical prowess. They also believe that it is essential that both men and women carry equal responsibilities for their own nation.

On the other hand, we cannot argue with the fact that there are physical differences between the sexes, and women are also less replaceable when it comes to reproduction. That means that if women are conscripted in large numbers it may lead to numerous female deaths or cases of infertility, which would have longer consequences on society.

One of the biggest arguments against conscription deals with the effects of the draft on the society. There is certain evidence proving that being conscripted increases the tendency to commit crime or be unemployed after the period of the service. This issue affects mostly the ones from racial minorities or poor backgrounds.

In conclusion, the issue nowadays is open for discussion and causes significant diversification globally. When the Cold War ended, many nations, especially in Europe, abolished mandatory military service, with the security of the NATO and in Europe the EU. Since in many parts of the world, without any imminent military threat, it is considered unnecessary by plenty of people globally. In recent years the debate has about-faced, with many countries considering a reinstatement of mandatory conscription in some form. The conversation is also happening in some Western European countries, for example France, Italy or the UK. But the issue is subject to debate because of being extremely controversial.

We cannot deny the fact that compulsory military enrolment has a significant impact on the life of young men. It can also reinforce already existing inequalities in the likelihood of future success. These facts, pros and cons have to be taken into account when deciding whether to reinstate or abolish mandatory conscription.



Major parties involved

In recent years many countries have reinstated conscription. The list below is not exhaustive, of course. There are other countries which also have military service and conscription.

France

France is planning to reintroduce compulsory military service for all 16-year-olds. The service would include a month-long placement with an aim of directly experiencing military life. It was an idea of current president, Emanuel Macron, during his election campaign, and he promised that it would be a softer version of the compulsory military service.

This attempt of reintroducing compulsory military service, in a new way, with shorter period of compulsory enrolment and further possibilities of voluntary military service, might have a key role in the solution of the issue. Considering the pros and cons of the draft, this solution could mean a golden mean, strengthening patriotism and experiencing military life, but in the same time not threatening human rights with years long compulsory conscription.

North Korea

North Korea is considered the world's most militarised society. Every third person might be enlisted in a military organisation at any given time. Conscription in North Korea began before the Korean war broke out in 1950. The government didn't even have to force the conscription; it was mostly the families themselves pressuring young people to enlist in the army, to secure their well-being.

Nowadays North Korea is the country with the longest compulsory military service, with eleven years for men and seven years for women. In 2003 North Korea reported to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that every military enlistment in the country is voluntary, though the legal status of military conscription in North Korea is not entirely clear.

Eritrea

Eritrea, in Eastern Asia, is one of the most undeveloped countries on the globe. Similar to North Korea, it is very reclusive, and strict. In Eritrea, conscription is existing, men and unmarried women are required to undertake 18 months of compulsory military service. However, according to human rights groups the service is often extended for years and in some cases indefinitely. According to human rights organisations, national service is the main driver causing Eritreans to flee.



Timeline of events

1960 – Every nation-state member of the European Union conscripted for military service with the sole exceptions of Andorra, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, and San Marino.

1978 – The UN General Assembly was explicit in its Resolution 33/165 which recognized “the right of all persons to refuse service in military or police forces”.

1981 – The UNHRC again supported conscientious objection in its Resolution 40 (XXXVII).

1987 – The UN Human Rights Commission in Resolution 1987/46 resolved that “conscientious objection has to be considered as a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of conscience and religion”.

2001 – The Council of Europe stated “The right of conscientious objection is a fundamental aspect of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” before the UN Human Rights Council.

2002 – The UNHRC adopted Resolution 2002/45 which called upon “States to review their current laws and practices in relation to conscientious objection to military service”.

2012 – The UN Human Rights Council tabled before the UN General Assembly Resolution 20/12, “Promotion and protection of all human rights [...] including Conscientious objection and seconded by 34 UN Member States, many of them conscripting nations.

Possible solutions and approaches

The solution of the issue is vital in terms of human rights and the aim of a peaceful and balanced world. The resolution has to deal with the case of conscientious objection and might also find a golden way solution, with France showing a good example.

Taking into consideration the controversy regarding the issue, with understanding of every country’s policy either in favour or against the draft, the cooperation of the delegations is needed in order to protect human rights and properly address this issue.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

See in ‘*Timeline of events*’ and ‘*Annex*’.



Annex

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18)

Civil and Political Rights (Article 18)

Resolution 33/165; Resolution 40 (XXXVII); UNHCR Resolution 1982/36; UNHCR Resolution 1987/46; UNHCR Resolution 1989/59; UNHCR Resolution 1991/65; UNHCR Resolution 1993/84; UNHCR Resolution 1995/83; UNHCR Resolution 1998/77; UNHCR Resolution 2002/45; UNHCR Resolution 2004/35; Resolution 20/12

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