



## QUAKER COUNCIL FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

### The Right to Conscientious Objection in Europe: A Review of the Current Situation

#### Country Report: FRANCE

##### Conscription

France was the first country in the world to introduce conscription in 1793.

In 1997, the French government decided to suspend conscription. The last conscripts were called up for military service in 2001. Since 2002 the armed forces consist of professional soldiers only.

Conscription has been replaced by a compulsory one day “rendez-vous citoyen” (national day of preparation for national defence). All young men and women between the ages of 16 and 18 are obliged to participate in this day. On this day, people have civil status and do not have to bear arms or wear a uniform or be subjected to military discipline. Participation in the “rendez-vous citoyen” is a necessary condition for taking part in final examinations or obtaining a diploma in state universities.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Law on National Service Reform (97-1019), the government may reintroduce conscription at any time. The legislation providing for national service has in fact not been repealed.<sup>2</sup>

##### Conscientious objection

The right to conscientious objection was legally recognized in 1963. French CO legislation was restrictive and did not comply with international standards on conscientious objection. CO applications could only be made before starting military service and not by serving conscripts, and substitute service lasted twice as long as military service. Compared to other European countries, the number of COs in France has always remained relatively low. During the 1990s approx. 6,000 CO applications were made per year, which was only 3 per cent of all eligible conscripts.

With the suspension of conscription in 2002, the 1983 Law on Conscientious Objection (Law 83/605) became applicable only to men born before 31 December 1978. Consequently, young men who are born after 1979 have no possibility of claiming the right to conscientious objection.<sup>3</sup>

There are no legal provisions for conscientious objection for professional soldiers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> European Bureau for Conscientious Objection/Heinrich Böll Foundation: European Union without Compulsory Military Service - Consequences for Alternative Service, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: Child Soldiers Global Report 2004.

<sup>3</sup> European Bureau for Conscientious Objection/Heinrich Böll Foundation (2000).

<sup>4</sup> Information provided by Union Pacifiste, August 2004. Exercise of the right of conscientious objection to military service in Council of Europe member states, Report Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Doc. 8809 (Revised), 4 May 2001. War Resister' International: Refusing to bear arms - A world survey on conscription and conscientious objection to military service, 1998.