

Turkey

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| Response to Information Request Number: | TUR01001.SND |
| Date: | 19 December 2000 |
| Subject: | Turkey: Information on the Islamic Welfare Party (IWP) and Islamic Virtue Party (IVP) and Protests Against the Headdress Ban |
| From: | INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC |
| Keywords: | Turkey / Islam / Islamists / Islamic Fundamentalism / Islamic Welfare Party (IWP) / Refah Party (RP) / Islamic Virtue Party (IVP) / Fazilet Party (FP) / Headdress / Headscarf / Religious Clothing / Protest / Demonstration |

Query:

- 1) What are the Islamic Welfare Party and the Islamic Virtue Party?
- 2) What is the religious headdress movement and how has the Islamic Virtue Party been involved?
- 3) How are women who wear religious headdresses treated in Turkey?
- 4) In October 1998, were demonstrations in protest against the headdress ban held in Turkey, and how were those in attendance treated?

Response:

1) What are the Islamic Welfare Party and the Islamic Virtue Party and how have they been involved in the religious headdress movement?

The Islamic Virtue Party (VP, or Fazilet Party) is the most recent in a line of successive Islamist parties that trace their origin to the National Order Party (NOP) founded in 1970 by Necmettin Erbakan. VP was founded on December 17, 1997 as a successor to the Islamic Welfare Party (WP, or Refah Party), which was brought to court in mid-1997 and outlawed by the Constitutional Court in January 1998. The Court ruled that the Welfare Party had violated the principles of secularism and the law on political parties (*MERIA* Sept. 1999).

In May 1999 Turkey's chief prosecutor Vural Savas opened a legal case against the Virtue Party. Savas holds that VP is the continuation of the already-banned Welfare Party, and is therefore illegal. The prosecutor has also requested that the Constitutional Court remove VP's 110 deputies from parliament and to ban them from political activity for five years (*The Seattle Times* 7 May 1999). In October of this year the Constitutional Court delayed further debate on this case until legal challenges to a set of government decrees have been resolved (Cable News Network 23 Oct. 2000).

In July 2000 an appeals court confirmed the conviction and sentencing to a one-year term of Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of VP, for a speech he gave in 1994 in which he criticized the state for replacing prayers in schools with nationalist slogans. The government expects Erbakan to turn himself in after a four-month stay that will expire on January 13, 2001 (*Turkey Update* 18 Sept. 2000).

2) What is the religious headdress movement and how has the Islamic Virtue Party

been involved?

In the 1920s when Kemal Ataturk initiated his reforms after founding modern, secular Turkey, freedom of religion was declared and Turkish society was secularized. Secularization mandated, among other reforms, a ban on religious attire in places of education, government ministries, and other public institutions. The headdress movement erupted in 1984 when, after multi-party politics resumed, university women began to wear the Islamic style of dress, largely to signify their participation in the Islamist movement and their desire to shape its interaction with modern society (*Jerusalem Letter* 1 Feb. 1999). Though a law was passed in 1989 stating that "attire is free," in 1991 the Constitutional Court ruled that "the covering of the neck and hair with headcovers or religious headdress is not within the scope of freedom of attire because it has been determined that such attire is unconstitutional" -- the rationale being that religious dress in public buildings threatens secularism (*Istanbul Milliyet* 13 Sept. 1998). Women are banned from wearing the religious headdress in any educational setting other than during Kuranic courses at imam-hatip lyceums (*Jerusalem Letter* 1 Feb. 1999). Istanbul University and Malatya Inonu University have decided to bar students who wear religious headdresses or beards from entering their campuses (*Istanbul Hurriyet* 25 March 1998 and *Ankara Anatolia* 5 May 1999).

In the mid-1990s the Welfare Party had called for a lifting of the ban on religious headdresses, which exacerbated the struggle between the Islamists and secularists and contributed to the decision to outlaw the party in 1998 (*MERIA* 3 Sept. 1999). The National Youth Foundation (MGV), a youth organization with close ties to the VP, has led the charge in organizing protests against the dress code, further demonstrating the connection between the VP and the headdress controversy (*Istanbul Milliyet* 5 Sept. 1998). Finally, analysts believe that the actions of Virtue Party parliamentary deputy Merve Kavakci served as the final challenge of the party to the secular laws precipitating the May 1999 court case against the VP five days later. On May 2, 1999 Kavakci entered Parliament for her swearing-in wearing a headscarf. Pro-secular deputies shouted and pounded on tables, forcing Kavakci to leave before taking the oath (*The Seattle Times* 7 May 1999). Kavakci was subsequently stripped of her Turkish citizenship (she also holds US citizenship) (*Freedom in the World 1999-2000* 2000, 492).

3) How are women who wear religious headdresses treated in Turkey?

Women who work in the public sector or education can be penalized for wearing the Islamic headdress. The 1999 Department of State Country Report on Turkey states that in 1999 312 teachers, including 180 student teachers lost their jobs for wearing head coverings. 47 university professors were fired for wearing headdresses or supporting the movement. In addition, hundreds of women working in the public sector have also lost their jobs as a result of this increased enforcement (*Country Reports 1999* 2000, 1925). Students who wear headdresses are also vulnerable to adverse action. Students have been unable to register for classes, have been suspended from classes for as long as a month, and have been prevented from taking their final exams (*Ankara Anatolia* 5 May 1999 and *Jerusalem Letter* 1 Feb. 1999). Police raided a school in February 1999 to prevent students wearing headdresses from entering (*Freedom in the World 1999-2000* 2000, 492). Last year Istanbul University insisted that no student could enter university buildings, including classes, without a valid student photo identity card, and no official photo would be taken of students whose faces were at all covered -- by headscarves or beards (*Jerusalem Letter* 1 Feb. 1999).

4) In October 1998, were demonstrations in protest against the headdress ban held in Turkey, and how were those in attendance treated?

Protests began to erupt across Turkey in early 1998. News sources indicate that on October 11, 1998 protests on this issue were held across the country and that 500 people were arrested in connection with this activity (TRT Television Network, 11 Oct. 1998). A statement by the Interior Ministry indicates that 267 people were detained in connection with the protests, 75 of those were apprehended in Istanbul and released immediately

interrogation (TRT Television Network 12 Oct. 1998 and TRT Television Network 13 Oct. 1998). Reports indicate that at least the majority of those arrested were held for demonstrating without a permit and/or refusing to disperse. No sources indicated whether or not the October protests, or demonstrations on other dates, were held in the Sultanahmet district of Istanbul.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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