

## Headscarves: Mosque and State in Turkey

**SIMON MARKS, reporter:**



Take a look at modern Turkey: a bustling, economically thriving, democracy ... and mostly Muslim.

For more than 50 years, this country has served as an important friend of the United States. Its location gives Turkey great influence.

The Bosphorus, the body of water which divides Istanbul, also separates Europe from the Middle East and Asia.

And though you'd never guess it from the very Americanized look of life on campus at Istanbul's Fatih University ... beneath the surface a battle is raging for Turkey's heart and soul.

The issue: how much of a role religion should play in government.

For both sides the symbol of this debate is the *hijab* -- the headscarf traditionally worn by many Muslim women -- but banned on university campuses.

**HAVA DOMNEZ, student:**



**ALPORSLAN ACEPKESH, Dean, Fatih University:**

It's hard because you are trapped between your choices and your emotions. And maybe I was trapped between my religious beliefs and my education.

It is very difficult to understand the Turkish situation, really, when you look from the outside.

The university's dean says it's difficult, because Turkey's constitution calls for the country to be secular, non-religious in public life.

**SIMON MARKS:**

There must, it says, be separation between "mosque" and "state." So on campuses across the country, female students are free to wear blue jeans or mini-skirts ... but not headscarves, the symbol of their Islamic faith.

**ALPORSLAN ACEPKESH:**

Students, if they want to dress up head open, fine, there is no issue with that. And if they want to wear a scarf or whatever hat, kind of dress they would like to wear, I would believe that it should be free.

**SIMON MARKS:**

But there is no freedom to choose on campus. By law, the constitution outlaws any display of religious faith in a public institution. It's one of many laws designed to keep religious leaders from influencing the government.

Student Derya Mercan, chooses not to wear a headscarf at home, but believes the law should be changed.

**DERYA MERCAN, student:**



Ask all the women, they don't feel it is a symbol.

They wear headscarves because of their beliefs, because of their faith, and they don't see that as a symbol. It can't threaten people. I think people make this problem, not headscarves.

**SIMON MARKS:**

The Quran, Islam's sacred text, says women should dress modestly. That's why many believe a woman should cover her hair in public. But defenders of Turkey's constitution insist that the headscarf is both a religious and political symbol.

Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, leads a pro-Islamic party that now leads the government.

Bedri Baykam is one of Turkey's leading artists, and a vocal defender of the country's secular principles.

**BEDRI BAYKAM, artist:**



He accuses the government of re-writing school textbooks to emphasize Islamic themes, of trying to restrict the number of restaurants and clubs serving alcohol, and of encouraging young women to challenge the headscarf ban.

The people who supposedly ask this as a freedom and democracy for veil don't have two percent of tolerance for other lifestyles.

**SIMON MARKS:**

The headscarf issue is about a lot more than what young women should be allowed to wear. It goes to the very heart of the enormous debate that swirls here about what kind of country Turkey should become.

**SIMON MARKS:**

The country's foreign minister Abdullah Gul says the government is serious about keeping Turkey on a modern, U.S.-friendly track.

**ABDULLAH GUL, Foreign Minister:**

Turkey is modernized country and it's getting every day more modernized. Expression of opinion is free in this country. You can express whatever you think and wish.

**SIMON MARKS:**



Many of the government's supporters want those freedoms extended to schools and universities so Islamic girls can wear head scarves if they want.

But opponents say permitting the headscarf would be the start of a slow slide toward Islamic fundamentalism.

It's a debate that is becoming increasingly heated, and forces Turkey's young women having to make a political decision every time they leave their homes and head to school.