

Turkish Court and Religious Freedom

CA H-SS Standards:

10.10.3 Discuss the important trends in the regions today and whether they appear to serve the cause of individual freedom and democracy.

12.9.8 Identify the successes of relatively new democracies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the ideas, leaders, and general societal conditions that have launched and sustained or failed to sustain, them.

Introduction:

The article begins, "Turkey's constitutional court today supported an effort to block a candidate for the country's presidency whose background is in political Islam, pitching the country into early national elections and a referendum on the role of religion in its future."

The article adds, "Last week, the country's military, which has ousted four elected governments since 1960, issued a stern warning, hinting that it might act against the government if it strayed too far from secularism."

Discussion-Starters for Students:

- Vocabulary terms to discuss: Upheld; Secular; "Islamic Credentials"; and, Defining Moment.
- Ask your students if they think that a very religious person should be allowed to be the head of a secular government. Encourage them to explain their thoughts. What problems might arise if a very religious person was the head of a secular government?
 - Ask students to pretend that Thomas Jefferson, one of history's greatest supporters of democracy had the opportunity to speak to the Turkish Supreme Court, what would he say?
- Pose: If Abdullah Gul asked you for advice as to what he should do since Turkey's Supreme Court blocked his route to the presidency how would you respond? Why?
 - Students could develop responses to Mr. Gul.

Resources:

Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom

<http://www.vahistorical.org/sva2003/vsrf.htm>

Turkish Court Blocks Islamist Candidate

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/01/world/europe/01cnd-Turkey.html>