

From Our Own Correspondent BBC Radio 4: Turkey's Ideological Dilemma

CUE: The prominent Turkish writer and academic Fikret Baskaya has been charged under the country's anti-terror laws because of his writings about Turkey's Kurdish minority. The trial is going ahead, despite the strong disapproval of the European Union, which Turkey aspires to join. JONATHAN FRYER, in (the Turkish capital) Ankara, finds the case symbolic of the country's deep ideological tensions.

They're digging up Bayindir Street in downtown Ankara, in a scheme to extend the city's pedestrianised area. Men in business suits, girls in modern Western fashion, and women with headscarves and modest Islamic dress, all gingerly make their way round the potholes and mounds of rubble. Every so often, waiters from the outdoor cafes that line the street, emerge with buckets of water, which they sprinkle over the dust, to stop it blowing in their customers' faces. The locals call Bayindir Street the "Street of Drunkards", as most of the cafes are in fact bars, serving beer, which men drink at outside tables in a way that would be unthinkable in most Muslim countries.

But Bayindir Street is also home to an unusual institution, housed in a converted apartment in an anonymous concrete block: Ankara's Free University. You have to ring a bell to be let inside, rather like entering a speakeasy. But the refreshment offered in the Free University is entirely intellectual. There one can hear ideas and views not normally aired in mainstream universities. And anyone is welcome to attend. These days, the premises are buzzing with activity, as staff, students and volunteers rally support for the Free University's most famous lecturer: the development

economist and writer, Fikret Baskaya. He's been charged under Turkey's anti-terror laws, because of a book he wrote in 1991, called *Westernisation, Modernisation and Development: The Bankruptcy of a Paradigm*. In that, he uses Turkey's long-suffering Kurdish minority as a case study. He was sent to prison for over a year following the book's initial publication. But it's long been back in print, and is now in its eighth edition. Incredibly, with the publication of the eighth edition, Dr Baskaya finds himself on trial over it again.

The case opened the other day in Ankara's State Security Court. The public gallery was packed. In front of us was a dramatic set worthy of an opera designer: a great, towering wooden structure, on top of which three judges and the state prosecutor were installed, way above the body of the court. Half way down the structure, a blonde lady stenographer in a bright turquoise blouse sat impassively recording the proceedings. A stern Clerk of the Court kept an eagle eye on the public; one man was reprimanded simply for crossing his legs.

"Stand up!", the chief judge suddenly barked at Fikret Baskaya. Grey-haired and in his early sixties, dressed in a grey suit and a shirt without a tie, the defendant looked almost a caricature of a French, left-wing intellectual. And indeed, he was partly educated in France. Politely, quietly, he began to address the court, declaring that he doesn't believe that he has committed any crime. And that the freedom of expression is the mark of a civilised society. The judges scowled, the stenographer looked into the distance, and above them all, near the ceiling of the courtroom, a golden death mask of modern Turkey's founder, Kemal Ataturk, glared.

Dr Baskaya is rather rude about Kemal Ataturk in his book, which is one reason why some people are so upset about it. Criticising Ataturk is akin to blasphemy in the avowedly secular state that he created. Yet during Dr Baskaya's trial, even Ataturk was quoted in his defence. But the best moment in the opening session came when one of the defence lawyers quoted a poem. When the judge interrupted him, to ask what relevance this had to the proceedings, the lawyer replied slyly that this was a poem by a certain Recep Erdogan, for which its author was convicted. Recently, of course, this same Recep Erdogan became Prime Minister of Turkey, after victory in the polls by a party that would like Turkey to be more openly proud of its Islamic heritage.

Therein lies modern Turkey's dilemma. It is a society torn by conflicting tendencies. Islamists against secularists, modernisers against traditionalists, even Europe against Asia. Geographically overwhelmingly in Asia, Turkey was nonetheless declared a European state by Ataturk. And it aspires to be a member of the European Union. Fikret Baskaya's trial isn't exactly helpful for Turkey's chances of that in the short term. Indeed, as his lawyer pointed out, the European Court of Human Rights has already ruled in his favour. In principle, Turkey is obliged to obey that ruling. But the trial is still going ahead. Yet sitting in on it, I felt I was watching the death throes of an old order. This wasn't just because the whole apparatus of a State Security Court seems more appropriate to a military dictatorship than to a modern, democratic state. Rather, it was the faces of the people present in the public gallery: not fearful, but defiant, even silently mocking Fikret Baskaya

himself smiled wryly as the case was adjourned for a month, and he went to meet the great phalanx of television cameras waiting outside.

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