



KOSOVO

COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

September 24, 2007

Students' defiance of headscarf ban raises questions about an independent Kosovo

By Nebi Qena, AP/Santa Barbara News Press

<http://www.newspress.com/Top/Article/article.jsp?Section=WORLD&ID=565090552505567397>

SRBICA, Serbia (AP) - Three students were suspended from school in Kosovo this week for wearing Muslim headscarves, reflecting a debate that is echoing across Europe and complicating the province's quest for independence.

The argument over whether secular society should trump religious rights is similar to those taking place in France, Turkey, Britain and elsewhere.

But some in the breakaway Serb province fear its bid for statehood could suffer if Kosovo is perceived as overly Islamic.

"Not only does religion damage the quest for independence, it damages our entire concept," said Rexhep Ismajli, the head of Kosovo's Academy of Science, a body that includes the province's leading thinkers. "It damages Kosovo's society, it damages our vision."

Fatmire Jashari, 18, was suspended from her high school in the central Kosovar town of Srbica - a former stronghold of the now-disbanded Kosovo Liberation Army, the guerrilla group that fought Serb forces in the 1998-1999 war.

"I hope I won't be pushed to choose between the two," she said. "But if I am, I will choose the headscarf."

Another girl in Fatmire's school and a student in a different school were also suspended this week.

Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanians are mostly Muslim, although they are largely secular. The province's governmental institutions, which are supervised by a United Nations administration, are careful not to associate themselves with Islam, fearing that a strong Muslim identity could harm the province's quest for independence from Serbia, a predominantly Orthodox Christian country.



KOSOVO

COMPROMISE 2007

Your daily-updated analyses, charts and solution plug-ins for the Kosovo crisis.

Some countries in Europe remain hesitant to accede to the ethnic Albanian majority's demands for independence, and analysts in Kosovo have raised concerns that this skepticism is due in part to Kosovo's Islamic heritage.

Western intelligence reports have suggested that Muslim-dominated regions in Bosnia and Kosovo could be recruitment grounds for the so-called "white al-Qaida" - Muslims with Western features who could blend into European or U.S. cities and execute terrorist attacks.

Meanwhile, the debate over what kind of country Kosovo will be - if it becomes a country - continues.

"It was easy to proclaim adherence to the democratic principles of the West in during the repression of the Serb regime," said Dukagjin Gorani, an ethnic Albanian commentator. "But when the West actually came to Kosovo, people started going to mosques. This will not necessarily make Kosovo a religious state, but it will certainly start a heated debate on what it should be."