

what a *beautiful* democracy!

A documentary about the struggle of women running for the Turkish parliament



About the film

Do women have enough access to politics in Turkey? What obstacles do they have to overcome to participate in the political arena? Do they have any real agenda on women's problems in Turkey?

"What a *Beautiful Democracy!*" a feature length documentary by the Istanbul based filmmakers collective **filmist** looks for the answers while chronicling the campaign of women candidates running in the general elections in Turkey.



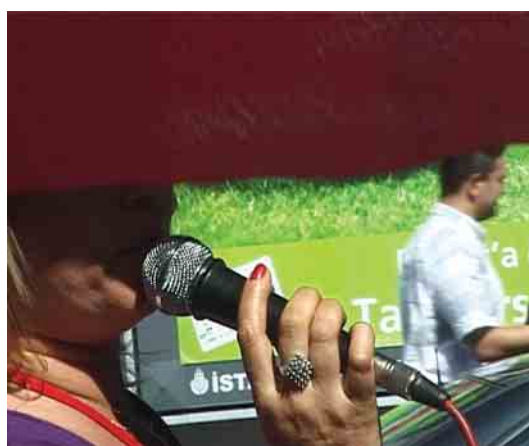
Brief Synopsis

Turkey, summer 2007. The general elections are in two months time. Six different women are working hard to reach the same goal: to be a member of parliament. A business woman, a professor, the youngest candidate of the opposition, a Kurdish activist and two former sex-workers. They run from houses packed with women to mass-circumcision ceremonies, from funerals to rallies. There is pressure at every level: Men, money, time, voters and of course rivals.



Through the story of these candidates the question of gender politics in Turkey is raised by exploring the roles given to women by their parties, their personal political agenda, how their public image has been created and how they are perceived by voters.

"What A *Beautiful Democracy!*" is a feature documentary reflecting both women's struggle for power and also the social face of today's Turkey.



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About the production

The filmmakers were with the candidates during their entire campaigns in the summer of 2007 in İstanbul and the southeast city of Diyarbakır, when they were speaking at mass meetings, visiting street markets, shops and houses in various neighbourhoods, meeting with the NGO's, attending social activities like circumcision, wedding ceremonies and funerals.

It is the first collective project developed by Filmist Filmmakers Collective, whose aim was to chronicle the story of female candidates amidst the biggest ever campaign for women's representation in the parliament --the one before had only 4.4 percent of female members of parliament, ranking 47th in the 47 member European Council in terms of female participation.

The filmmakers filmed 6 candidates, one from the Islamist AK Party, two from the secular Republican Party CHP –one being the youngest ever to stand for elections. Filmist also filmed two independent candidates who were former sex workers. Filmist followed their struggle and emancipation as they claimed the street and gained wide recognition and support from the public as well as women's NGOs. Their tragic life stories reflected in many ways still unresolved women's issues in the country, including incest, honor killings and patriarchal repression.

The filmmakers also filmed a Kurdish candidate in the Southeastern Turkey, who was a former journalist and activist for women's rights.

The filming continued against the background of ongoing controversy of secularism vs. islamism, reflecting the increasing tension between parties during the election campaigns, as well as the tension in the border in the southeast. These issues were touched upon through the perspective of the main characters of the film.

"What a Beautiful Democracy!" is an independent production, produced by Filmist collective. The post-production was supported by the Consulate General of Sweden in İstanbul.

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Festivals, screenings and news

“What a *Beautiful* Democracy!” had its national premiere on April 18th, 2008, at the **27th İstanbul International Film Festival**.

“What a *Beautiful* Democracy!” is now among the selection of films nominated by SIYAD (Turkish Film Critics Association) for the “Best Turkish Documentary Award”.

The film’s international premiere will take place at the **14th Sarajevo Film Festival**, August 2008.

Film info

Directed by: Belmin Söylemez, Berke Baş, Haşmet Topaloğlu, Somnur Vardar

Camera: Berke Baş, Belmin Söylemez, Haşmet Topaloğlu, Somnur Vardar, Melis Birder, Elvan Kivılcım, Zeynel Doğan, Onur Demir

Produced by: filmist

97 min, Turkish-Kurdish, with English subtitles

for more information:

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Filmographies of the Directors

Belmin Söylemez worked as copy writer, editor, director and producer. Her short films and documentaries got national and international awards and were shown on TV Channels such as ARTE, SVT (Sweden), YLE (Finland), SBS (Australia). Her films include *State of Sleep* (1999), *The Moustache* (2000), *Waves* (2001), *Windows* (2002), *Picture of My Life* (2003), *34 Taxi* (2005).

Berke Baş received her masters degree in media studies at New School University, New York. She has worked in various documentary projects and publicity videos dealing especially with individual and public rights. Some of her films are *Crossing Brooklyn* (2002), *In Transit* (2005), *Boreas* (2006 – editor), *A Jihad for Love* (2007-videographer).

Haşmet Topaloğlu has worked for national tv-channels over a period of ten years as reporter, producer, presenter. Since 2002 he produces documentaries and educational films for NGO's. His films include *Black on Yellow* (2004), *Five Masters of Construction* (2005), *Lotus Power* (2005) and *How Beautiful Istanbul is Today* (2005).

Somnur Vardar received her M.A. from Media Studies program of New School for Social Research, NY. She wrote, produced and directed documentaries on social and political history, urban affairs and current political affairs for NTV- news channel. Since 2000, she has been working as an independent researcher. Her research study on "Inter-religious Marriages in Istanbul", conducted under the supervision of Prof. Abdullahi A. An'Naim of Emory University, has been published in English by Global Media Publications. Her films include *The German Dream of 40 Years* (1998), *Memories of the Republic* (1999), *An Island on the Mediterranean* (1999), *Turkey's Electoral History* (1999). She is currently working on her documentary "*Will You Marry Me?*".