



NEWS REPORT

Date: 15 December 2014
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Title: ECtHR finds the Turkish Government's refusal to grant an Alevi foundation the exemption from paying electricity bills granted to places of worship to be discriminatory
Country: Turkey
Context
Issue at stake: The government's differential treatment of minority religious groups in the allocation of social advantages
Ground of discrimination: Religion/belief
Source: ECtHR, *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, application no. 32093/10, 2 December 2014.
Field: Social advantages

Content

Case: On 7 May 2010, an Alevi religious foundation in Istanbul had filed a petition at the ECtHR, arguing that its exclusion by the government from a social advantage granted to places of worship under the Turkish law violated Article 14 (the prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion). The applicant foundation runs Alevi places of worship (*cemevi*) across Turkey and specifically the Yenibosna Cultural Centre, a complex which houses, among others, the foundation's headquarters, a room for funerals and a *cemevi*. Relying on Article 14, together with Article 9, the applicant claimed that it had been unduly deprived of an exemption from paying electricity bills granted to all places of worship due to the Turkish government's failure to recognise the *cemevis* as places of worship. Relying on Article 9, the applicant further complained about the Turkish authorities' refusal to grant the status of place of worship to the Yenibosna Centre.

Turkish legislation provides the electricity bills of places of worship to be paid from a fund administered by the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*). Earlier, Turkish courts had dismissed the foundation's claims for benefitting from the exemption, based on the opinion of *Diyanet* that Alevism was not a religion and that the *cemevis* were not places of worship, hence ineligible for benefits.

Decision of the Court: On 2 December 2014, the ECtHR issued a unanimous judgment in the case of *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*. Finding that the *cemevis* were places of worship and that the situation of the applicant foundation was similar to that of other religious communities in Turkey, the ECtHR concluded that the government's exclusion of *cemevis* from the benefits afforded to other religious groups amounted to a difference in treatment on ground of religion which had no objective or reasonable justification. The Court held that the exemption system entailed discrimination on the ground of religion, and found a



violation of Article 14 in conjunction with Article 9. It found the applicant's separate claim under Article 9 to be inadmissible.

Internet link source and additional information:

The full text of the judgment is available in French:

[http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/Pages/search.aspx#{"docname":\["cumhuriyetci"\],"documentcollectionid2":\["GRANDCHAMBER","CHAMBER"\],"itemid":\["001-148609"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/Pages/search.aspx#{)

For the Court's press release in English: <file:///C:/Users/Dilek/Downloads/udgment%20Cumhuriyetci%20Egitim%20Ve%20Kultur%20Merkezi%20Vakfi%20v.%20Turkey%20%20privileged%20status%20granted%20to%20places%20o.pdf>