

TURKEY: Appeals court rules Alevi minority's cem houses are places of worship

Ahval News (28.11.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2TW5uNj> – Turkey's Court of Appeals ruled that cem houses, places where the Alevi religious minority carry out services, are places of worship and the state should therefore cover their electricity expenses as it does for the mosques, left-wing news site Sendika.org reported .

According to Turkish law, the electricity bills for places of worship of the Muslim population are paid from the budget allocated to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), Turkey's top religious body.

But the Diyanet does not pay the electricity bills for the cem houses of the Alevis, who make up some 15-20 percent of Turkey's population as the Turkish state treats Alevi Islam as a heterodox Muslim sect .

Turkey was taken to the European Court of Human Rights in 2010 by Cem Foundation, an Alevi organisation, for not paying the electricity bills of cem houses in Istanbul.

The court ruled in 2014 that Turkey was discriminating against Alevis by failing to grant their places of worship the same status and advantages as those of other faiths.

The Turkish Court of Appeals later decided to overturn a previous court verdict from 2012 that was in favour of the Istanbul's Electric Distribution Company (Bedaş), which sued cem houses in Istanbul for not paying their electricity bills. Bedaş appealed, but the court one again ruled in favour of the Alevi cem houses.

Lawyer Ulaş Çam, who has been representing the Cem Foundation from the very start, told Sendika.org that the verdict was expected to be finalised in a short while and after that cem houses would not be obliged to pay their electricity bills.

“This is an important step, we have been following this case for a long time. Our demand from now on is a legal regulation,” Çam said.

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