

EU monitors Alevi reform

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The ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) reform initiative on the status of Alevis, a distinct and liberal movement in Islam with its believers mostly found in Turkey and Syria, has attracted the attention of the European Union.

Members of the European Commission's Turkey delegation, Sema Kılıçer and Diego Mellado Tuesday paid a surprise visit to the AKP's Istanbul deputy, *Reha Çamuroğlu*, an Alevi politician who prepared the general reform package on Alevis.

Kılıçer and Mellado queried Çamuroğlu on subjects which were earlier emphasized in the EU 2007 Progress Report, namely the official status of Cemevis, Alevi houses of worship ; possibility of financial support to Alevis ; the content of high school courses on religion that need to take better account of different faiths ; and timeframe of the steps to be taken.

The package suggests including "dede's," Alevi religious leaders, on the state pay roll and granting Cemevis the status of "place of worship" within the framework of Religious Affairs Directorate. Alevis claim that the Religious Affairs Directorate is dominated by Sunni officials, who ignore their religious needs. Moreover, Alevi community leaders in Cemevis do not receive payment from the state, whereas imams in mosques do.

The reform targets the high school curriculum on religious education as well, advocating addition of objectives and satisfactory materials on the Alevi belief. The Strasbourg based European Court of Human Rights ruled in October that religion classes in Turkey are not objective and do not fit in with the pluralism criteria.

Furthermore, Çamuroğlu's proposals urge the state to hand out land and financial aid for Cemevi construction and to air programs that show Alevi culture on state television and radio.

Çamuroğlu said these measures will not harm secularism but strengthen it, in the meeting with the European commissioners. He pointed out that there are other Alevi deputies in the AKP and said the party is very sensitive to the problems of Alevi citizens. Çamuroğlu said no one dared to propose a solution to Alevis' problems in the past, and that now it was time to wait for the results of discussions in the public opinion.

Sources

Source : « Turkish Daily News », 29 novembre 2007

<http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/...>