

*Permanent Representation
of Turkey
to the Council of Europe
Ambassador*

Strasbourg, 1 February 2011

Dear Mr. Commissioner,

On behalf of the Turkish Government, I would like to thank you for your encouraging assessment regarding the positive developments in Turkey with respect to freedom of religion.

Turkey remains committed to the protection of human rights and strengthening the rule of law. Recent developments, including the adoption of the constitutional reform package following a public referendum bear testimony to the political will that exists not only within the Government, but also with the public at large.

The Government will carry on the reform process to further freedom of thought, conscience and religion in Turkey.

Turkish authorities have established direct dialogue with different faith and belief groups to this end. Meetings have been held periodically since 2006 with the representatives of different non-Muslim religious communities including Jews, Catholic Syriacs, Orthodox Syriacs, Orthodox Armenians, Orthodox Greeks, Orthodox Bulgarians, Catholic Georgians, Catholic Armenians, Protestant Armenians, Catholic Keldanis and Latin Catholics.

In order to address difficulties in the training of clergy, 12 Greek Orthodox Metropolitans attached to the Patriarchate have been granted Turkish citizenship to render them eligible for the Holy Synod elections.

The Government has also taken an initiative to address the demands of the Alevi community. Since June 2009, seven workshops have been organized under the coordination of the Minister of State, Mr. Faruk Çelik, with the participation of representatives of the Alevi community, media, academics and NGOs. A consensus has been reached among participants on certain issues such as the necessity to recognize the legal status of Alevi worship places (Cemevleri) and to review the curriculum of courses on Religious Culture and Morals.

A legal commission has been set up to examine the status issue of Alevi worship places (Cemevleri) and prepared a detailed report regarding the current situation as well as the possible legal steps to be taken. The report is presently under consideration by the Minister of State.

Following the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) on "*Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*", Religious Culture and Morals curriculum had been cancelled at

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the end of the 2006-2007 academic year and a new curriculum prepared with a holistic approach including topics related to Alevi-Bektashi belief has been introduced in the following academic year.

However, the need to further review the textbooks of courses on Religious Culture and Morals has been confirmed during the workshops organized by the Minister of State. Taking into account the views of the representatives of Alevi, Jaafari (Caferi) and Nusayri religious communities, a commission has been set up to review the curriculum once again. The revised curriculum, approved by the Ministry of Education on 31 December 2010, will be introduced in the academic year of 2011-2012.

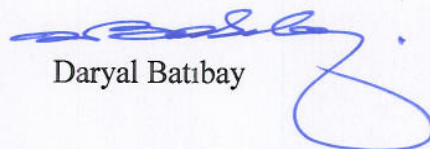
The following topics are included in the revised curriculum on Religious Culture and Morals:

- Examples of prayers from Turkish culture.
- Muharrem Fast
- Sufistic comments
- Doctrine of Yesevi
- Doctrine of Kadiri
- Doctrine of Nakshibendiyye
- Doctrine of Mevlevi
- Doctrine of Alevi-Bektashi
- Cemevi
- Cem rituals and its varieties
- Samah (Semah)
- Hızır Fast
- Courage and heroism of Caliph Ali
- Contribution of Turks to the science and civilization of Islam
- Principles of oneness (Tevhid) and belief in the works of Hacı Bektaş Veli
- Exemplary personality of Caliph Ali and his words about the importance of worship

As to the matter of identity cards indicating the owners' religious belief (*Sinan Işık v. Turkey judgment*), a revision of the ID cards is under consideration.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to reiterate that continued cooperation with you, Mr. Commissioner, remains a priority for the Turkish Government.

Yours sincerely,


Daryal Batıbay