



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Turkey: Alevis

Version 2.0
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Preface

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and policy guidance to Home Office decision makers on handling particular types of protection and human rights claims. This includes whether claims are likely to justify the granting of asylum, humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and whether – in the event of a claim being refused – it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under s94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must consider claims on an individual basis, taking into account the case specific facts and all relevant evidence, including: the policy guidance contained with this note; the available COI; any applicable caselaw; and the Home Office casework guidance in relation to relevant policies.

Country information

COI in this note has been researched in accordance with principles set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#) and the [European Asylum Support Office’s research guidelines, Country of Origin Information report methodology](#), namely taking into account its relevance, reliability, accuracy, objectivity, currency, transparency and traceability.

All information is carefully selected from generally reliable, publicly accessible sources or is information that can be made publicly available. Full publication details of supporting documentation are provided in footnotes. Multiple sourcing is normally used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, and that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided. Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source is not an endorsement of it or any views expressed.

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to make recommendations to him about the content of the Home Office’s COI material. The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the COI documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s website at <http://icinspector.independent.gov.uk/country-information-reviews/>

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Policy guidance

Updated: 1 August 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm at the hands of state or non-state actors due to the person's Alevi faith.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Assessment of risk

a. Treatment by the state

- 2.2.1 Freedom of religion and conscience is guaranteed by the Turkish Constitution and relevant legislation (see [Legal framework](#)). However as a strictly secularist state, Turkey requires the absence of religion in public life. Therefore no religious community in Turkey – including the majority Sunni Muslim community – has full legal status and they are all subject to state controls limiting their rights to maintain places of worship, train clergy, and offer religious education (see [Religious freedom](#)).

- 2.2.2 The Turkish government considers Alevism to be an unorthodox Muslim sect as opposed to a religion in its own right (see [Alevism](#)). As a consequence Alevi places of worship (cemevi) and Alevi religious leaders (faith leaders) are not officially recognised. Whilst it is technically illegal to worship in unrecognised places of worship, in practice Alevi are free to practice their religion and have been able to build new cemevis (see [Places of worship](#)).

- 2.2.3 Unlike recognised places of worship, cemevis do not receive financial support from the state. However following a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights that this amounted to discrimination, the Turkish government stated in 2015 that cemevis will be granted legal status but this has not fully happened yet and only some local administrations in Turkish provinces have declared cemevis as official places of worship (see [Places of worship](#)).

- 2.2.4 Alevis also face unequal treatment in education. Members of recognised non-Muslim religious groups are legally allowed an exemption from compulsory religious instruction in schools. However no exemptions are allowed for Alevis. Furthermore, although the Turkish authorities added material on Alevism to the religious curriculum, many Alevis believe that this material is inadequate and, in some cases incorrect (see [Education](#)).
- 2.2.5 Previously national identity cards contained a space for religious identification and did not permit Alevi as an option. However in January 2017, new national identity cards were introduced which do not show the person's religion on the face of the cards (see [Religion on identity cards](#)).
- 2.2.6 In general there is no real risk of state persecution or serious harm and Alevis are free to practice their religion. Although there is a degree of state discrimination against Alevis particularly in respect of the financing of their places of worship and in education, these are not sufficiently serious by their nature and repetition as to amount to persecution or serious harm.

b. Treatment by non-state actors

- 2.2.7 There are reports of incidents of hate speeches, societal discrimination and violence against Alevis. This is usually directed at Alevis by devout Sunni Muslims who feel they are non-believers or 'devil worshippers'. However these incidents are rare and most Alevis are reported to co-exist with other communities with few problems on a daily basis (see [Societal discrimination](#)).
- 2.2.8 In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, many Alevis reported threats and some violence from those opposing the failed coup in response to which the authorities provided effective protection (see [Societal discrimination: Situation since the coup attempt in July 2016](#)).
- 2.2.9 In recent years Alevis also fear threats by terrorist groups. However, the Turkish authorities appear to be able and willing to provide protection against these non-state armed groups (see [Threats by terrorist groups](#)).
- 2.2.10 Considering the number of Alevis in the country against the relatively low number of reported incidents, the risk of serious harm from non state actors is statistically very low. In general Alevis are not subject to treatment by non state actors which amounts to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.2.11 However, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk of persecution or serious harm. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at risk of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors if returned to Turkey.
- 2.2.12 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.3 Protection

- 2.3.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm by the state itself, they will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.

- 2.3.2 Where the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm by non-state agents - including rogue state agents - then the state is in general both willing and able to provide effective protection.
- 2.3.3 The Turkish Penal Code was amended in March 2014 to introduce crimes of 'hatred and discrimination,' with a penalty for hate/discrimination offences on religious and other, grounds. Furthermore, a revision of Article 122 of the Turkish Penal Code introduced penalties for discriminatory, hate-based practices in economic activities and in employment (see [Anti-discrimination laws](#)). Avenues of complaint exist for persons to lodge complaints against police officers they accuse of ill-treatment (see country policy and information note on [Turkey: Background including actors of protection and internal relocation](#)).
- 2.3.4 In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt in July 2016, there were incidences of Alevis facing threats of societal violence and protests in Alevi neighbourhoods in response to which the police are reported to have provided effective protection (see [Societal discrimination: Situation since the coup attempt in July 2016](#)). The authorities have similarly provided effective protection to Alevis against ongoing threats from non-state armed groups such as Daesh (see [Threats by terrorist groups](#)).
- 2.3.5 Decision makers need to consider each case on its facts. The onus is on the person to demonstrate they are unable to seek and obtain state protection.
- 2.3.6 See also country policy and information note on [Turkey: Background including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).
- 2.3.7 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Internal relocation

- 2.4.1 Where the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm at the hands of the state they will not be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.4.2 There are Alevi communities throughout Turkey and in general where an Alevi does encounter local societal hostility it will be reasonable for them to avoid this by moving elsewhere in Turkey.
- 2.4.3 See also the country policy and information note on [Turkey: Background including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).
- 2.4.4 For further guidance on internal relocation, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Certification

- 2.5.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.5.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under Section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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3. Policy summary

- 3.1.1 Alevism is considered by the Turkish state to be an unorthodox Muslim sect, rather than a religion in its own right and is not officially recognised. Alevis are nevertheless able to worship freely. Their places of worship have not in the past been officially recognised but the Turkish government has given an indication that these will be given legal status and this has been implemented in parts of the country. Alevis also reportedly experience unequal treatment in education. However in general such treatment by the state does not amount to persecution or serious harm.
- 3.1.2 There are a small number of reports of incidences of hate speech, societal discrimination and violence towards Alevis, but in general Alevis co-exist peacefully with other groups.
- 3.1.3 In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt in July 2016, there were incidences of Alevis facing threats, societal violence and protests in Alevi neighbourhoods in response to which the police are reported to have provided effective protection. The authorities have similarly provided effective protection to Alevis against ongoing threats from non-state armed groups such as Daesh.
- 3.1.4 Where the person's fear is of persecution or serious harm by non-state agents - or rogue state agents - then the state is in general both willing and able to provide effective protection
- 3.1.5 In general, a person will be able to relocate internally to escape societal ill treatment, but internal relocation will not be reasonable if ill-treatment is at the hands of the authorities.
- 3.1.6 Where a claim is refused it is likely to be certifiable as clearly unfounded.

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Updated: 25 July 2017

4. Alevism

4.1 Beliefs and practices

4.1.1 Minority Rights Group International state:

'Alevi is the term used for a large number of heterodox [holding unorthodox opinions] Muslim Shi'a communities with different characteristics. Thus, Alevi constitute the largest religious minority in Turkey. Technically they fall under the Shi'a denomination of Islam, yet they follow a fundamentally different interpretation than the Shi'a communities in other countries. They also differ considerably from the Sunni Muslim majority in their practice and interpretation of Islam.

'The vast majority of Alevi are probably of Kizilbash or Bektashi origin, two groups subscribing to virtually the same system of beliefs but separately organized. The Alevi (Kizilbash) are traditionally predominantly rural and acquire identity by parentage. Bektashis, however, are predominantly urban, and formally claim that membership is open to any Muslim.

'Linguistically, they consist of four groups: Azerbaijani Turkish, Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish (both Kurmanci and Zaza). The last two categories constitute the largest Alevi groups. Politically, Kurdish Alevi have faced the dilemma of whether their prior loyalty should be to their ethnic or religious community. Some care more about religious solidarity with Turkish Alevi than ethnic solidarity with Kurds, particularly since many Sunni Kurds deplore them. Some fear such tensions may lead to new ethno-religious conflict.

'Alevi share a way of truth unavailable to the uninitiated, and like Sufis claim that the Koran has both an open and a hidden meaning. There are progressive levels of divine understanding from obedience to shari'a Islam through tarika (brotherhood) to ma'rifa (mystical understanding of God) and ultimately to hakkika (immanent experience of divine reality). Their profession of faith includes Ali along with God and the Prophet Muhammad. Alevi differ outwardly from Sunni Muslims in the following ways: they do not fast in Ramadan but do during the Ten Days of Muharram (the Shiite commemoration of Imam Husayn's martyrdom); they do not prostrate themselves during prayer; they do not have mosques; and do not have obligatory formal almsgiving, although they have a strong principle of mutual assistance.'¹

4.1.2 Further information about Alevi beliefs and practices can be found on the website of the Britain Alevi Federation which is an umbrella organisation for approximately 300.000 Alevi living in the United Kingdom.²

¹ Minority Rights Group International. 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples,' Undated. <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/alevis/> Accessed: 16 June 2017.

² Britain Alevi Federation. 'Alevism'. Undated. <http://www.alevnet.org/AjaxRequestHandler>.

4.2 Population

- 4.2.1 According to the US Department of State's 2015 International Religious Freedom report, '[A]cademics estimate there are 15 million to 20 million Alevi Muslims. Alevi foundation leaders report higher numbers, estimating 20 million to 25 million Alevis in the country.'³
- 4.2.2 Minority Rights Group International state '[t]he number of Alevis is a matter of contention. Estimates range from around 10 per cent to as much as 40 per cent of the total population... The Alevi-Bektas,i Federation claims that there are around 25 million Alevis in Turkey, constituting nearly 33 per cent of the population.'⁴

5. Legal rights

5.1 Legal framework

- 5.1.1 According to the US Department of State's 2015 International Religious Freedom report:

'The constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of conscience, religious belief, conviction, expression, and worship. The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds and prohibits exploitation or abuse of "religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion."

'The Turkish state coordinates and governs religious matters through the Diyanet. The Diyanet's mandate is to promote the belief, practices, and moral principles of Sunni Islam, educate the public about religious issues, and administer places of worship. Operating under the prime minister's office, with a president appointed by the prime minister, and administered by a 16-person council elected by clerics and university theology faculties, the Diyanet has five main departments: the high councils for religious affairs, education, services, publications, and public relations.

'Although registration with the government is not mandatory for religious groups, unregistered religious groups cannot request legal recognition for places of worship. Holding religious services at a location not recognized as a place of worship is illegal and may be punished with fines or closure of the venue. A religious group may register as an association or foundation provided it is associated with a charitable or cultural cause. Religious

[ashx?Function=GetSecuredDOC&DOCUrl=App_Data/alevinet_org/Alevism-Resorces_en-GB/Documents_2015-16/151854076_109173189_ALEVISIM.pdf](#) Accessed: 25 July 2017.

³ US Department of State. '2015 International Religious Freedom Report,' Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section I. Religious Demography). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

⁴ Minority Rights Group International. 'World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples,' undated. <http://minorityrights.org/minorities/alevis/> Accessed: 16 June 2017.

community foundations are the only religious groups permitted to own real estate.’⁵

5.1.2 In its national report of October 2014 to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, the Turkish government stated that:

‘Freedom of religion and conscience is firmly guaranteed by the Constitution and relevant legislation. Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious rites and ceremonies, or to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions.

‘Dissemination of religious beliefs or convictions is not prohibited under the Turkish law. To the contrary, prohibition of expression or dissemination of religious belief through coercion or threat constitutes an offence.

‘In terms of promoting the environment of tolerance and mutual understanding, Turkish citizens belonging to different faith groups can freely hold their own religious ceremonies. Since 2010 religious ceremonies have been held at various places for worship including The Historical Sumela Monastery in Trabzon, Surp Hac Armenian Church on the Akhdamar Island of Lake Van, Surp Giragos Armenian Orthodox Church in Sur district of Diyarbakır and Aya Yorgi Church in Alanya.

‘Dialogue with different faith groups has intensified since the first cycle of the review. Accordingly, high level Turkish authorities met with representatives of different faith groups and spiritual leaders of the communities. Priority was given to tackling the problems faced by these groups.’⁶

5.1.3 The 2017 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted:

‘The 1982 Turkish constitution provides for the freedom of belief, worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas, and prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Nevertheless, the state interprets secularism to require state control over religious communities, including their practices and houses of worship. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) maintains control over the practice of Islam in Turkey; all other religions are under the auspices of the General Directorate for Foundations (Vakıflar).’⁷

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5.2 Anti discrimination law

5.2.1 In its 2014 Progress Report on Turkey (which covers the period from October 2013 to September 2014), the European Commission reported that:

⁵ US Department of State. ‘2015 International Religious Freedom Report;’ Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Legal framework). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

⁶ UN Human Rights Council. National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: Turkey, 30 October 2014, A/HRC/WG.6/21/TUR/1 (paras 55 – 59). <http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHRC,,TUR,,54c108254,0.html>. Accessed: 27 June 2017.

⁷ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. ‘Annual Report 2017’, (p187) 26 April 2017 <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>. Accessed: 27 June 2017.

'In March [2014], the Criminal Code was amended to refer to "hatred and discrimination." The amendment increased the penalty for hate offences including those based on language, race, nationality, colour, gender, disability, political view, philosophical belief, religion or sect. The amendment did not however include hate offences based on ethnic origin, sexual orientation or gender identity...

'In the field of anti-discrimination, the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of disability was introduced into the national education law and the labour law. Furthermore, a revision of Article 122 of the Turkish Penal Code introduced penalties for discriminatory, hate based practices in economic activities and in employment. There is still no protective legislation regarding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or age...

'The Turkish Criminal Code regulates anti-discrimination, listing language, race, colour, gender, disability, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, sect and similar reasons as bases on which discrimination is not permitted. It was amended to refer to hate crimes and to increase penalties for discrimination. Refusing to sell or rent a movable or immovable property to a particular person, while this has been offered to the public, is considered discrimination and has become a crime. However, discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, sexual orientation and gender identity were not listed in the March [2014] revision of the Criminal Code. This affects especially important minorities as Roma and Kurds that are the most disadvantaged groups.... A draft law on the establishment of an Anti-discrimination and Equality Board remained pending at the Prime Ministry.'⁸

5.2.2 According to Legislation Online, Article 122 of the Turkish Penal Code reads:

- '(1) Any person who discriminates against another person on the ground of language, race, colour, gender, disability, political view, philosophical belief, religion, sect, or any similar reasons by:
- a. preventing the sale, or transfer, of personal property or real estate, the performance or enjoyment of a service or who offers employment, or refuses employment;
 - b. withholding foodstuffs or refusing a service that is available to the public,
 - c. preventing a person from carrying out an ordinary economic activity, shall be sentenced to a penalty of imprisonment for a term of six months to one year or a judicial fine.'⁹

⁸ European Commission. '2014 Progress Report on Turkey', 8 October 2014 (Chapter 23: Judiciary and fundamental rights, pages 41, 58 – 60). http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf. Accessed: 19 June 2017

⁹ Legislation Online. 'Turkey.Criminal Code.' Undated. <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/18562>. Accessed: 25 July 2017

5.2.3 The European Commission, in a comparative study of anti-discrimination law in Europe published in January 2017, summarised the main specific anti discrimination law in Turkey at the start of 2016, as follows¹⁰:

Constitutional anti discrimination provisions	Main specific anti-discrimination legislation	Grounds covered
Art. 10 of the Constitution	Law on Persons with Disabilities No 5378 of 1 July 2005, as last amended in 2014	Disability
	Labour Law (no. 4857), of 22 May 2003, as last amended in 2015	Language, race, colour, gender, disability, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect or any such considerations

5.2.4 In its 2016 Progress Report on Turkey (which covered the period from October 2015 to September 2016), the European Commission reported that:

‘On non-discrimination, the new Law on the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey contains provisions prohibiting discrimination on a large number of grounds and is a step in the right direction. There is still a need to adopt a fully comprehensive dedicated law on combating discrimination in line with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, including with regards to sexual orientation. Turkey is encouraged to swiftly ratify Protocol 12 ECHR providing a general prohibition of discrimination. This would strengthen legal certainty. The National Human Rights and Equality Institution needs to be rapidly established and start processing cases of discrimination.

‘The criminal code is incomplete concerning hate crime and is not fully in line with best practices at international level. Turkey should take account of the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe in this field.

‘Moreover, the provisions do not cover hate offences based on ethnic origin or sexual orientation. Non-discrimination is not sufficiently enforced either in law or in practice and the rights of minorities are not sufficiently upheld. Ethnic and religious groups and groups promoting gender diversity continued to report cases of discrimination in society and employment.’¹¹

¹⁰ European Commission. European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination, ‘A comparative analysis of non-discrimination law in Europe 2016’ (page 130). 12 January 2017. <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3987-a-comparative-analyses-of-non-discrimination-law-in-europe-2016-pdf-1-2-mb>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

¹¹ European Commission. ‘Commission Staff Working Document: Turkey 2016 Report’. 9 November 2016. (Page 74 - 75) https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_turkey.pdf. Accessed: 2 June 2017.

- 5.2.5 See also the country policy and information note on [Turkey: Background information including actors of protection and internal relocation](#).

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6. State treatment and attitudes

6.1 Religious freedom

- 6.1.1 In a December 2015 news article, the Daily Sabah referred to governmental steps ('the Alevi initiative') to resolve the concerns of the Alevi community

'[it] was launched during Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's tenure as prime minister in 2009, and seven discussion workshops were held with the participation of Alevi leaders and representatives from different segments of society over a course of six months. Moreover, on Nov. 23, 2011, Erdoğan apologized on behalf of the state for the Dersim tragedy in 1937.

'The incident refers to the massacre of Alevi Zaza people in Dersim in 1937 and 1938 after an Alevi uprising during the Republican People's Party's (CHP) single-party era. According to gendarmerie reports, 13,806 people were killed and thousands more were internally displaced due to the military campaign against the uprising after the 1934 Resettlement Law, which aimed to assimilate ethnic minorities. Erdoğan described the incident as one of the most painful and bloody tragedies in Turkey's recent history.'¹²

- 6.1.2 According to the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom report covering events in 2015: 'The government continued to consider Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect and did not financially support religious worship for Alevi Muslims. Alevi leaders said the government failed to meet their demands for religious reforms and expressed concerns about security.'¹³

- 6.1.3 In its 2016 Progress Report on Turkey (which covered the period from October 2015 to September 2016), the European Commission reported that: 'Outstanding issues concerning the Alevi community need to be tackled, including the implementation of several ECtHR judgments.'¹⁴

- 6.1.4 The International Crisis Group reported in November 2016 that 'Alevis have long-standing demands and security concerns that AKP governments have not met. They have little representation in the upper echelons of the party, feel discriminated against because their houses of worship (cemevis) lack legal status and complain of derogatory language and lack of protection from the state and government. Recently, they were alarmed because the Bosphorus Bridge opened in August was named for Yavuz Sultan Selim, a

¹² Daily Sabah. 'Alevi houses of worship to be granted legal status.' 10 December 2015. <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2015/12/10/alevi-houses-of-worship-to-be-granted-legal-status>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

¹³ US Department of State. '2015 International Religious Freedom Report,' Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Government Practices). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251> Accessed: 19 June 2017

¹⁴ European Commission. 'Commission Staff Working Document: Turkey 2016 Report'. 9 November 2016. (Page 71) https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_turkey.pdf. Accessed: 2 June 2017.

sixteenth century Ottoman ruler who massacred tens of thousands of Alevis.¹⁵

6.1.5 The 2017 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted:

‘While the Turkish government has increasingly restricted a broad range of human rights, especially in the aftermath of the failed July 2016 coup d’état attempt, it has nevertheless taken some positive steps to improve religious freedom conditions in Turkey. The government has returned properties expropriated from religious minority communities, provided dual citizenship to Greek Orthodox Metropolitans so they can participate in their church’s Holy Synod, and revised school curricula. However, due to the Turkish government’s strict interpretation of secularism as requiring the absence of religion in public life, no religious community—including the majority Sunni Muslim community—has full legal status, and all are subject to state controls limiting their rights to maintain places of worship, train clergy, and offer religious education. Additionally, longstanding religious freedom concerns persist pertaining to religious properties, listing of religious affiliations on national identification cards, and education.’¹⁶

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6.2 Political representation

6.2.1 In a June 2015 response to an information request, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board citing various sources stated:

‘An article published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a US non-profit organization that works to promote US Middle East policy, states that the opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), is supported by a “majority” of the Alevi population. Sources report that the leader of the CHP is Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who is an Alevi. The Washington Institute reports that over the past 12 years “the Alevis have been almost entirely cut out of power, except in a few cities where the local government belongs to opposition parties like the ... CHP”.’¹⁷

6.2.2 According to a House of Lords briefing paper, in the November 2015 national elections, Justice and Development Party (AKP) won 316 seats in Parliament, Republican People’s Party (CHP) won 134 seats, the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) 59 seats and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) 41 seats.¹⁸

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¹⁵ International Crisis Group, Turkey’s Refugee Crisis: The Politics of Permanence, 30 November 2016 (page 16), https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/241-turkey-s-refugee-crisis-the-politics-of-permanence_0.pdf. Accessed: 25 July 2017

¹⁶ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. ‘Annual Report 2017’, (p186) 26 April 2017 http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017_USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf. Accessed: 19 June 2017

¹⁷ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. ‘Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015),’ 12 June 2015, TUR105167.E <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455948&pls=1>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

¹⁸ UK Parliament. House of Lords. Parliamentary Elections in Turkey, November 2015. <http://research.briefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/LIF-2015-0046>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

6.3 Places of worship

6.3.1 In January 2014, Forum 18 reported that:

'It is in fact, if not in law, possible for Alevis and other communities, such as Protestants, to worship in a building not having legal place of worship status. But there are legal, financial and social consequences.

'Legally, gathering for worship in a building that is not legally recognised, or calling it a cem house (cemevi), church or similar name may - albeit seldom - result in prosecution.

'Financially, legally recognised places of worship enjoy certain exemptions from a number of taxes, for instance, property tax, and electricity and water charges. Belief communities whose buildings do not have legal place of worship status cannot enjoy these benefits.'¹⁹

6.3.2 According to the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom report covering events in 2015:

'Although registration with the government is not mandatory for religious groups, unregistered religious groups cannot request legal recognition for places of worship. Holding religious services at a location not recognized as a place of worship is illegal and may be punished with fines or closure of the venue. A religious group may register as an association or foundation provided it is associated with a charitable or cultural cause. Religious community foundations are the only religious groups permitted to own real estate.'²⁰

6.3.3 The same report stated:

'Although Alevi groups were able to build new cemevis, the government continued to decline to provide financial support from the Diyanet, a move Alevi groups considered discriminatory. Alevi leaders reported there were approximately 2,500 to 3,000 Alevi cemevis in the country, an insufficient number to meet their needs.

'In August [2015] the Supreme Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court's decision that cemevis are places of worship and should be exempt from paying utility bills. The lower court had held that cemevis had been known as places of worship for Alevis for hundreds of years, and a charter referring to cemevis as places of worship was not in contravention of the constitution or prohibited by law. At the end of the year, the government had not legally recognized cemevis as places of worship although several municipalities led by the opposition Republican People's Party recognized cemevis and waived utility bills.'²¹

¹⁹ Forum 18 News Service. 'Turkey: Religious freedom survey, January 2014,' dated 16 January 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1916. Accessed: 17 June 2017

²⁰ US Department of State. 'International Religious Freedom Report for 2015' (Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom). 10 August 2016. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>. Accessed: 25 July 2016.

²¹ US Department of State. '2015 International Religious Freedom Report;' Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Government Practices). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251> Date accessed: 19 June 2017

6.3.4 In a December 2015 news article the Daily Sabah reported:

‘Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced that the places of worship for the country’s Alevi minority – referred to as a cemevi - will be granted legal status.

‘The exact size of the Alevi population in Turkey is not known, but they constitute the second-largest religious community in the country after Sunni Muslims. Alevi constitute the second-largest religious community in Turkey, after Sunni Muslims. Local administrations of several Turkish provinces have declared cemevis as official places of worship.

‘At the beginning of 2015, the European Court of Human Rights urged for the recognition of cemevis as places of worship with status equal to that of mosques and churches in December. In August 2006, an Alevi foundation argued that cemevis should be recognized officially and, similar to other places of worship, their bills should be paid for through a fund administered by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİB).

‘Courts dismissed the foundation’s application, basing their decision on the DİB’s opinion that cemevis are not places of worship, rather places of assembly in which spiritual ceremonies are held.

‘For years, public recognition of the Alevi identity, institutions and the legal status of Cemevis have been common requests made by a variety of groups in the Alevi community. Though the cemevis are the houses of religious rituals for the Alevi minority of Turkey, so far they have no legal status equivalent to that of mosques or churches. According to the program, arrangements to give them legal status will be completed and, as with mosques, water and power expenses will be covered by the DİB. Moreover, the government is also planning to provide public aid to the Dedes.’²²

6.3.5 The 2017 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted:

‘Alevi worship in cemevis (gathering places), which the Turkish government does not consider as legal houses of worship and thus are denied legal and financial benefits available to other houses of worship.

‘In April 2016, the ECtHR held that the Turkish government was violating the European Convention by not recognizing Alevi places of worship and religious leaders. However, in 2016 the Turkish government designated 126 Alevi dedes (faith leaders), located in several European countries, as “field experts.” While stopping short of deeming them as religious leaders, the designation provides them some recognition so they can advocate for the community’s interests. The court also ruled that only Alevi leaders could determine which faith (Islam or not) their community belonged to.’²³

²² Daily Sabah. ‘Alevi houses of worship to be granted legal status.’ 10 December 2015. <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2015/12/10/alevi-houses-of-worship-to-be-granted-legal-status>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

²³ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. ‘Annual Report 2017’, (page 187 - 188) 26 April 2017 http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017_USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf. Accessed: 19 June 2017

6.4 Education

6.4.1 In its national report of October 2014 to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, the Turkish government stated that:

‘Positive steps have continued to be taken in favor of different faith groups in the area of education and culture. In this context, Ministry of National Education (MoE) annually reviews course materials to remove connotations that might be perceived as discriminatory by different faith groups. Moreover, Ankara 13th Administrative Court ruled that there is no obstacle before the request of the Assyrian citizens towards delivery of Assyrian courses along with the curriculum of the MoE in certain days or hours of the week in a pre-school to be opened under a community foundation.’²⁴

6.4.2 The US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom report covering events in 2015 stated:

‘The constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in public primary and secondary schools, with content determined by the Ministry of National Education’s Department of Religious Instruction.

‘The law requires 12 years of compulsory education, including elementary, intermediate, and secondary school. Religion classes are compulsory, with two hours per week for students in grades four through eight and one hour per week for students in grades nine through 12. Students who are part of a recognized religious minority may apply for an exemption. Members of recognized non-Muslim religious groups are legally allowed an exemption from religious instruction. No exemptions are allowed for atheists, agnostics, Alevis or non-Sunni Muslims, Bahais, or Yezidis. Islamic religious courses may also be taken as electives for two hours per week in middle school during regular school hours.’²⁵

6.4.3 The same source also stated:

‘Although authorities added material on Alevism to the religious course curriculum after the ECHR decision, many Alevis stated this material was inadequate and, in some cases, incorrect. In March National Education Minister Nabi Avci said the government would partner with the Helping Hands Foundation to support construction of an Alevi school to teach Alevi-Bektashi beliefs. At the end of the year, the school had not yet opened. Alevis had many unresolved discrimination cases against the Ministry of National Education pending in courts at the end of the year.

‘Non-Sunni Muslims said they faced difficulty obtaining exemptions from compulsory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools, particularly if their identification cards listed their religion as “Muslim.”

²⁴ UN Human Rights Council. National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: Turkey, 30 October 2014, A/HRC/WG.6/21/TUR/1 (paras 55 – 59). <http://www.refworld.org/country,,UNHRC,,TUR,,54c108254,0.html>. Accessed: 27 June 2017

²⁵ US Department of State. ‘2015 International Religious Freedom Report;’ Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Legal Framework). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dlid=256251>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

Members of other minority religious groups, including Protestants, also said they had difficulty obtaining exemptions. The government said that the compulsory instruction covered the range of world religions, but religious groups, especially Alevis and members of the Syriac Orthodox community, stated that the courses largely reflected Hanafi Sunni Islamic doctrine and contained negative and incorrect information about other religious groups. While the government allowed non-Muslims to select other electives to fulfill their required coursework for graduation, non-Sunni Muslims reported they often were only allowed to choose from electives concerning different aspects of Sunni Islam. In February the National Education Ministry's Directorate General of Religious Education wrote a memorandum to provincial governors ordering all children except those whose ID cards listed Christianity or Judaism, including those whose ID cards listed no religious affiliation, to be enrolled in the mandatory religion classes.'²⁶

6.4.4 In February 2015 Al Jazeera reported:

'The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has rejected an appeal by Turkey, upholding a September 2014 ruling that mandatory secondary school religious classes were in breach of the "right to education".

'The applicants argued revised textbooks - changed after another ECHR judgement of 2007 - still treated the Alevi faith as a "tradition or culture, not as a belief system in its own right".

'The court's ruling [...] said that Turkey's education system, even after changes were made in the textbooks, was still discriminatory.

"Turkey has to remedy the situation without delay, in particular by introducing a system whereby pupils could be exempted from religion and ethics classes without their parents having to disclose their own religious or philosophical convictions," said the court.

'According to Turkish legislation, only Christians and Jews are exempt from mandatory religious classes at secondary schools.

'Ahmet Iyimaya, an MP of the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party, told Al Jazeera that Turkey would act in line with the judgement.'²⁷

6.4.5 The 2017 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted:

'The Turkish government requires primary and secondary students to attend a compulsory "Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge" course, established by the Ministry of National Education. While non-Muslim children can be exempted, they often must disclose their religious affiliation (or lack thereof), which can lead to social ostracism. While the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in 2014 that requiring students to disclose their

²⁶ US Department of State. '2015 International Religious Freedom Report;' Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Government Practices). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

²⁷ Al Jazeera. 'Europe court upholds religion ruling on Turkey schools'. 19 February 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/02/europe-court-upholds-religion-ruling-turkey-schools-150218085054274.html>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

religious affiliation was a violation of the European Convention, nongovernmental organizations continue to inform USCIRF that some schools in Turkey are not upholding the decision. The textbooks used in the course also have been criticized for including superficial, limited, and misleading information about religions other than Islam. In a positive development, on February 8, 2017, Education Minister İsmet Yılmaz announced that all required religion courses would respect the ECtHR's ruling and approach all religions equally, eliminating any elevation of Sunni Islam above other religions.²⁸

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6.5 Religion on identity cards

6.5.1 The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom report covering events in 2015 stated 'National identity cards contain a space for religious identification, although the constitution stipulates that no one can be compelled to reveal his or her religious belief. The national identity cards provide for the following religious identities: Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist, No Religion, or Other. The applicant may also elect to leave the space blank. Bahai, Alevi, and Yezidi, among other groups with known populations in the country, are not listed as options.'²⁹

6.5.2 The 2017 annual report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom noted:

'In 2010, the ECtHR ruled that a mandatory listing of religious affiliation on Turkish identification cards violated the European Convention. Thereafter, the Turkish parliament passed a law removing the requirement from the face of the cards. The new identification cards, which went into effect on January 2, 2017, do not show the holders' religious identification, although it is a non-required biodata point on the card's microchip. While religious minority communities view this as an improvement, they remain concerned that a biodata field on religious affiliation could lead to discrimination if the field is left blank or lists a faith other than Islam.'³⁰

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6.6 Broadcasting media

6.6.1 In its 2016 Progress Report on Turkey (which covered the period from October 2015 to September 2016), the European Commission reported that: 'Takeovers of media groups by the Government continued. Trustees modified the editorial policy, while numerous journalists were laid off. [...] In

²⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. 'Annual Report 2017', (p187-188) 26 April 2017 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

²⁹ US Department of State. '2015 International Religious Freedom Report,' Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Legal Framework). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

³⁰ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. 'Annual Report 2017', (p187-188) 26 April 2017 <http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

the aftermath of the coup attempt, the government issued decrees-laws ordering the closure of TV channels and radio stations, predominantly for alleged links to the Gülen movement. However the closures and suspensions extended to a number of channels broadcasting in Kurdish language, one Alevi channel and some opposition channels. By the end of October, 46 TV channels and radios stations, five news agencies, 55 papers and 18 magazines were closed, while arrest warrants were issued against some 90 journalists, access to more than 20 news websites was blocked and the licences of 29 publishing houses were revoked. [...] The proportionality and alignment with international standards of those restrictive measures, including in times of emergency, is questionable.

'The Turkish authorities' decision to close a number of media outlets publishing or broadcasting in Kurdish language and on Alevi culture is a source of concern.'³¹

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6.7 Situation since the coup attempt in July 2016

6.7.1 In a January 2017 response to an information request, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board citing various sources stated:

'The Research Assistant at the University of Sydney also stated the following on how the Alevis in Turkey have been treated by authorities since the coup in 2016: "At state level, following the coup attempt, the government has declared state emergency measures and started to detain thousands of state officials, military officers, academics and journalists. In social media, news were circulated that a great number of detained soldiers and officers were Alevi, but it remains difficult to assess whether these news were correct or not. Nonetheless, it is well known that the AKP government, and in particular the previously PM and now president Erdogan denigrated Alevis publicly a number of times."

'In a 2016 report, Human Rights Watch states that on 28 September 2016, Turkish authorities issued a decree under the state of emergency to order the shut-down of 23 radio and television stations popular specifically among the Alevis. Similarly, sources report the closure of TV 10, a station catering to an Alevi audience.'³²

6.7.2 A January 2017 article published by the Council on Foreign Relations stated:

'Alevis say they are frightened that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is moving to remake Turkey into a place with little room for dissent or even different lifestyles. They accuse the government of kicking them out of their historic strongholds by replacing them with Sunni Syrian refugees. In Anatolian Turkey thousands of Syrians, funded by international donors, the

³¹ European Commission. 'Commission Staff Working Document: Turkey 2016 Report'. 9 November 2016. (Page 72) https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_turkey.pdf. . Accessed: 2 June 2017.

³² IRB (Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada). 'Turkey: The situation and treatment of Kurds and Alevis after the coup attempt in July 2016, including in the large cities (July 2016–January 2017). TUR105723.FE.' 26 January 2017. <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=456925&pls=1>. . Accessed: 19 June 2017

AKP, and themselves, have been relocated to Alevi neighborhoods where rents are cheaper. In March 2016, for instance, the government demolished homes in Kucuk Armutlu to make way for new development sites, which would push out many of the local residents.’³³

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7. Societal discrimination

7.1 Societal attitudes

7.1.1 The US Department of State’s International Religious Freedom report covering events in 2015 stated: ‘In two separate incidents, unknown gunmen fired at three Alevi leaders. [...] Over twenty houses owned by Alevi Muslims were vandalized.’³⁴

7.1.2 According to the 2016 US State Department’s report, covering events in 2015 Alevis and other minority religious groups were regularly the subject of hate speech and discrimination.³⁵

7.1.3 In a June 2015 response to an information request, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board citing various sources stated:

‘In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor at the Department of History, Anthropology & Philosophy at Georgia Regents University, who specializes in the political history of Turkey, explained that some "who consider themselves to be devout Sunni Muslims feel that Alevis are non-believers or 'devil worshippers'". Other sources state that "many" Sunni Muslims regard some Alevi practices as "heresy".....The Professor similarly stated that discrimination of Alevi "both subtle and more overt, takes place throughout the country". In contrast, a 2014 article in the Turkey Analyst, a bi-weekly publication of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Joint Center that focuses on news and analysis of domestic and foreign policy issues in Turkey, states that the "increasing frequency of anti-Alevi prejudice" comes from "members of the AKP leadership," that there has been no major increase in anti-Alevi sentiment "amongst the Sunni population as a whole" and that most Sunnis and Alevis co-exist with relatively few problems on a daily basis.’³⁶

7.1.4 The same Canadian IRB response to information request stated that sources report on incidents of violence against Alevis, including the following:

³³ Council on Foreign Relations. ‘Turkey and the Alevis’. 5 January 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2017-01-05/turkey-and-alevis..> Accessed: 28 June 2017

³⁴ US Department of State. ‘2015 International Religious Freedom Report;’ Turkey, 10 August 2016 (Section II. Legal Framework). <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256251>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

³⁵ US Department of State, ‘Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016’ (Section 6. Other Societal Violence or Discrimination Other Societal Violence or Discrimination). 3 March 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=265482>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

³⁶ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. ‘Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015),’ 12 June 2015, TUR105167.E <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455948&pls=1> . Accessed: 19 June 2017

- ‘During the month of Ramadan in 2012, the home of an Alevi family was surrounded by local residents after the family tried to stop drum noise used to wake people for a predawn Ramadan meal. Sources report that the home was stoned and a stall next to the house was set on fire.
- ‘According to Hurriyet Daily News, in August 2012 "[a]rsonists attempted to set fire to a cemevi ... in Istanbul's Kartal district" (ibid.). According to the same article, the day before the attempted arson, the houses of 25 Alevi families were "marked" by unknown individuals in the same neighbourhood.
- ‘In December 2013, the homes of 13 Alevi were marked with red paint, similar to that which occurred prior to the 1978 killings of Alevis. Minority Rights Group International (MRG) indicates that this took place in Adiyaman province.
- ‘According to an article in Today's Zaman, in October 2014, nine apartment buildings in an Alevi-majority area in Istanbul were marked with the message "Death to Alevis and Kurds. ISIL".
- ‘In November 2014, Deniz Naki, a footballer playing for a Turkish club, was physically attacked and "insulted" for his Alevi and Kurdish origins. Hurriyet Daily News reports that he had experienced past abuse for being an Alevi. As a dual Turkish and German citizen, he left the club and returned to Germany.’³⁷

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7.2 Situation since the coup attempt in July 2016

7.2.1 A January 2017 article published by the Council on Foreign Relations stated:

‘Tensions have been especially high since the failed coup attempt on July 15 [2016]. Although Alevis have been spared from mass arrests, the national state of emergency has Turkey’s minority communities on high alert. Indeed, on the night of the coup, fights broke out in the Gazi neighborhood of Istanbul between AKP partisans and Alevis, who chose not to mobilize in support of the government. A few miles away in the Kucuk Armutlu neighborhood, pro-government protestors singled out the Alevis, blasting demands for their participation through loudspeakers. When the Alevis refused, the protesters accused them of being traitors, but left without a clash, said Sinan Yesilyurt, 21.’³⁸

7.2.2 According to the 2016 US State Department’s report ‘Following the July 15 [2016] coup attempt, many Alevis reported threats of violence and reported that police prevented attacks in Alevi neighborhoods. On July 17 [2016], protesters entered an Alevi neighborhood in Malatya shouting slogans

³⁷ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. ‘Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015),’ 12 June 2015, TUR105167.E <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=455948&pls=1> . Accessed: 19 June 2017.

³⁸ Council on Foreign Relations. ‘Turkey and the Alevis’. 5 January 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2017-01-05/turkey-and-alevis..> Accessed: 28 June 2017

related to the failed coup and denigrating Alevis. On August 18 [2016], an armed group fired several shots in front of the Garip Dede Cemevi (house of worship) in Istanbul's Kucukcekmece suburb. There were no reported casualties; as of year's end, police had not identified the attackers.³⁹

7.2.3 In a January 2017 response to an information request, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board citing various sources stated:

'In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a research assistant at the University of Sydney, a graduate of Bogaziçi University in Istanbul and the London School of Economics, whose doctoral dissertation was on the transformation of the Alevi movement in the diaspora, stated the following with respect to the treatment of the Alevis by Turkish society since the failed coup in 2016: "Following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, the government called the citizens onto the streets to protest against the so called coup d'état. Some protestors - ignited by the atmosphere on streets - became violent especially in some of the districts where the Alevi population resided. One example was the Pasaköskü district in the city of Malatya where the masses gathered on streets and insulted against the Alevi residents. Another example was in Antakya where a violent group attacked Arab Alevis. Other cases of harassment [have occurred] in districts of Gazi, Nurtepe, Ikitelli, Sari Gazi, Okmeydani in Istanbul, Tuzlucaayir in Ankara and Pazarcik in Maras."

'In addition, Voice of America (VOA) reports that an attack by Erdogan supporters on members of the Alevi religious minority occurred on July 17, 2016, in Malatya. Erdal Dogan, a specialized human rights attorney, told Al-Monitor that "the coordinated lynching attempts" in predominantly Alevi neighborhoods confirmed the Alevis' fears about security.

'A sociologist from Istanbul told Al-Monitor that he was concerned about the impact of the state of emergency on the Alevi communities in eastern Turkey. The sociologist informed Al-Monitor that multiple areas were declared "special sections" in the city of Dersim, which has a considerable impact on the freedom of movement and on the livelihoods of people farming and raising livestock.⁴⁰

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7.3 Threats by terrorist groups

7.3.1 Christian Solidarity Worldwide reported in April 2016 that: 'The safety of Turkey's religious and ethnic minorities is precarious. This is in part due to Turkey's porous borders, which facilitate the passage of radical Islamists to

³⁹ US Department of State, 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016' (Section 6. Other Societal Violence or Discrimination Other Societal Violence or Discrimination). 3 March 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2016&dliid=265482>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

⁴⁰ IRB (Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada). 'Turkey: The situation and treatment of Kurds and Alevis after the coup attempt in July 2016, including in the large cities (July 2016–January 2017). TUR105723.FE.' 26 January 2017. <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/Eng/ResRec/RirRdi/Pages/index.aspx?doc=456925&pls=1>. Accessed: 19 June 2017

and from Syria and Iraq, and the government's engagement in asymmetric conflict with the Kurds.'⁴¹

7.3.2 According to Forum 17:

'On 16 March 2016 the General Directorate of Security warned the police that Daesh members may have researched places where Jews and Christians may be found, and that the Hizbullah/Ilm Islamist group may also launch attacks. One reason the General Directorate gave was that these groups do not like the distribution of New Testaments and other religious brochures and books. Police were asked to contact and protect the places of worship of Jews, Christians, and Shia Muslims, especially in the capital Ankara [...]

'Recent incidents indicate that this threat continues. Police caught a suspected Daesh terrorist and found on him photos of the Alevi cem house in Gaziantep, in south-east Turkey, Dogan News Agency reported on 17 September [2016]. His interrogation revealed that he was part of a group planning a bomb attack on the cem house. Police then took steps to protect the cem house. The head of the Alevi Kultur Dernekleri (Alevi Culture Associations), Yilmaz Demirdelen, said that they are facing a very serious threat, Cumhuriyet newspaper reported on 17 September [2016]. He added that a police presence should continue until the threat is eliminated.'⁴²

7.3.3 A January 2017 article published by the Council on Foreign Relations stated:

'[...] secular customs make the Alevis a natural target for ISIS' hardline brand of Sunni Islam. Police have already thwarted two plots against Alevis in Gaziantep, a city in southeastern Turkey close to the Syrian border. On September 17 [2016], police arrested a suspected ISIS member for scheming to bomb a cem evi, an Alevi religious and cultural center. Then, on October 16 [2016], three Turkish policemen were killed when two suicide bombers blew themselves up during a raid on their cell, which authorities allege was planning an attack on Alevis and Kurds.

'Members of the Alevi community say they're no strangers to persecution. Many claim that ISIS wants them dead because they're not Sunni, and some hardliners mistakenly connect them to Syrian Alawites, the sect of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his regime. But as Vedat Kara, an Alevi activist, told me, "It's not just a sectarian conflict. ISIS is using us as simply another target."⁴³

7.3.4 The same article continued:

'Yet even as mistrust between Alevis and the government lingers, ISIS' very attempt to divide them may, ironically, be pushing the two sides together. As Tomar explained, the Turkish police's role in preventing attacks against

⁴¹ Christian Solidarity Worldwide: Freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression, April 2016 (page 6), <http://docs-eu.livesiteadmin.com/dc3e323f-351c-4172-800e-4e02848abf80/2016-03-turkey.pdf>. Accessed: 25 July 2017

⁴² Forum 18. 'Turkey: Freedom of belief and security threats'. 13 October 2016. http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2224. Accessed: 19 June 2017

⁴³ Council on Foreign Relations. 'Turkey and the Alevis'. 5 January 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2017-01-05/turkey-and-alevis..> Accessed: 28 June 2017

Alevis in Gaziantep may inadvertently bring more unity, by turning ISIS into an enemy against which Alevis and the Sunni majority can rally.

'This is because ISIS's attempt to drum up fear and division comes at a time when the Turkish state cannot afford to make more enemies at home. Since the coup attempt, the government has purged the institutions of Kurds and Gulenists, accusing some of terrorism. More than 125,000 people have been fired or suspended and at least 40,000 detained.

"The government isn't crazy about the Alevis, especially the Kurdish ones, but they're going to protect them against ISIS to present a united front," said one Turkish law enforcement official who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They need the Alevis as allies right now."

'Boyraz said that ISIS' threats against Alevis are nothing new, but that the government has been paying more attention to them in the last seven months. "Intelligence in the last five years of attacks against Alevis was ignored," he said. "Now it's more important for the government because it's directly [tied to] fighting ISIS."

'Alevis say that they are afraid of continuous ISIS attacks, just like other Turkish citizens, although they don't trust the government to protect them. But activists also say that if the AKP is extending a genuine hand of solidarity, they would embrace it. ISIS is a common enemy they must confront together as a nation. As Ali Yildirim, an Alevi student, told me, "ISIS is targeting innocent people whether they believe in Sunni Islam or Alevism." Yet if help is to come, it must come soon. The threat of ISIS "makes me feel afraid and sad," Yildirim continued. "Sometimes I'm losing my hope for a better future."⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Council on Foreign Relations. 'Turkey and the Alevis'. 5 January 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2017-01-05/turkey-and-alevis..> Accessed: 28 June 2017

Version control and contacts

Contacts

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Below is information on when this note was cleared:

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