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3 December 2021

TUR200819.E

Turkey: Situation of Alevis, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevis by society and authorities; state protection (2019–November 2021)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

For information on the Alevi faith, including principles, beliefs, traditions, and ritual practices, see Response to Information Request TUR200820 of November 2021.

2. Religious Rights

Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution states that "[e]veryone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds. ..." (Turkey 1982). Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution provides the following:

Everyone has the freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction.

Acts of worship, religious rites and ceremonies shall be conducted freely, as long as they do not violate the provisions of Article 14.

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.

Religious and moral education and instruction shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and morals shall be one of the compulsory lessons in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives.

No one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political interest or influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets. (Turkey 1982)

According to sources, Turkish authorities consider Alevis Muslim and do not recognize them as belonging to a separate religion (US 29 Apr. 2019; Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 3.21). Sources further note that Alevi places of worship [*cemevis*; *cemevleri*] do not have official recognition as places of worship (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021; Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. D2; Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 3.21). The US Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* states that in March 2018, the head of Diyanet [Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs], the state institution that "governs and coordinates religious matters related to Islam" with a mandate "to promote and enable the practice of Islam," stated that "mosques were the appropriate places of worship for both Alevis and Sunnis" (US 10 June 2020, 1, 9). The same source further notes that lack of official recognition for *cemevis* means that they are not exempt from utility bills and do not receive public funding for construction or maintenance, and thus do not have the same benefits as Sunni mosques (US 10 June 2020, 13, 19). An article from Deutsche Welle (DW), an international media outlet based in Germany, quotes a representative of the "pro-Kurdish" Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) as stating that Alevi communities receive no funding from [Diyanet], such as to buy materials needed for burial practices for community members, which Muslim imams receive (DW 26 Jan. 2020). According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), an organization that advocates for freedom of religion and provides research and analyses

regarding the freedom of religion in over twenty countries (CSW n.d.), religious minorities, including Alevis, face "restrictions" on construction for houses of worship (CSW 1 May 2020). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* states that in June 2017, the Ministry of National Education introduced a regulation that required all new schools to have an Islamic prayer room; however, the government denies Alevis the right to establish places of worship in government buildings that do not have places of worship for non-Sunnis (US 10 June 2020, 18).

According to a report from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), in April 2015 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that "the Turkish government was violating the European Convention by not recognising Alevi places of worship and religious leaders" (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 3.21). The ECHR also noted in the case of *İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey* that the lack of "a clear legal framework" by the government for unrecognized religious minorities, including Alevis, "caused numerous legal, organisational and financial problems relating to the ability to build places of worship, to receive donations or subsidies, to appear in court in their own right, etc." (Council of Europe 31 Aug. 2021, para. 217). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* further notes that in 2018, the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that cemevis are places of worship and should be given the same benefits as mosques, which includes exemption from utility bills (US 10 June 2020, 13). According to the ECHR, a "refusal" by the Diyanet

to pay the electricity bills for an Alevi religious centre housing a cemevi ... in the same way as it paid energy bills for mosques, churches and synagogues [was] based on the non-recognition of a cemevi as a "place of worship" The Court held that this differential treatment had no objective and reasonable justification (*Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*). (Council of Europe 31 Aug. 2021, para. 186, italics in original)

DW reports that court rulings indicating that cemevis should be recognized as places of worship have not been implemented (DW 26 Jan. 2020). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020*, Alevi organizations continued to call on the government to adhere to the ECHR ruling regarding cemevis and the Alevi Cem Foundation filed a court case to receive the remainder of the compensation the ECHR ruled they were owed by the government (US 12 May 2021, 15). The same source explains that in 2010 the ECHR ruled that the government was to pay the Alevi Cem Foundation 54,400 euros (EUR) (US\$66,700) based on discrimination for not paying electricity bills;

the government appealed for a reduction to 23,300 EUR (US\$28,600) which was rejected, and by 2020 the government had paid 39,010 EUR (US\$47,900) (US 12 May 2021, 15).

According to DW, the municipality of the city of İzmir voted to "treat construction plans for Alevi houses of prayer as plans for places of worship" and not as cultural centres as they had been in the past (DW 26 Jan. 2020). An article by the Demirören News Agency (DHA), [owned by] the "[p]ro-Erdogan" Demiroren Holding (Reuters 21 Mar. 2018), reports that the majority of the İzmir municipal assembly "voted in favor of recognizing Alevi worship places in the districts of Bornova, Aliağa, Bayraklı, Çiğli, Konak and Selçuk" (DHA 14 Jan. 2020). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* states that on 13 January 2020, "the municipal council of Izmir granted seven Alevi cemevis the status of house of worship" and on 16 January 2020, the municipal council assembly in Istanbul "approved the provision of free services to cemevis in line with other municipality and government treatment of other places of worship" (US 12 May 2021, 10). DHA reports that the Istanbul municipal council voted unanimously to grant 93 cemevis in Istanbul the status of houses of worship (DHA 14 Jan. 2020). However, other sources state that the proposal to recognize cemevis as houses of worship in Istanbul was denied by the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party [Nationalist Action Party] (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) (DW 26 Jan. 2020; Duvar 16 Jan. 2020; Turkish Minute 17 Jan. 2020).

Regarding national identity cards, the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* indicates that the cards have "no visible section to identify religious affiliation" and that religious affiliation is protected as private information and recorded on the card's chip, which is available to authorized public officials (US 12 May 2021, 6–7). The same source further states that the previous version of the national identity card, which remains in circulation, has a field for selecting religion that did not include Alevi as an option, but there was an option to leave the space blank (US 12 May 2021, 6–7). The ECHR decided in the case of *Sinan Işık v. Turkey* that the applicant's "inability" to change "İslam" to "Alevi" on their identity card was a violation of article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides the right to "[f]reedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Council of Europe 31 Aug. 2021, para. 1, 216).

According to a report from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), an Oslo-based organization aiming to improve human rights practices including by monitoring religious freedom in Turkey, Alevi holidays and days of rest are not

recognized as official holidays (NHC 11 Sept. 2020, i, 26). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019* notes that Alevi leaders are not authorized to "register and officiate at marriages on behalf of the state," while Sunni imams have been authorized since November 2017 (US 10 June 2020, 19).

The DFAT report indicates that Alevis are "generally able to worship freely and participate in most areas of Turkish life" (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para 3.24). However, in an interview with the Research Directorate, a Turkish anthropologist based in Germany who studies Kurdish Alevis stated that although the official position of the state is that Alevis are allowed to practice their religion "relatively freely," they "face discrimination and violence in almost every aspect of life" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). The NHC similarly notes that non-Sunni individuals, including Alevis, face "widespread" fear of discrimination (NHC 11 Sept. 2020, 10).

3. Political Rights

According to sources, Alevis remain "politically marginalized" in the country, with "limited representation" in positions of power (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021; MRG June 2018). The anthropologist further stated that Alevis have no representatives in any state institutions (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). In an interview with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of history at an American university, whose research focuses on religious movements, including on Alevis, indicated that there are no Alevi governors (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021).

In 2017 correspondence with the Research Directorate, an assistant professor at a Turkish university stated that "one of the most prominent demands" of the Alevis is "the protection of secularism" and that Sunnification policies under the AKP "distress Alevis very much" (Assistant Professor 2017). In November 2021 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Assistant Professor noted that there has been no change to the information they provided in 2017 (Assistant Professor 2 Nov. 2021). An article in the *New York Times* states that "Alevis are key stakeholders in the secular Turkish state" (*The New York Times* 22 July 2017). According to the anthropologist, Alevis support secularism since it allows them to enjoy public life (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). According to the US Congressional Research Service (CRS), Alevis "often attract, and to some extent rely on, legal appeals, political advocacy, and support from Western countries" (US 9 Nov. 2020, 12–13).

The Assistant Professor further stated that "Alevi are historically inclined to express their demands through various leftist political channels," such as the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), and the HDP (Assistant Professor 2017). The DFAT report notes that Alevi have a "prominent role" in politics, with "most" Alevi supporting the CHP but also having parliamentary representation in other parties, including the AKP (Australia 10 Sept. 2020 para. 3.22). The current leader of the CHP is Alevi (CNN Türk 17 June 2011; SCF 16 Nov. 2021). According to a report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the HDP party defends the rights of minorities and has Alevi members among its ranks, even though their core members are "predominantly Kurdish" (Netherlands Mar. 2021, Sec. 5.3.1). The same source further notes that the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (Ezilenlerin Sosyalist Partisi, ESP) is "a Marxist-Leninist party that particularly commands support among Alevi and Marxist Turks" (Netherlands Mar. 2021, Sec. 3.8).

Freedom House states that Alevi face "political discrimination"; although minorities hold "some" seats in parliament, particularly through the CHP and the HDP, their political rights and electoral opportunities have been "seriously harmed" by the crackdown on opposition parties (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. B4). The Assistant Professor indicated that Alevi are "heavily stigmatized by the pro-government media" because of their political views (Assistant Professor 2017).

4. Treatment by Society

According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020*, Alevi face "hate speech and discrimination" (US 30 Mar. 2021, 87). Freedom House further states that "Alevi and non-Muslims reportedly face discrimination in schools and in employment, particularly when seeking senior public-sector positions" (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. F4). The Associate Professor noted that individuals who are open about being Alevi "might" be "socially discriminated against" (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). According to the anthropologist, "violence and discrimination against Alevi is a daily life routine" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an emeritus professor of contemporary Muslim societies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, who has written about Alevi, stated that "[t]here is widespread Sunni prejudice against Alevi" and that many Sunnis consider Alevi to be "unclean" and "accuse them of nightly orgies and ritual

incest" (Emeritus Professor 2 Nov. 2021). According to *Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2020*, which "assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries," hate speech and threats are a "serious problem" for minorities (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020, 2, 7).

According to a study from the NHC, eight cases of faith-based hate crimes or incidents committed against Alevis were identified in 2020 (NHC Sept. 2021, 22–23). CSW notes that religious minorities, including Alevis, face hate speech and "occasional" hate crimes "with perpetrators generally enjoying impunity" (CSW 1 May 2020). An article by the Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF), "a non-profit advocacy organization that promotes the rule of law, democracy and human rights with a special focus on Turkey" (SCF n.d.), states that a former AKP deputy wrote a November 2019 column in the "pro-government" daily newspaper *Akşam* targeting the Alevi heritage of the CHP leader by saying that "Kurds and Alevis were compulsive liars" and that "Alevis were ethnic Turks and that those Kurds who claimed they were Alevi were 'double liars'" (SCF 16 Nov. 2021).

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) states that there are "periodic" reports of Alevi homes being vandalized "with derogatory or nationalistic slogans" and in November 2017, a mob attempted to set fire to a cemevi in Istanbul, and thirteen houses were marked with red crosses in Malatya province (MRG June 2018). The DFAT report states that Alevis are subjected to "low-level societal threats of violence" and notes that in 2019, "several" cemevis, tombs, and shrines were vandalized and covered with "derogatory statements" and red Xs (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 3.23). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2019*, the police launched an investigation into an incident in October 2019 when the president of an Alevi organization had "[i]t is your time for death" written on his door (US 10 June 2020, 22). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* cites a news report from June 2020 as stating that a monument commemorating Alevis killed in 1938 was vandalized (US 12 May 2021, 21).

Sources indicate that in January 2020 a cemevi in Istanbul was broken into and had death threats painted on its walls (Bianet 20 Jan. 2020; Duvar 20 Jan. 2020). Sources, published respectively in January 2020 and January 2021, report instances of homes of Alevi families being marked with red crosses (AA 3 Jan. 2020; Pirha 25 Jan. 2021), which the Associate Professor explained is a reminder of past "Alevi massacres" and functions as "a kind of threat" (Associate Professor

19 Nov. 2021). According to the SCF, Alevi houses were "similarly" painted before the Kahramanmaraş [Maraş] Massacre in December 1978, which resulted in the death of "more than" one hundred people and the burning of "hundreds of houses and workplaces belonging to Alevi citizens" (SCF 26 Jan. 2021).

4.1 Treatment in Regions

According to the Associate Professor, Alevis living in small provincial towns face "daily" pressure to practice Sunni traditions and it would be "risky" for Alevis to live or maintain places of worship in "more conservative" or pro-government towns; the source added that areas with "long standing" Sunni-Alevi tensions, such as eastern Anatolia, are "much riskier" for Alevis (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The anthropologist stated that Tunceli province, formerly Dersim, is the only Alevi majority province, but that "violence never ends" in the region, and military campaigns and clashes between guerrillas and armed forces continue to take place (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021).

The anthropologist stated that large cities are "too dangerous" for Alevis, because while Alevis can band together, [this relative strength in numbers] can also provide an excuse "for mass attacks" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). In an interview with the Research Directorate, a senior research fellow at the Refugee Study Centre of the University of Oxford stated that it is difficult to identify who is Alevi in "big" cities, but there are more frequent interactions with Sunnis, such as when looking for work and housing, where Alevis "have to prove they are good people" and face discrimination in accessing employment and education (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). The Senior Research Fellow noted that in the east, where there are more Alevis, there is "more police harassment and more securitization," while in bigger cities, there is "less direct surveillance" but "more discrimination" in daily life (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021).

The Associate Professor noted that Alevis tend to move to areas along the Aegean and Mediterranean coast, which are "more liberal politically" (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Treatment by Authorities

The Dutch report, citing "some" human rights organizations, states that the government used the failed coup of July 2016 to "settle scores with diverse groups and individuals who deviate from the norm set by the government," including Alevis (Netherlands Mar. 2021, Sec. 4.1). The anthropologist stated that non-Muslim groups are an "internal enemy to state politics" and that "oppressive state policies against cultural minorities" have "accelerated" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). Similarly, in an interview with the Research Directorate, a professor, who is also a visiting scholar at Harvard University, with a research focus on Kurdish Alevis, indicated that the state has "harsh policies that are forcing Alevis to become like Sunni Muslim" (Visiting Scholar 24 Nov. 2021). The Senior Research Fellow noted that the agenda of the Erdoğan administration is to promote Sunni Islam "in every space of public life" (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). The same source further stated that "discrimination [has] increased exponentially since the AKP administration gained power" (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). According to the Assistant Professor, under the AKP government, "Alevis became more vulnerable to social, economic and political discrimination" (Assistant Professor 2017). CSW notes that the Erdoğan government "has increasingly conflated religious and national identities by publicly endorsing a move towards a Sunni Muslim identity for Turkey" (CSW 1 May 2020).

A report by the International Association for Human Rights Advocacy in Geneva (IAHRAG), an organization that aims to "assist, support, guide and sustain victims of human rights violations," including in Turkey, states that it is "quite common" for individuals in the executive branch to use hate speech toward minorities, including Alevis (IAHRAG May 2021, 3, 4). CSW notes that "[t]he promotion of ultra-nationalism has contributed to a rise in discrimination and in hate speech that encourages violence towards non-Sunni religious communities" which occurs in "education, the workplace and religious practice, to day-to-day administrative procedures" (CSW 1 May 2020).

Sources state that while Alevis contribute to funding the Diyanet through taxes, they do not benefit from the services of the Diyanet, which organizes Sunni religious services (SCF 21 Aug. 2017, 14; Assistant Professor 2017). Sources indicated that the objective of the Diyanet is "to assimilate Alevis into Sunni Islam" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021) or the "Sunni Islamisation of society" (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The Associate Professor stated that the budget of the Diyanet is growing "exponentially" (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021).

According to a report by the Danish Immigration Service, Alevis in prison tend not to be open about their religion as it can lead to "discrimination both from other prisoners and from the prison administration"; the report provides an example of a prisoner who faced "aggressive reactions" and "threats of arson" when he stated he was Alevi (Denmark 31 Mar. 2021, 56). The same source notes that it can be "difficult" for religious minorities in jail to see a religious leader (Denmark 31 Mar. 2021, 56). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* notes that Alevi clerics did not serve in prisons but can enter with permission from the public prosecutor (US 12 May 2021, 9).

5.1 Employment in State Institutions

According to sources, there is employment discrimination in state offices and in the private sector (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021; Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The Emeritus Professor stated that it is "more difficult" for people recognized as Alevis to find employment (Emeritus Professor 2 Nov. 2021). According to the anthropologist, public sector employment requires a security clearance that reveals the applicant's religious or ethnic identity and "hundreds" of applicants have been rejected for being Alevi or anti-government (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). According to the Visiting Scholar, Alevis are "very well educated" but are blocked from employment by the state, who believe that public resources should be reserved for Turkish Muslims (Visiting Scholar 24 Nov. 2021). The same source stated that the state is one of the largest employers, but there are no Alevis in the police or army (Visiting Scholar 24 Nov. 2021). Similarly, the *BTI 2020* notes that minorities are "practically excluded from certain professional positions, such as civil servant and military officer" (Bertlesmann Stiftung 2020, 7). The Associate Professor also noted that it is "harder" for Alevis to get into the police and security forces (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The Emeritus Professor stated that "judges and bureaucrats suspected to be of Alevi background have lost their positions" (Emeritus Professor 2 Nov. 2021). The Visiting Scholar additionally stated that the state only hires academics who study Alevis from the "state[s] perspective" (Visiting Scholar 24 Nov. 2021).

5.2 Construction on Religious Sites

According to sources, the governor of Tunceli province plans construction over Munzur Springs (Sivil Sayfalar 26 Feb. 2018; US 12 May 2021, 18), an Alevi "place of worship" (US 12 May 2021, 18). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* notes that construction began in September 2020 (US 12 May 2021, 18). The same source, citing media reports, further states that in June 2019, village leaders in the Ovacık district in Tunceli province, which is home to many Alevis and their holy sites, received evacuation orders from the government since the area was "'in a natural disaster zone'," but media reported that the evacuation was to allow for planned exploratory mining in Munzur National Park, which Alevis consider a "spiritual area" (US 12 May 2021, 18). According to the European Commission, there are court cases against "culturally and environmentally destructive" government-funded construction projects, including the mining project in Tunceli Mountains, which is a sacred site for Alevis (EU 19 Oct. 2021, 16).

The Assistant Professor stated that Alevis want to end "compulsory mosque-building projects in Alevi settlements" as they view this as a "political tool employed by the Turkish state to assimilate Alevis into Sunnism" (Assistant Professor 2017). According to the *New York Times* article, when Alevis construct cemevis, the state "often" constructs a mosque nearby and further describes an Alevi cemevi in northern Anatolia that was turned into a mosque, despite another mosque standing a few hundred yards away (*The New York Times* 22 July 2017). US *Country Reports 2020* notes that in the Hardal village in Sivas province, the government has plans "to convert a historic mansion containing Alevi inscriptions and belonging to an Alevi association into a mosque" (US 12 May 2021, 10).

5.3 Religious Education

Article 24 of the Constitution establishes compulsory religious classes in primary and secondary school [see section 2 of this Response] (Turkey 1982). According to sources, the classes are based on Sunni Islam (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 2.32; Emeritus Professor 2 Nov. 2021; Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021) and the class content is determined by the Diyanet (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 2.32). Sources indicated that the religious instruction "forces Islamification" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021) or "indoctrinate[s]" Alevi children (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). According to MRG, the classes are "particularly discriminatory" against non-Sunni Muslim minorities (MRG June 2018) and the Emeritus Professor notes that "the schoolbooks contain

humiliating/insulting statements about Alevis" (Emeritus Professor 2 Nov. 2021). Sources note that the classes portray Alevism as "mysticism" (US 12 May 2021, 11) or "mystical" (DW 26 Jan. 2020). According to the Senior Research Fellow, passing a religion class is required to enter high school and university; an Alevi student who states that they do not believe or refuse to pray in class will fail (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020*, "[o]nly" students with national identity cards which identify them as Christian or Jewish can apply for exemptions from the religion classes (US 12 May 2021, 6). Sources further note that Alevis or those who opted to leave the religion section on the identity card blank receive "no exemptions" (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 2.32) or are "rarely granted exemptions" (US 12 May 2021, 6).

Sources indicate that the ECHR ruled that the compulsory religious classes violated educational freedom (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021; US 12 May 2021, 10). According to sources, the decision from the ECHR has not been implemented (US 12 May 2021, 11; Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). The 2019 US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report notes that despite the ruling from the ECHR occurring in February 2015, "the government has yet to take steps to exempt Alevi students from attending compulsory religious classes" (US 29 Apr. 2019, 3). The *BTI 2020* report notes that in 2017 the government instituted a curriculum that placed "more emphasis on Sunni religious values and reducing teaching time on secular, republican values" (Bertlesmann Stiftung 2020, 7).

The Associate Professor noted that there are "less visible" ways the government tries to "assimilate" Alevis, including forcing students to travel to Sunni villages daily by closing schools in Alevi villages (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). According to sources, under the AKP there has been an increase in the number of religious schools (Freedom House 3 Mar. 2021, Sec. D2; *The New York Times* 22 July 2017) and in "some" areas, there are no longer secular schools (*The New York Times* 22 July 2017). According to the US *International Report on International Religious Freedom for 2019*, there is a nation-wide voluntary program that selects 50,000 children aged 6 to 12 to attend religious classes at their local mosques during a two-week winter holiday, which Alevi organizations objected to since students who did not participate could be "'singled out'" and viewed as different by the other students (US 10 June 2020, 18–19).

6. State Protection

According to sources, there are no laws protecting the rights of Alevis (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021; Emeritus Professor 2 Nov. 2021; Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The NHC indicates that "[t]he channels for seeking redress of rights violations on the basis of individual events are not effective" for various reasons, including "the burden of proof, reluctance to endure greater exposure, the desire not to declare one's religion or belief, fear of losing employment, etc." (NHC 11 Sept. 2020, 10).

According to the European Commission report, investigations into hate crimes remain "ineffective" (EU 19 Oct. 2021, 32). The Associate Professor stated that the government does not charge or punish hate crimes against Alevis "accordingly" (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* indicates that an Istanbul prosecutor rejected a complaint of hate speech against a teacher who stated that "food prepared by Alevis should not be eaten" and that one should consult an imam if they ate "from the hand of an Alevi" (US 12 May 2021, 20–21). The Senior Research Fellow indicated that "many" Alevis who had their houses graffitied with Xs took their cases to court, but their cases were not heard (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). The Visiting Scholar noted that some "perpetuators of the hate" are promoted or become mayors or members of parliament (Visiting Scholar 24 Nov. 2021). According to the Senior Research Fellow, the ECHR rulings not only had no impact, but the government uses these rulings to argue that foreign governments are trying to interfere in domestic politics (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021).

According to Duvar, a news portal based in Ankara (Duvar n.d.), in June 2021 the Constitutional Court of Turkey reviewed and postponed an application of "no effective trial" and "violation of the right to life" for the 1993 Sivas-Madımak massacre that resulted in 33 deaths, including of Alevis (Duvar 7 July 2021). The same source states that the case has been under review by the Constitutional Court for seven years (Duvar 7 July 2021).

6.1 Treatment by Police

The Visiting Scholar noted that the police do not act on complaints filed by Alevis (Visiting Scholar 24 Nov. 2021). The anthropologist stated that Alevis avoid making complaints to the police since [this could be seen as] an "invitation for

another violent incident" (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). According to the Associate Professor, police take the incidents of house being defaced "lightly" (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The Senior Research Fellow noted that Alevis "struggle" to report their houses being graffitied to the police (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). The same source further notes that Alevis "would not be treated fairly" in the court system (Senior Research Fellow 15 Nov. 2021). However, a news report in Pirha, a "pro-Alevi" news website (SCF 26 Jan. 2021), states that after Alevi houses were marked with crosses, police launched an investigation (Pirha 25 Jan. 2021). According to a January 2020 article by Duvar, police were investigating an attack on an Istanbul cemevi (Duvar 20 Jan. 2020).

According to the anthropologist, police attacked cemevis hosting funerals of Alevi members of socialist, leftist or radical parties (Anthropologist 16 Nov. 2021). In a story published on Sendika.Org, a Turkish news website aiming to share information from the working class (Sendika.Org n.d.), a funeral procession transporting the body of an Alevi "freedom fighter" to a cemevi was "attacked" by the police and "many participants" were detained; the police also ordered the body to be buried without being washed, in violation of Alevi tradition (Sendika.Org 4 Apr. 2020). A story from Bianet [1] indicates that the police used rubber bullets and tear gas to prevent a crowd from receiving the body of a lawyer who died from fasting in protest of her detention; the police also surrounded the cemevi where the funeral was to be held (Bianet 28 Aug. 2020).

The Associate Professor indicated that Alevis would not "necessarily" receive worse treatment from the police on a daily basis, but also stated that the police use violence or impose harsher punishments "more easily" in neighbourhoods with large Alevi populations (Associate Professor 19 Nov. 2021). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* states that at a demonstration organized by the Democratic Alevi Association in remembrance of the 1993 massacre at the Madimak hotel in Sivas, police detained and then released seven demonstrators (US 12 May 2021, 18). However, according to an article in the *New York Times*, in July 2017 when a group of Alevis gathered for the memorial of the massacre, the police protected the Alevi marchers (*The New York Times* 22 July 2017).

According to US *Country Reports 2018*, sixteen members of the largest Alevi organization in Turkey, the Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Association (PSDAK), were arrested and "accused of 'aiding a terrorist organization'"; PSDAK stated that "they were arrested due to their religious activities" (US 13 Mar. 2019, 57).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] Bianet is a website implemented by the IPS Communication Foundation and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) (Bianet 20 Jan. 2020). The IPS Communication Foundation is a non-profit based in Istanbul promoting "rights-based journalism values" for Turkish media (Hrant Dink Foundation n.d.).

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