



Turkey – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 24 January 2018

1. Update of Previous Query Q22264 " Proposed amendment to Constitution in Turkey and Alevi religion"

2. Information on discrimination experienced by people who practice the Alevi religion in Turkey and in particular in the Kurdish region of Eastern Turkey

The Human Rights Watch report on the events of 2017 in Turkey states:

“An April 2017 referendum, which voters approved by a slim margin, introduced constitutional amendments switching Turkey to a presidential system of governance, the most significant change to its political institutions in decades. The referendum took place under a state of emergency imposed after the July 15, 2016 attempted military coup, and in an environment of heavy media censorship, with many journalists and parliamentarians from the pro-Kurdish opposition in jail.

The new presidential system, which consolidates the incumbent's hold on power, is a setback for human rights and the rule of law. It lacks sufficient checks and balances against abuse of executive power, greatly diminishing the powers of parliament, and consolidating presidential control over most judicial appointments. The presidential system will come fully into force following elections in 2019.” (Human Rights Watch (18 January 2018) *World Report 2018 – Turkey*)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the situation of Alevis in Turkey, in a section headed “Treatment by Society”, states:

“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’. According to Country Reports 2013, ‘Alevis regularly faced societal discrimination’ 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 (CACI and SRSP n.d.), 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.” (Immigration

and Refugee Board of Canada (12 June 2015) *TUR105167.E – Turkey: Situation of Alevi, including political and religious rights; treatment of Alevi by society and authorities; state protection (June 2012-May 2015)*

A report published by the Washington DC-based Clarion Project states:

“The historical and current treatment of Alevi in Turkey is a conspicuous example of what violent and civilizational jihad brings to non-mainstream Muslim victims in predominantly Islamic countries. Alevi in Turkey continue to suffer oppression and discrimination on a number of levels. Just recently, writings on the walls of a predominantly Alevi neighborhood in the city of Izmir read, ‘Do the fasting, kafirs [Infidels]!’ Again recently, a holy site for Alevi in the Cagsak village in the city of Kayseri has been put up on sale by the municipality, which is governed by the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the founding party of the Turkish Republic which is today the main opposition party in Turkey’s parliament. Dervis Altun, the head of the Cagsak Village Culture and Solidarity Association, condemned the decision, saying that the site is sacred for Alevi and that the religious values of people are ignored.” (Clarion Project (29 June 2016) *Minority Massacres in Turkey: Alevi Threatened*)

The 2016 Minority Rights Group report for Turkey states:

“Another marginalized community in Turkey is its Alevi population, the country’s largest religious minority, who subscribe to a distinct form of Islam that differs from that practised by the Sunni majority. An important milestone for the community came with the announcement in December of a range of expanded rights for Alevi, including legal recognition of cemeteries, their houses of worship – a long-standing area of discrimination. This was preceded some months earlier by the visitation of an Alevi religious leader or dede to an Alevi prisoner in May – the first time an Alevi religious leader had been officially allowed to meet with a community member in jail. Despite this progress, however, problems persist, with reports in June of Alevi homes in the provinces of Elazığ and Kocaeli being daubed with paint. Behzat Hazır, head of the Elazığ Human Rights Association’s (İHD) branch, called on people to remain calm as the tagging was intended to create ‘an environment of fear and panic, making people anxious and deepening the religious discrimination’.” (Minority Rights Group International (12 July 2016) *State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2016 – Turkey*)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response for information on the treatment of Alevi following the July 2016 coup attempt, in a section headed “Situation of the Alevi”, states:

“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 Alevi 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, Tuzluçayir in Ankara and Pazarcik in Maras.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (26 January 2017) *TUR105723.FE – 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)*)

A Voice of America news report states:

“An attack late Sunday by Erdogan supporters on members of the Alevi religious minority in Malatya, in eastern Turkey, raises fear among rights activists, dissidents, Kurds and religious minorities of widening polarization after the failed coup. News reports said pro-Erdogan demonstrators in Malatya also attacked a Protestant church and a Catholic church in the northern Black Sea city of Trabzon.

‘The situation does not look good at all,’ said Muharrem Guler, 58, sipping tea with friends at a teahouse in Okmeydani, a largely Alevi neighborhood of Istanbul and a bastion of the Erdogan opposition. ‘Of course, as Alevis, we are very, very tense. This country’s path is very unpredictable.’

Alevis have been the victims in several massacres in recent decades, and that is cause for Guler and his neighbors to worry.” (Voice of America (19 July 2016) *Turkey Crackdown Grows as Erdogan Encourages Protests*)

A report from the Washington DC-based media website Al-Monitor states:

“On the night of the July 15 coup attempt, a friend called from Nurtepe, a predominantly Alevi neighborhood of Istanbul. She was concerned about the hundreds of men marching on her street with sticks in their hands chanting Allahu akbar (God is Great). Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had called upon the people to come out on the streets and some saw it as an opportunity to intimidate Alevi neighborhoods.

Alevis have had notoriously sour relations with the Gulen movement, which many Turks suspect of orchestrating the coup attempt, so there was no reason to suspect Alevi involvement in the putsch. Indeed, at the end of August the government had announced that Dersim, a majority Alevi province, was the least infiltrated province by Gulenists among Turkey's 81 provinces. My friend, who had studied Alevi massacres in modern Turkey, was scared for her life. Has life as an Alevi gotten much more difficult in Turkey in the aftermath of the attempted coup?” (Al-Monitor (9 September 2016) *How will Turkey's Alevis react to Syrian gambit?*)

An article from the English-language Turkish newspaper Hurriyet Daily News

“Unknown assailants attacked a cemevi, an Alevi house of worship, in Istanbul on Nov. 9 and attempted to set the building on fire. Rocks were thrown at the Habibler Cemevi in the Sultangazi district at around 6 p.m., breaking its windows. The assailants then threw a burning plastic bucket

inside the building through the broken windows and the flames from the bucket set the carpets on fire, which were extinguished by cemevi personnel. No one was injured in the incident and police units arrived at the scene to carry out examinations. Police launched efforts to apprehend those involved in the attack.” (Hurriyet Daily News (10 November 2017) *Cemevi in Istanbul attacked*)

An AI-Monitor report states:

“Members of the Alevi religious community are on edge after vandals targeted several homes in eastern Turkey, recalling earlier violence against the country’s largest minority and rousing fears that a surge in nationalism is stoking ethnic tensions.

Late last week, assailants painted an ominous red 'X' on 13 homes in the predominantly Alevi district of Cemal Gursel in Malatya, a conservative city of nearly 800,000 people, said the head of a local Alevi group, adding police had yet to make any arrests.

‘We know this wasn’t a couple of hooligans because they knew which houses on which streets to target. It was definitely carried out in a deliberate and organized way,’ Mehmet Topal of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association told AI-Monitor. “We have seen these markings before.”

The same tactic was used in 1978 in the nearby city of Kahramanmaras before right-wing gangs murdered 100 Alevi, Topal said. More than a 100 other Alevi were killed in three more massacres over the next two decades.” (AI-Monitor (28 November 2017) *Turkey’s Alevi on edge after homes vandalized*)

A article recently published by American right-wing think tank the Gatestone Institute states:

“Pressures against the Alevi community in Turkey take several forms -- such as mass murders, the lack of official recognition of their places of worship, and arbitrary arrests. Particularly since the failed coup d’état against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2016, many Alevi have been arrested for allegedly having ties with something the Turkish government calls the ‘Fethullah Terrorist Organization’ (FETO), naming it after Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen, who has for years been living in exile in Pennsylvania since 1999. The Turkish government after accuses Gülen of organizing the attempted coup.” (Gatestone Institute (18 January 2018) *Persecution of Alevi in Turkey: Threats, Arbitrary Arrests*)

This article also states:

“Unfortunately, the government’s crackdown on Alevi has been escalating; now, Alevi journalists are also targeted. TV10, the television channel known as ‘the voice of Alevi’, was closed down in September 2016 after the failed coup, allegedly ‘for threatening national security and belonging to a terror organization.’ Two officials of the Alevi-run TV10, Veli Büyükaşahin and Veli Haydar Güleç were arrested on January 10. Recently, Kemal Demir, an employee of TV10, was also arrested. ‘These detentions and the government’s intentional harassment of the Alevi media have no meaning

other than attempting to shape the Alevi media,' said Şükrü Yıldız, former chairman of TV10, and called the arrests 'an attack against the Alevi faith and resistance.' Alevi citizens are also threatened inside their homes: red crosses and threatening graffiti are drawn on their doors and walls." (ibid)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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