

POLITICAL DISCOURSES ON ALEVIS AND ALEVISM DURING AKP ERA

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Keywords: Alevis, Alevism, Political Discourse, Secularism

Turkish secularism has been employed as a foundation of modernization since the founding of the Turkish Republic. But it has also been criticized severely, given its dilemmas. One basic dilemma is caused by the fact that Sunnism, the faith held by the majority, has become established as one of tenets of the Turkish national identity by the founders. The role and influence of Sunnism have been enhanced with multi-party democracy, to be accelerated after the 1980 coup. As a result, the non-Sunnis have faced difficulties and discrimination when practicing their faith.

Political discourses about the largest non-Sunni group, the Alevis, are studied in this master's thesis, in relation with the discussion, perception and presentation of their demands regarding the practice of Alevism during the 2000s. Like in previous periods, different parties used different discourses to defend or challenge the status quo. Unity has been a popular discourse, strengthened by the conspiracy and separatism discourses, used to justify the status quo and the differential treatment of non-Sunnis. Alevis, on the other hand, have used diversity and identity discourses to demand their rights, until the 2000s.

The 2000s has been a debated period regarding transformations in terms of democracy, secularism and pluralism. During this era, Alevis began using democracy and equal citizenship discourses, leaving the identity and diversity discourse. On the

other side, unity discourse has become to be increasingly used with reference to faith. But the debates has not led to positive, concrete outcomes for Alevis except for the increasing visibility of their faith and demands.

ÖZET

AKP DÖNEMİNDE ALEVİLER VE ALEVİLİKLE İLGİLİ KULLANILAN POLİTİK SÖYLEMLER

Elif Selçuk

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Alevi, Alevilik, Politik Söylem, Laiklik

Laiklik Türkiye'de Cumhuriyetin kuruluşundan bu yana modernleşmenin temellerinden biri olmuştur. Ama aynı zamanda, çelişkileri sebebiyle, ciddi biçimde eleştirilmiştir. Temel çelişkilerden biri çoğunluk inancı olan Sünniliğin Cumhuriyetin kurucuları tarafından milli kimliğin temellerinden biri olarak yerleştirilmesinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Sünniliğin rolü ve etkisi çok partili demokrasiye geçiş sonrasında ve özellikle 1980 darbesi sonrasında giderek arttı. Bu gelişmeler sonucunda da Sünni olmayanlar inançlarını yerine getirme konusunda ayrımcılık ve zorluklarla karşılaştılar.

Bu yüksek lisans tezinde 2000'lerde, Sünni olmayan en büyük grup olarak, Alevilerle ilgili politik söylemler, inançlarına dair taleplerinin algılanması ve sunumu, tartışılmaktadır. Bu dönemde, daha önce yapıldığı gibi, taraflar statükoyu koruma ya da değiştirme amaçlı olarak farklı söylemler ileri sürmüşlerdir. 2000'lere dek ayrılıkçılık ve komplo söylemlerinin yanı sıra kullanılan popüler birlik söylemi Alevilere farklı davranılmasını haklı çıkarıp statükoyu korumayı amaçlarken, Aleviler haklarını ararken farklılık ve kimlik söylemlerine başvurdu.

2000'ler demokrasi, laiklik ve çoğulculukla ilgili çok tartışılan bir değişim dönemi oldu. Bu dönemde Aleviler farklılık ve kimlik söylemlerinden vazgeçip demokrasi ve eşit

vatandaşlık söylemini kullanırken diğer tarafta statükocu birlik söylemi gitgide dini referanslara dayalı olarak kullanılmaya başlandı. Fakat bu tartışmalar sonucunda Aleviler, inanç ve taleplerinin artan görünürlüğü dışında, olumlu ve somut sonuçlar elde edemedi.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT PAGE.....	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	iii
ÖZET.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	
1.1. General Introduction.....	1
1.2. Turkish Secularism.....	3
1.3. Aim and Methodology.....	5
CHAPTER 2.ALEVIS AND ALEVISM BEFORE THE RISE OF AKP	
2.1.Alevism.....	10
2.2.History.....	11
2.3.Developments during the final decade of the Twentieth Century.....	14
2.4.Major Events of 1990s.....	18
CHAPTER 3.ALEVIS VIS-A-VIS RULING AKP AND MAJOR PARTIES	
3.1.State and Alevism-Reform Attempts.....	24
3.1.1.Alevi Opening.....	25
3.1.2.Democratization Package.....	30
3.2. Alevis and Party Politics.....	31
3.2.1.ANAP.....	32

3.2.2.AKP.....	33
3.2.3.CHP.....	36
3.2.4.MHP.....	38
3.2.5.BDP.....	39
3.3. Events related to Alevis and Alevism	
3.3.1.Gezi Riots.....	41
3.3.2.Syrian Friction.....	43
3.3.3.Foreign Interpretations.....	44
3.4.Contested Issues.....	47
3.4.1.Cemevis.....	48
3.4.2.Education.....	55
3.4.3.Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA).....	66
CHAPTER 4. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION	
4.1.State of Demands.....	74
4.2.Discourses Used.....	75
4.3.Discussion.....	79
Bibliography.....	89

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1.General Introduction

Turkey has a unique position among countries which have predominantly Muslim populations with its secular democracy. While Turkey's efforts at secularization go back to the nineteenth century along with its modernization efforts its democracy is relatively younger, dating back to the second half of 1940s.

Turkey has been heir to the 600-year old Ottoman Empire, a religious and ethnic mosaic, where elements were kept apart with the *millet* system, but collapsed after reform efforts failed. The efforts at secularism, modernization and nation-building had to go hand-in-hand after the founding of the new Republic, complicating the success of each one. The demographic structure was transformed in terms of ethnicity and religion in a rather short period due to mass immigration and deaths owing to wars, riots, and violence. This intricate process was made even more complicated owing to the influence of inherited traditions, structure and mindsets as well as fears developed while the Empire collapsed with a wave of independence wars and violence. This generalized fear was later to be called the *Sevres syndrome* (Aras, 2009; Akçam, 2001).

The founders of the new polity found themselves with a people made up of mostly Muslim immigrants from the Balkans, unlike the ethno-religious mosaic of the lost empire as mentioned above. As a result, the founding fathers of the new Republic focused on Turkish nationalism to bond the new nation while pan-Islamism and pan-Ottomanism formulas failed to save the Ottoman Empire as last efforts. As the Empire became the Turkish Republic the Westernist camp of the Ottoman civil and military bureaucrats designed the new Republic to imitate the West not just regarding science and technology but also institutions, culture and values, in line with the ideal of becoming "a civilized nation" set by its founding father, Atatürk. Şerif Mardin (1983) explains this transition period of reforming of the *millet* system towards a modern system with the new cadre of bureaucrats who were educated with the

rationalism and positivism of the West, perceiving and enforcing societal reforms in a mechanistic manner as a result.

In Turkey the state aimed to create its nation with a mechanistic, top-down approach to design, not only the state system and organizations but also, the society and people. It has also been debated whether the national identity was created from nothing or rather the latent, potential elements underlying were stimulated to become manifest by the state, as proposed by Lewis. Bernard Lewis also claimed that the Kemalist establishment “misidentified” the people, proposing this identity based on Turkishness, as the real Turkish people were religious. Lewis (1961) calls this early period of the new Republic designing the society via secularism towards modernity “an eclipse”. Lewis suggested that Islamic components would eventually return to public life and predicted that this trend would continue, if not accelerate, as the state could not help but orient itself towards its people in modern Turkey. The Turkish-Islamic synthesis of the 1980s to define “proper” Turkishness, reached by the Kemalist elite by consensus though in violation of secular reforms, came as a confirmation of Lewis’ prediction as politics of the “proper” nation.

But Toprak (2005) suggests that the discovery and return of Islam into the political stage has happened much before the 1980s. The Islamist-Westernist debate ended prematurely with the founding of the new Republic. It was in 1946 when the soul-searching and fight between Islamists and Westernists emerged again with the establishment of multi-party democracy. This fight only gained momentum, after the 1980 coup, in the 1980s and 1990s as politics and public became increasingly divided between “secular” and “Islamist” camps. Toprak explains this phenomenon with the introduction of multi-party democracy where the logic of revolutionary politics became replaced with that of competitive, democratic politics as parties began catering to each camp while balancing them as need arose. With multi-party democracy and democratic competition all parties began appealing to and sometimes exploiting religious sensitivities while institutions such as the DRA, Directorate of Religious Affairs, increasingly discriminated against religious minorities and Sunnism gained more weight in politics. Secularism has increasingly been established as a populist and instrumental institution, especially after 1946, while religion became a political tool and especially with the replacement of the ruling elite in the post-1980 era. So it can be said that Turkish secularism has evolved from idealistic to pragmatic and even exploitative while gaining its idiosyncratic characteristics and practices that we observe today.

1.2. Turkish Secularism:

Turkey was secularized just after the founding of the Republic in 1920s Turkish secularism as a project of modernity and nation-building, depended on the French model of *laicite* of controlling faith rather than the American model of religious pluralism. In the French model, also called *assertive secularism* (Taylor, 2007; Kuru, 2007), the state tries to stay equidistant to all faiths while acting as a paternal agent to control faith. On the other hand, the American model, sometimes called *passive secularism* (Taylor, 2007; Kuru, 2007), aims to keep the state and faith from interfering in each other's affairs and rather apart, using a *wall of separation*, and keep religious pluralism alive. Turkey has chosen the French model out of these systems and focused on the state's control over faith, though taking it further than the French version of 1905 (Stepan, 2010). However, the equidistance to all faiths, or the neutrality of state, aspect of secularism was ignored in Turkish secularism. Minority groups within the Turkish population, though making up a much smaller portion of the people than it used to during the days of Ottoman Empire, complained, along with conservative Muslims, that Turkish secularism was "too Turkish, too secular and too Sunni" (Keyman, 2007).

The mainstream critique towards Turkish secularism focused on the ban on the public display of religious symbols and contained the argument that Turkish secularism has been an extreme case of French-style *laicite* in terms of state control over religion. But this criticism does not look into the big picture of all religious identities. It rather focuses on the banning of display of Islam in the public sphere based on the ground that Islamism could emerge as a political alternative and a challenge to the modernization project of the Turkish Republic. Davison (2003) suggests that the Turkish model is an "ambivalent, partial and inconsistent form of laicism" and even religio-political in some aspects. This model, Davison argues, has never been secular as state or politics has never become non-religious, not having divorced politics and religion. This religio-political character of Turkish state and institutions has meant not only shaping and controlling of Islam to offer a "proper Islam" but also promote Sunnism at the expense of "others" in various spheres of life, be the non-Muslim or of other sects of Islam such as the Alevis.

The major topics of complaint and debate regarding Turkish secularism has been about its promotion of one faith over others. The first and foremost target is the DRA, Directorate of Religious Affairs, through which the state pays for religious services provided to Sunnis, such as staffing imams and building and maintaining mosques out of the budget made up of the taxes collected from all citizens, regardless of faith. The other source of complaint concerns

the religious culture and moral knowledge courses which have become more controversial especially since the 1980 coup as these courses became compulsory. Unlike its counterpart in France where practices of funding religion and religious education by the taxes collected from all were left in 18th and 19th centuries, the Turkish system continued with the paradoxical institution of the DRA which was created to control and shape the religion, it became center of much debate for decades with its budget and staff size that have grown gigantically in proportion with its power and weight.

Mardin (1983) states that the early efforts at secularism aimed to privatize religion as well as controlling and shaping national identity around religion, the dominant faith which is Sunnism. So the policies shaped around this new identity worked against minorities and made them “others” with increasing isolation from the majority. From this perspective, religion has always been present in Turkish, *a la Turca*, secularism (Ulutaş, 2010; Keyman, 2007) Aktoprak (2010) similarly argues that religious minorities have never been treated according to principles of secularism as should be the case in a secular, modern state. The DRA, as explained above, is a good example with its budget and staff size, serving as a tool to promote Sunnism and is supported with the education system. The paradox here is that though Islam was to be shaped and controlled originally by the state, it then became a part of everyday politics with incumbent parties promoting its protection using state resources. This outcome was also discerned by Stepan (2010), who proposed the *twin tolerations* concept to overcome the religion-secularism dichotomy. But Stepan, though challenging the relationship between secularism and democracy, also called Turkish secularism “controlling all religions but financially supporting (and controlling) one religion”.

The issue here is about the clean slate assumption of the founders of the Republic though they not only continued with the mindsets of the past empire, into which they were born and educated in, but also reproduced some Ottoman institutions under different names, such as the DRA. With secularism, a top-down “project”, institutions and rules have been imported from the West to transform the society. However this project of transforming individuals into secular ones in line with the values and principles of Enlightenment failed, while groups and individuals resisted the transformation to cover all society, such as the creation of a civil religion to bond the people and the state (Tepe, 2008), to embrace all and be embraced by all.

Regarding the non-Muslims, general public perception and treatment by the state have been towards categorizing them as “potential enemies within” with suspicion, owing to the *Sevres syndrome* as another remnant of the past. As a result, the minorities faced difficulties

in education in own language or of the clergy or building places of worship with Turkish state, in violation of Lausanne Treaty commitments. Alevi, a non-Sunni but Muslim minority group not protected by Lausanne Treaty according to the interpretation of the Turkish state, have faced violence and discrimination for centuries. Even today the major issues related to Alevism, enlisted as Alevi demands for the last two decades including places of worship, education, and DRA, all related with violation of secularism, have remained the same.

1.3. Aim and Methodology

In this thesis, the aim is to look into the 2000s, the AKP era, the discourse used by different parties in relation with the demands and conditions of the largest non-Sunni religious minority, Alevi, and look into the era in its entirety and the context to understand social and political conditions. As explained in the following sections, the 1990s witnessed a change towards identity politics and especially a revival for Alevi, so the 2000s seems like an important period to study to conclude if the changes continued, to what extent and which targets were reached, if any. The 2000s is a riveting and pivotal period of transformation as first of all it is the post-secular era during which religion has become more visible, rather than extinct as expected due to ascending modernity. This has led to the visibility of many faiths, with religious pluralism, providing the context where US system of secularism gains more weight (Kuru, 2007). In this regard, Turkey provides a compelling case where religion has become more prominent and visible with increasing conservatism as well as the rise and consolidation of the rule of AKP, a conservative party. One related question is whether the AKP has managed to integrate religion and religiosity with a pluralistic approach (Göle, 2012) or failed to do so. Regarding this debate, it is important to note that during AKP era the much debated institution of the DRA has been provided with a bigger budget and staff as well as more power and weight.

In this regard, the identity and agenda of the party ruling the country for more than a decade and still going strong, AKP, has been the topic of a lot of debates. The nature of the AKP era has been debated regarding the nature of changes, whether the country has changed towards a liberal democracy though opponents claimed changes were in the other direction, authoritarianism with a single-party rule under an omnipotent leader. Secularism, like the status of democracy, has been another debated topic or rather an Achilles' heel for AKP, given its Islamist roots and especially the rhetoric presented by AKP's predecessors in the past. AKP has been the incumbent party for more than a decade, presenting a potentially

curious case of secularism. The debate about AKP's identity as to whether it is a conservative, center-right party transforming the country into a liberal democracy (Başlevent and Kırmanoğlu, 2008), an Islamist party with a hidden agenda (Turam, 2008; Tombuş, 2013) or sitting on the fence between Islamists who aim an authoritarian state and moderate conservatives, trying to satisfy each at different times (Somer, 2012) is vital.

The perception and treatment of Alevis is important to give us an idea about AKP as well as the Turkish secularism that does not have a successful track record regarding its perception and treatment of religious minorities. Furthermore, Alevis, representing the heterodoxy within the dominant faith of Islam, have been a major target by the state as a challenger of Sunnism and so the national identity. For this reason, it is important to see whether the situation has been stable, improved or deteriorated under the rule of AKP, arguably a center-right party trying to liberalize the country despite its Islamist roots. Here heterodoxy is also important given the increasingly conservative context as heterodoxy is perceived as not just a challenge but more a threat towards the dominant faith, Sunnism (Tepe, 2008) unlike ethnic identity claims, such as that of the Kurds. Pınar (2013) suggests a related argument that AKP continues with the state tradition to promote national unity when faced with an ethnic or religious identity challenge. But unlike previous governments AKP rather structures unity around religion shared at the expense of religious minorities such as Alevis, supporting Tepe's argument.

These arguments underline the fact that Alevi demands have been challenged by the state on the basis of national unity threatened and securitized in line with the formal state identity. Tepe explains the religious basis of the national identity rhetoric with heterodoxy and strong Sunni roots of AKP. Gülalp (2013) takes this interpretation further to argue that Turkish secularism has become a form of re-emergent Ottoman system with over-emphasized Sunnism and tolerance rhetoric. Turkish secularism, utilized as a basic tenet of modernization and nation-building, has been ambivalent since the beginning with its staunch exclusion of religion and on the other hand controlling, supporting and promoting religion in a paradoxical way. But in the AKP period though this ambivalence may be still in place, it is debated that unlike the past governments AKP uses 'national unity' rhetoric around which both seculars and religious gather while leaning on religion more as the basis so the new exclusion targets non-Sunnis and not ethnic cleavages, unlike the past.

This research attempts to analyze how AKP and other parties defended their positions and demands during this period, in relation with the power structure to allow for any change for a non-Sunni religious minority, especially given the debated identity of the era and the

AKP. The focus of this study will be on the discourses used and developed by different parties in a relational manner, given the events, actions and rhetoric used, regarding Alevis and Alevism. The whole period, including major events, statements and rhetoric of the actors, will be studied to discuss the transformation or establishment of the status quo, with regard to the established state ideology around securitization which is blended with the religious basis. The question is whether the debates between parties related with the Alevi issue are established around a new version of secularist Turkish state discourse, with a strengthened religious basis, towards the demands and claims of Alevis, regarding the practising of a faith considered heterodox.

Regarding methodology, for this study, I analyzed the Turkish daily national newspaper Milliyet's archives covering the period of 2002-2014, the AKP era in Turkey. I chose Milliyet as a prestigious representative of mainstream Turkish media, called "liberal" (Usluata, 1999), "one of the widest circulated" (Gençtürk et al., 2014) and "mainstream secularist" (Dole, 2006). My attempt was to discover the media representation of Alevis and Alevism in mainstream media, without leaving the political center towards left or right which could represent ideologies and so focusing on or leaving out some data with this purpose. But it should be reminded that as Milliyet is considered a liberal, secular daily newspaper some related bias may have been included in the data collected though the events referred to in this study are mostly major and highly publicized ones. Milliyet has been owned by Demirören Group, a group close to AKP, since 2011 and before it was part of the Doğan Media Group, an AKP opponent. I chose media analysis as I wanted to be as close as possible to the data, actions and rhetoric of the actors, as well as having to access to the whole era as opposed to focusing on certain dates, events or actors. My aim was to study the big picture, history and context in relation with the topic under study, to explain the important issues better so as to reach conclusions regarding the development of this issue during this era that has been most transformative since the founding of the Republic.

I used the keywords "Alevi", "Alevilik" and "Aleviler" to search for in Milliyet newspaper's online archives to read, write and then categorize into themes. Thematic analysis is used to categorize the data, events, actions and statements, for which themes were formed while I organized the data that began clustering around certain themes. The themes formed this way represented the context at various levels, state and society as well as domestic and foreign context and actors, and the main issues, problems and demands as the proposed solutions to these problems. I tried to refrain from forming themes in advance as such a

strategy could mean looking for certain themes at the expense of ignoring other, important ones though I kept the literature in mind while forming and naming the themes, looking for recurrences. As thematic analysis takes a rather discursive approach than pure content analysis in search of underlying meanings and values, discourses of the actors and the era also appeared along with themes around which discourse was formed and became visible.

Discourse analysis, the study of language as that of words or structure in short, can take different forms and one form is critical discourse analysis, going beyond sole descriptive and explanatory analysis of communications, regarding actions, words and values. Critical discourse analysis, trying to link theory and practice in search of underlying problems, issues or controversies (Gee, 2014), primarily studies the reproduction, enaction and resistance regarding power relations, dominance and inequality in society. Here language, choice of words and structure used, act as tools to establish power relations as well as reproducing it through justification of the status quo. The key issues here are controlling the public discourse, directed by powerful groups at ordinary people, and as a result control of the minds and actions of the less powerful via public discourse created and shaped (Schiffrin et al. 2008). Critical discourse analysis was used in this study to discover how powerful groups, political parties, politicians, scholars, the military, school administrations and the judiciary, created and established dominance over “others”, to be taken for granted by the majority, and in return, were challenged by the “others” and other related parties, such as foreign officials.

In this study initially two discourses, “unity and sameness” and “diversity and identity”, emerged based on the literature search, but as the data piled up and were categorized according to themes other discourses appeared. Many of these discourses were directly related with the two early discourses, such as democracy and equality or foreign and domestic conspirators, and some were not, such as dark legacy of political parties or secret agendas of rivals, especially *takiye* directed at Islamists. The core discourse of ‘unity’, evolving from *national unity* to *unity around religion*, was protected with ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’ and ‘separatism discourse’. In addition, ‘dark legacy of the past discourse’ and ‘secret agenda discourse’ were employed as tools to attack rivals while secret agenda, along with ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’ and ‘separatism discourse’, was also used to protect unity. The by-products of the ‘national unity’ and its custodian discourses of ‘separatism’ and ‘conspiracy by enemies’ were also employed similarly: ‘brothers discourse’, symbolizing ‘unity’, was protected by the ‘us versus them discourse’, an offshoot of ‘separatism’. Likewise, monism regarding religion, formulated as *unity in and around Islam*

to refer to unity in Islam, the faith, and unity around Islam as unity of Muslims as, people gathered around the true faith , also requires lack of dissent while justifying the status quo' implying that 'within being different lies separatism'. So dissent is presented and interpreted as attack and conspiracy against the state and religion rather than the right to dissent and be "different".

My aim was not to provide a snapshot of specific events but cover the entire period to understand the process underlying as well as the context to represent the big picture along with specific events, actors and rhetoric used. In addition, in this thesis I studied discourse in a sociological sense as communication, language and meaning were situated within the context of events and actions at various levels: individuals, society, political parties and foreign actors converse with each other just like actions, language and meanings shape and are shaped with each other so isolating one or a few could provide inadequate information.

CHAPTER 2

ALEVIS and ALEVISM BEFORE the RISE of AKP

2.1. Alevism:

The meaning and roots of the word “Alevi” is debated as to whether it means “supporting or following Ali” or “about flame”, referring to *alev*, flame in Turkish, as a nod to Alevism’s non-Islamic roots, such as Christianity and Zoroastrianism (Karaosmanoğlu, 2013). The definition and boundaries of Alevism is equally debated. While some Alevis consider Alevism an Islamic sect others perceive it more as a collection of moral rules and rather a lifestyle, using a more urban interpretation. There is another group of Alevis who view Alevism as a different religion than Islam. As all these different perceptions converge on the difference with Sunni Islam, it may be worthwhile to look at basic characteristics and idiosyncracies of Alevism that first of all *cemevi*, rather than the mosque, is the place of worship. Alevis attend prayer meetings which involve dance and music without gender segregation, again unlike other Muslims. Lastly the Sunni practice of fasting during Ramadan is replaced with fasting during Muharrem month to commemorate the killings of Kerbela, to end with Asura. While the idiosyncratic elements have been the subject of criticism or insults directed at Alevis and Alevism, the central role of Ali has been used several times by politicians as maneuvering space to unite all sects under the umbrella of Islam by praising Ali. This argument has also been used by Prime Minister Erdoğan in the 2000s several times and before, during his mayorship in the 1990s.

Alevi society consists of people with Turkish, Kurdish and Arab origins where regions of historical inhabitation are set according to these ethnic cleavages: Turkish-originated Alevis live in Central Anatolia, Kurdish-originated Alevis in Eastern Anatolia, with Shia-like elements more present in Jafari faith dominant in the Kars province namely, and Arab-originated Alevis, the Nusayri or Alawites, in South Anatolia around Hatay and Adana. The exact number of Alevis is unknown and so estimated due to lack of governmental data on sectarian differences (Güneş-Ayata, 1992) as well as the difficulty faced by researchers when classifying different groups under the umbrella of Alevism and reluctance of Alevis to reveal their identity fearing discrimination (van Bruinessen, 1996). Scholars such as Markus

Dressler (2013) suggest that upon founding of the Republic, Alevi roots were underlined regarding their hailing from Central Asia, representing pure Turkishness, and their faith being part of Islam, pagan and Christian elements rejected, so the Muslim Alevi identity created was to be questioned in the post-1980 period, especially by Kurdish Alevis.

Mainstream Alevism defines itself as the “core of Islam”, centered around Ali and his descendants while other streams refer to pre-Islamic faiths and traditions revolving around fire, referring to claims that Islam was adopted due to pressure and increasing exposure to Islam. These statements are not too different from the findings of a METU research on Alevi migrants in Ankara. The study reports that while those with less education describe Alevism as “true Islam” and faith, those with more education perceive Alevism as a lifestyle and culture and rather source of ethnic identity. This distinction also overlaps with the East-West, older-younger and Turkish-Kurdish cleavages respectively too (Milliyet, 4 July 2005).

2.2 History:

In order to understand contemporary debates about Alevism and Alevis in Turkey better, two related phenomenon need to be understood as well: *Kızılbaş* which refers to the Anatolian support for the Safevid challenge to the Ottoman rule, and Bektashism which refers to Janissaries and Muslim conversion of Balkan people, with its tolerant and heterodox belief system. Bektashism also represents the state discourse regarding faith until being replaced by Sunnism in the sixteenth century after the Ottoman sultans seized the title of caliphate. *Kızılbaş*, red cap in Turkish, came to be used synonymously with humiliation and despise after becoming symbol of the groups in Anatolia supporting the Safavids against the Ottomans. The clash between Safavids and Ottomans leading to the Çaldıran War in early 16th century also meant trouble for Bektaşis as the Janissaries revolted against the Sultan during his campaign against the Safavids which was followed by *Kızılbaş* rebellions in Anatolia. The next most important strike against Alevi faith was the abolishment of Janissaries, and so Bektashism, in 1826 while *Kızılbaşlık*, Alevism, continued its existence in the rural parts of Anatolia . It was the pre-Republican period during which Pan-Turkism was shaped around “real Turk, pure Turk” to bond the communities of the new Republic after Pan-Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism failed to hold the Empire together. But as Sunnism was prescribed as the other ingredient of this “glue” of national identity, Alevis failed to benefit too much from the new Republic, its practices and institutions that were officially deemed secular and so equal towards all faiths (Irat, 2006).

Alevis and Alevism faced waves of state actions that affected the faith and identity drastically, of which first was the abolishment of dedes, lodges and convents of all sizes as part of Revolutionary Laws in 1925. But this legal change did not have a major effect at the time as Alevis lived in isolation in rural areas then, allowing them to keep the now abolished traditions and structure intact until the migration that began in the 1950s. So despite such state actions to limit Alevism, Alevis generally supported the new Republic and its secularism with its own peculiarities as a step forward when compared with the Ottoman period that was marked with Sunnism. The only exceptions during this period are the 1921 Koçgiri and 1937-38 Dersim riots as during other riots Alevis were on the side of the government as van Bruinessen (2001, in Köker, 2010) claimed that 1925 Sheikh Said riot was a Sunni Kurdish one while Dersim was an Alevi riot. But the Islamist roots of both riots, rather than socio-economic ones, were underlined by the new Republic though the ethno-religious, sectarian cleavages actually determined the support of local tribes during each riot. In the following period of multi-party competition, the fiercely Jacobin policies of single-party era gave the opposition a valuable and strong ammunition: religion. Though the CHP realized this weakness and tried to eliminate it through moves such as reinstating religious education courses in state schools or founding schools to train imams and preachers (IPSs), it couldn't avoid being defeated by Demokrat Parti (DP) in 1950 elections. Despite dubious early practices such as converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque, making religious culture and moral knowledge courses virtually compulsory and financing of 5000 new mosques, DP was generally supported by Alevis during the 1950 and 1954 elections (Irat, 2006).

Necdet Subaşı (in Erdemir, 2005) claims that Alevis began supporting DP as a negative reaction towards new policies by CHP such as religious culture and moral knowledge courses, decision about founding of Imam and Preacher Schools (IPSs) after 1946 though this support was also due to DP's economic policies supporting the farmers, appealing to the largely rural Alevis then. But DP's tolerance towards Islamic sects and especially employing Sunni sects, such as the Nur movement which had strong ties with DP ministers, to secure next elections was among the forces driving Alevis away from DP in 1957 elections (Schuler, 1999). During DP rule between 1950 and 1960, when the liberal attitude towards economy spread to other spheres so that in addition to practices mentioned above others, such as the ban on Said-i Nursi's publishings being removed, were interpreted by Alevis, and framed by CHP, as DP's efforts to strengthen Sunni Islam back. As a result of their centuries-old fears being evoked, Alevis' votes shifted back towards CHP, in 1957 elections, and Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TİP) in the 60s (Şener & İlknur, 1995). The other major change during

this period was about Alevis migrating to cities in large numbers exceeding those of Sunni population beginning in the 1950s (Toprak, 1990).

In the relatively liberal environment of the 1960s as Alevis began discovering their identity they were also “discovered” by both the left and other political parties with their vote potential. So was born the Alevi problem and began the period of political manipulations and ideological speculations. In this period Türkiye Birlik Partisi (TBP), the first Alevi political party with the party symbol consisting of 12 stars and the image of a lion, was founded in 1966 as the first attempt at founding a mass-level organization as a reaction to the rise of political Islam while Alevis supported center-left parties, such as CHP, as well. Scholars such as Dierl (1991) interpret this event as *babas* and *dedes* trying to hold on to power while they tried not to lose Alevi youth to Marxism. TBP’s party program defined the party as “revolutionary left”, asking for re-structuring of the DRA as the party also declared to be against discrimination based on denominations (Şener & İlknur, 1995). The post-1960 coup period can be likened to the late 1980s when associations made a comeback with a boom though in the 1960s ideologies were on the rise as opposed to the identity politics of the late 1980s. Accordingly, during this period of liberties that CHP proposed, under the leadership of İnönü, in 1963 the founding of Chamber of Orders in the DRA. The proposal was withdrawn under the massive counter-propaganda of conservative media, to which Alevis reacted publicly: 50 Alevi students announced a Declaration in which the word *Alevi* was used publicly for the first time in the history of Turkish Republic (Cinemre and Akşit, 1995).

The 1971 coup marked a shift towards CHP with the crushing of the left as well as the shift of CHP identity and policies towards more left under the leadership of Ecevit, becoming center-left, following the challenge posed by the socialist left that also targeted Alevis as a “pool of votes” in shantytowns on the outskirts of cities especially. So since then center-left CHP, briefly SODEP and SHP in the 80s and 90s, became the most viable address for Alevi votes. A clear picture of the period can be drawn by also referring to other elements in the right-wing politics: the first Islamist political party, Milli Nizam Partisi which became Milli Selamet Partisi after the 1971 coup, and the far-right, ultra-nationalist party Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi with its youth branch which later got involved in clashes with the leftist youth. In order to draw the whole picture it should also be said that in the pre-1980 period, the ideological cleavages with which Alevis were aligned with or opposed to set the scenes in the post-coup period as the early left-right clashes became Alevi-Sunni clashes towards the end of the 1970s to accelerate and turn the bloodshed into massive proportions. While the left-wing parties and groups felt secure with the Alevi support, in return right-wing groups provoked Sunni masses

against Alevis to lead to mass killings in cities like Sivas, Kahramanmaraş and Çorum where the population was divided between the Alevis and Sunnis, and as a result the country was driven into the coup environment. Another province of equal cleavage, Sivas, was to play an important part in the long history of violence against the Alevis, in the 1990s.

The 1980 coup aimed to stop the violence, based on ideological clashes, which reached the apex with the mass violence against Alevis, claimed to be provoked and practised by the right-wing. So though the aftermath of the coup period was marked with peace, the new identity and nationalism shaped around Sunni Islam, nationalizing Islam, affected Alevis much (Smith, 2005) to make them look for their own identity to be positioned in line with secularism against the rise of Islam in and out of the ballotboxes during and after 1983 elections. Following this growing trend in the 90s, Welfare Party's winning of 1994 local elections in Istanbul to be followed by the newly-elected mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's sending staff to demolish Karacaahmet cemevi sent warning signals to Alevis, caution against their adversary, the Islamists, which was gaining political power even in the largest city of the country.

2.3.Developments during the Final Decade of the Twentieth Century:

Koçan and Öncü (2004) claim that Alevis focused on class struggle in the 1970s, explaining the injustice against Alevis with economic factors, and sided with socialist movements to challenge the status quo. But the situation changed after the 1980 coup when the former socialists re-discovered their Alevi identity and began placing demands regarding their faith, identity and equal citizenship from the state beginning in the 1990s as Alevism emerged as a political and cultural identity. The revival of Alevi identity and Alevism that began in the late 1980s can be explained with a few factors: decades-long migration from rural areas to cities and abroad to reach its apex in the 70s as newly urbanized Alevis began re-defining themselves as Alevi in the de-politicized post-coup period (Çamuroğlu, 1998) owing to rising political Islam (van Bruinessen, 1996), the ideological shift towards identity politics with the collapse of Communism in late 1980s as well as loss of identity and power for the Turkish Left in the post-1980 coup context, the rise of Kurdish nationalism and negative discourse towards Kurds (Erman and Göker,2000) and finally revival of membership talks with the EU which supported protection of non-majority faith and identities to be accompanied with waves of legal changes eliminating such restrictions (Göner, 2005).

In late 1980s, Alevi publications and civil society movement exploded while Alevis reacted to the pressures of political Islam which invaded every sphere of life. But until then Alevis had already given up much of their idiosyncracies for the sake of solidarity and unity as modernization and secularization took hold with the birth of the new Republic. In the 90s, as with the rest of the world, identity politics was in ascendance while pure ideologies became obsolete. This condition partially explains the Alevi revival and its ideology presented as “egalitarian, liberal and just” owing to the Alevi intellectuals who discovered Socialist ideals and values in Alevism and defined Alevism using modern terminology and methods (Çamuroğlu, 1999). It should be noted here that scholars (Çamuroğlu, 1997; Vorhoff, 1998) expected Alevism to become extinct under the destructive effects of rapid urbanization and modernization but paradoxically these conditions, among others, provided fertile ground for the revival and transformation of Alevism. The Alevi Revival also meant leaving old ways to be replaced by new ones such as using the media rather than oral tradition or personal relations as well as introducing meritocracy to replace inherited authority (Olsson et al, 2005).

Drawing attention to another paradox, Subaşı (in Erdemir, 2005) suggests that the support given by Alevis to the Turkish Republic since its founding worked against Alevis in two ways: modernization changed the rural structure and relations while secularism, as practised in Turkey, meant preference and leaning of the state towards Sunnism. During this process, the ruling parties’ dependence on Sunni masses which were hostile towards Alevis along with the police force being purged off left-wing elements after the 1980 coup made the situation even worse for Alevis (van Bruinessen, 1996). As Alevis perceived the state sponsored Sunni propaganda, Turkish-Islamic synthesis, as promoting Sunnism as *the* right way, Alevis shifted towards identity politics leaving faith-based struggle behind.

Though the Turkish identity has been identified by scholars as centered around Islam from the beginning of the Republic, this relatively civic identity changed after the 1980s so that religion, Sunni Islam, became more emphasized than Turkishness (Bora and Can, 1991) as the new formula to hold the society together against internal threats such as communism and Kurdish separationism (Oran, 2001). The policies of 1980 coup administration as well as those of Motherland Party, incumbent party in the 80s, such as making religion courses compulsory and accelerating building of mosques both politicized Islam (Ahmad, 1991) and created a mechanism to assimilate Alevism to lead to a general unrest among Alevis (Kehl-Bodrogi, 1992). Accordingly, DRA increased its role with the increasing number of imams and mosques built during this period grew active against Alevism by assigning imams to Alevi villages while condemning Alevism as deviation from Islam as well as publishing

fatwas on various issues determining lifestyles, a move interpreted by Oran as “hegemonic” (Oran, 2001). Furthermore, Ulutaş (2010) suggests that after having Turgut Özal, a self-claimed Nakshibendi, come to power in early 1980s as the leader of ruling Motherland Party and so sects such as Nakshibendism became amalgamated with the state, owing to Motherland Party and Welfare Party governments, to accelerate the trend of the sects infiltrating the ranks of DRA rather than the state “using religion as a tool”.

With this shift of Turkish identity towards Islam under Turkish-Islamic synthesis, those alienated were the religious and ethnic minorities (Bora and Can, 1991) that Kurds interpreted this shift as Turkification and Alevis as Sunnification. Alevis, in return, began organizing to demand ending the Sunnification policies and protesting the state policies where the discourse created and supported was about equality and freedom and rights, asking for state neutrality towards Alevism. In the post-1983 period which was more liberal than the immediate aftermath of the coup, number of Alevi associations increased along with the booming civil society. In early 1990s, in line with accelerated membership talks with the EU, the removal of bans on association and publishing in languages other than Turkish changed the scene for Alevis and Alevism, leading to a boom in publishing activities and associations by Alevis, also called the Alevi Revival. Alevis began performing rituals such as *cem*, which had been banned since 1925 along with lodges and the institution of *dedes*, without hiding and *cemevis* began to be opened all around the country. These developments mark the shift of Alevism from being a mostly rural faith based on oral traditions to becoming a public and more formal faith with printed documents regarding faith, history and identity. Though some publications, like the Alevi Quran, caused controversy regarding Alevi faith and especially whether Alevism is a sect within Islam or rather a different religion as well as the origins of this other religion this revival was supported by seculars as Alevis were always considered their natural allies (Üzüm, 1999). The state also did not act against and even supported this revival as an attempt to provide an alternative identity to Alevi Kurds as PKK grew stronger in Eastern and especially Southeastern provinces while Alevis and Alevism were presented as “real Turks” and “real Islam”. It is important to note that at the intersection of religion and identity politics, Islam-based politics have been strong among Sunni Kurds, even by looking into votes received by Islamists in the pre-coup period (Laçiner, 1991) though PKK and its political allies have grown to be a strong alternative in the post-1980 coup period.

The state-level attendance at Hacı Bektaş festivities, which became depoliticized in the post-coup period following its status as *the* festival site for the left-wing from early 1990s, is a sign of this support and positive attitude during this period. Though major Alevi leaders were

courted and coopted to strengthen Turkish nationalism during this period, there was the problem of Alevis being perceived as inclined towards left and the anti-Alevi elements within DYP and ANAP at government and party levels. The attempts by the state to recognize Alevism and turning Hacı Bektaş into a symbol of loyalty to the Turkish state paid off such that the more religious and conservative camp within Alevism became part of Hacı Bektaş umbrella association and grew more supportive of the state. On the other hand those organized under the umbrella of Pir Sultan Abdal, another saint-like but rebellious figure from Alevi history, became more inclined towards left-wing parties (van Bruinessen, 2001). Hacı Bektaş is an interesting symbol as while Mustafa Kemal was presented as the reincarnation of Hacı Bektaş or Imam Ali according to others, during the Turkish Independence War among Alevis, this symbolism shifted in the 1990s to present Hacı Bektaş as a proto-nationalist symbol.

Subaşı supports the claims that state supported Alevism against the rise of the Sunni Islam (in Shankland, 1999) and PKK to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak, to the extent that there were rumors and accusations that Alevi commanders formed the top echelons of the 28 February 1997 coup command which targeted both *enemies* within, Islamists and Kurds (Yavuz, 2000). Several writers claim that Alevis having realized their key position in this complicated situation, rather than being passive or shy, began making demands such as banishing of DRA (Bozkurt, 2000; Kutlu, 2001). But Sivas Madımak fire and Gazi neighborhood events undermined the relationship between the state and Alevis to become consolidated and grounded on trust and loyalty.

During this period of revival, Alevis began questioning citizenship practices of the Turkish state, their exclusion from political community, state's affiliation with Sunni Islam and accordingly the growing role of DRA which began to be targeted as part of demands of all Alevi groups in various ways, as banishment altogether or re-structuring as an umbrella institution for all faiths. According to a TÜSES research, the number of those defining their identity as Alevi has risen from 3.6 % in 1998 to 8 % in 2002 and this phenomenon is explained with developments such as Alevi-Bektaşî Revival or Alevi Renaissance, rise of middle-class and urbanization among Alevis along with rise of market economy and shrinking of political polarization between right and left in the 90s.

2.4. Major Events of 1990s:

Alevi Declaration (May 6, 1990): The Declaration, published in daily Cumhuriyet, was the turning point in Alevism as the first attempt to define Alevism as a faith and culture regarding its distinctiveness and demand granting of rights by the Turkish state for recognition and self-determination, using the term *Alevi* openly rather than using symbols or allegories, to make Alevism public and visible (Vorhoff, 1998). It is considered the beginning of Alevi movement (Şener, 1991) or rather a turning point for Alevism (Kaleli, 2000) and also considered important for referring to *difference* so that Alevi identity is presented as different from that of the Sunnis, though Alevism is presented as part of Islam. The Declaration also enlists discriminatory practices as absence of Alevism in Turkish media and broadcasting, absence of Alevism in religious textbooks and the DRA and continuing practice of building mosques in Alevi villages. The demands include ending of building mosques in Alevi villages along with new measures such as building of schools and cemevis in Alevi villages instead, introduction of Alevism in religious textbooks and representation of Alevism in DRA. The Declaration is a turning point with enlisting these demands and especially defining Alevism regarding its different identity, deviating from demands about “equal citizenship” and instead asking for differential treatment, based on identity politics. In the Declaration universal human rights are referred to, asking Turkish intellectuals to support Alevi, while the position of Alevi is compared with that of the Jewish and Christians in Turkey.

Barış Partisi (1996) : Like the 1960s’ Türkiye Birlik Partisi (TBP), Demokratik Barış Hareketi (DBH), Democratic Peace Movement, and then Barış Partisi (BP), Peace Party, were founded by Alevi as Alevi political movements. This was the second attempt after TBP to establish an Alevi political party to make the Alevi issue more visible, the words *Alevi* and *Alevism* used more by politicians while the mission was defined as defending Alevi interests in or out of the Parliament, TBMM. Though this time overt Alevi signifiers were not used as was done before by TBP, the party officials acted and spoke in support of Alevi-related debates such as protesting of Gazi events or providing free bus services to organize Gazi-related protests. the party was officially committed to discussing ethno-religious pluralism and multi-culturalism given the declarations of party officials and party programs ((Demokratik Barış Hareketi, 1996). When the DBH refrained from running in the 1996 elections friction arose in the party that this time abolishment of DRA was proposed and in

1996 the movement became Peace Party and ran in the 1999 elections to win less than 1 % of the national vote so the party abolished itself in May 1999.

The last culprit to increase public visibility of Alevi-Bektashism along with the increasing number of Alevi-Bektaşî associations and cemevis was about very dramatic acts of violence towards Alevis: Sivas Madımak fire and Gazi shootings and riots in mid 1990s, towards which government acted with incompetence, lacking political morality, to lead Alevi society to create own defense mechanisms.

Sivas Madımak Events (2 July 1993): Sivas is a province with considerable Alevi and Sunni populations where villages are dominated by Alevis, both Turkish and Kurdish, while towns are populated by Sunnis dominantly. The city is also famous as the place where Pir Sultan Abdal, an Alevi saint and symbol, lived, rebelled against the state and was executed by the state and this is why Pir Sultan Abdal associations chose the city as the venue for the cultural festival attended by artists, authors and poets in July 1993. Sunni masses were angered with the presence of author Aziz Nesin who announced his intention about publishing *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie. The mob preparing to capture and kill Nesin grew after Friday prayers and attacked the sculpture of poet and rebel Pir Sultan Abdal first. After being encouraged by the speech of the then mayor of the city, representing the right-wing Welfare Party, the mob attacked and sieged the Madımak Hotel where the festival participants were staying. With the fire set to the hotel, 37 people died, out of which two were perpetrators killed in the fire as they helped set the hotel on fire, on July 2, 1993 (Sarihan and Ilimoğlu 2002).

According to van Bruinessen (2001), the events are different from the mass killings and pogroms of late 1970s. First of all festival participants, rather than Alevi population, were targeted while the attack at Pir Sultan Abdal sculpture is highly symbolic. Pir Sultan Abdal is known to symbolize not only Alevi rebellion against the state but also leftist political views. But the most important and thought-provoking implication of the events was about the sympathy of the local authorities, especially the mayor. The police did not do anything to stop the attacks while some policemen seemed to enjoy the view as they watched the hotel on fire on a leaked police tape, a phenomenon which can be explained by the selective right-wing, Sunni recruitment into police corps in the post-1980 period. The central government was ineffective during the fire, to say the very least. Though the then Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü was reached by phone by Aziz Nesin and others stuck in the hotel help failed to reach those at the hotel on time. The military, that gets involved when the police cannot cope with

local events, was also mysteriously ineffective as they could not stop the incidents and protect the festival participants either. At the time, the social democrats, SHP namely, were coalition partners with right-wing DYP and yet could not be effective. The funerals of those killed during the fire were attended by 400,000 people in Ankara and demonstrators threw stones towards the Parliament building while Hacı Bektaş Association journal later called the commemorations “state-supervised Sivas massacre commemorated” (Irat, 2006). The role of the state, which acted with indifference at the very least, as co-perpetrator or target as well as the boundaries and nature of state were questioned after the events by Alevis especially, creating an environment of greater mistrust. Identification of the events and the perpetrators by different groups can explain the increasing support for PKK among some Alevi groups while leftist organizations such as Pir Sultan Abdal associations also gained momentum among Alevis after the events. The other effect of the Madımak fire was about the migration of Alevis from the region due to Sunni animosity in the form of new Madımaks or at least inability to find jobs as well as the state-forced migration from the villages in the campaign against the PKK.

The then Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü later stated in an interview that there was a mix of weakness, negligence and failure. Though, İnönü said, a part of what happened was unknown for him as he did not fully understand what led to the negligence. Another remark was made by the then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller who stated her relief that “no citizen was harmed”, referring to a violent incident where 37 people died. In the meantime the conservative cabinet members accused Aziz Nesin with provoking the events to the extent that even the judiciary, Nusret Demiral of the State Security Court, announced intentions to bring Nesin into court and even ask for death penalty.

Gazi Neighborhood Events (March 12-14, 1995): The events in the Gazi neighborhood, a new and poor neighborhood of Istanbul with a high proportion of Alevi population, represent another low moment between Alevis and the state, the police namely. On the evening of March 12, 1995 gunmen in a stolen taxi opened fire at inhabitants of teahouses and a patisserie killing an Alevi dede and wounding several while the police was slow to take action. On the first day, after the reactions turned into protests that grew with participation from other neighborhoods and anger grew against the local policemen, believed to be ultra-nationalist, Alevi haters, one protester was shot by the police. So the protests grew and spread to another neighborhood to be over following the killing of more protesters by the police. The exact number of the dead is disputed: some sources give the number as between

15 and 20, and others report it as over 20. While hundreds are stated to be wounded, again the numbers are also disputed as between 300 to 600. The tragic fact is not only about the violent acts committed by the police force that went beyond professional crowd control but also that the policemen shouted insults at and threatened the moderate Alevi leaders while these leaders tried to calm down the crowds. Though the perpetrators of the attacks were never caught, the press claimed IBDA-C, a radical religious terrorist group, and Turkish Revenge Brigades, an ultra-nationalist group, as possible perpetrators while the then Minister of Interior Affairs Nahit Menteşe mentioned PKK and Hizbollah as other possible perpetrators of the attacks, insisting that the police didnt fire their weapons. The then Prime Minister Çiller said in a DYP Group Meeting in TBMM that the state had acted with wisdom and dealt with the situation diligently.¹⁰⁵ of Gazi neighborhood residents were sued by the state for “harming public property and attending illegal demonstrations” while the people who went to court as witnesses in trial of the accused police officers were also sued by the state.

After the trial regarding Gazi neighborhood riots, only two policemen were sentenced to 1 year and 8 months’ imprisonment for manslaughter following the trial that took years to be finished, in 2000. The sentences were postponed and the court decision was taken by the families of those killed during the riots into European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) where the Turkish state was sentenced to pay 510,000 Euros for violating articles of European Charter of Human Rights, of which Turkey is a signatory.

Sivas and Gazi neighborhood events strengthened and radicalized Alevi revival so that the moderate Alevi leaders who cooperated with the state, hoping for state recognition or personal gains, lost ground while leftist radicals gained momentum among the youth especially. With the state project about providing Alevism as an alternative to Kurdish nationalism and the rise of PKK failed while PKK acted immediately to take revenge of Madımak by attacking a Sunni village, Başbağlar, in Erzincan province and killing 33 civilians on July 5, 1993. The event was presented by the religious media, Yeni Şafak, Zaman and Milli Gazete, as “revenge of Sivas Madımak fire” and later calling it “Başbağlar fire” to draw the proper analogy with the “Madımak fire” which they ignored or mentioned only along with Başbağlar killings later (Irat, 2006). It should be noted that until early 1990s, Kurdish Alevis had little sympathy for PKK, especially due to its links with Sunni Islam, but this changed by 1994 as PKK gained considerable support among Alevis though the majority supported the secular state against all odds. In return the state didnt do anything more than meeting Alevi representatives or listening to the Alevi demands. Regarding Kurdish Alevis, while the state focused on the Turkish roots of Alevism to support the claim that Alevis are

ethnically Turkish, PKK rather focused on the Zoroastrian, *Zerdüşt*, origins of Alevism to promote Kurdishness of Kurdish Alevis and claim this shared ethnicity as the core of Alevi identity in the context of current confrontation.

Researcher Yaman (2000) underlines the fact that in this period, number of foundations increased as foundations were harder to be closed down by the state and that two of these foundations were different from others. One is C.E.M. Vakfı (Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı), referred to as Cem Foundation in the rest of this study, which does not accept other foundations as representative of Alevis, described as a religious/cultural organization seeking recognition as part of Islam (Poyraz, 2006). The other organization is Ehl-i Beyt Foundation which is closer to Shiite Jafaris and so lacks a wide support among Alevis, while both foundations have close ties with businessmen and industrialist organizations, CÜSİAD and DEMSİAD, and the state. Affiliated with Cem Foundation is Alevi Bektaşî Foundations which is also close to the state and holding traditional, even conservative, views to defend “unity” at times (Alemdar & Çorbacıoğlu, 2012). The younger and more left-leaning Alevis, discerning Alevism as a culture, are represented by the umbrella organizations of Pir Sultan Abdal Associations and Alevi Bektaşî Federation which make statements challenging the discourse and position of the state (Şimşek, 2004).

In early 2000s, Alevi demands were centered around DRA to propose abolishing of DRA, changing its structure and including Alevism or including Alevism within the current structure (Milliyet, 15 August 2001). The demands, mainly about granting of legal status to cemevis, banishing compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses, investigation of violence against Alevis, founding of Madımak museum in addition to banishing DRA, have been repeated in public numerous times since 1990 Alevi Declaration though then Madımak fire has not happened yet so the list didn't include the building of a Madımak Museum of Shame (Milliyet, 15 January 2013; Milliyet, 12 September 2013). But it was also reported that AKP was least positive about Alevi demands regarding banishing DRA and compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses, calling such demands *more political than religious demands* (Milliyet, 30 November 2008). The rejection of these demands have become a regular topic of concern in the 2012 Religious Freedom Report which stated that Turkey practiced “systematic and very poor limitations” on religious freedom, downgrading Turkey from *countries to be watched* to *countries of serious concern* group along with North Korea, China and Saudi Arabia in 2012 (Milliyet, 20 March 2012).

The mainstream argument about Alevis lacking a common identity and agenda, “lack of unity among Alevis”, to define a common set of demands has also been rejected by Alevis

as they repeated same demands: obtaining legal status of cemevis, removal of compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses, not paying taxes to finance DRA which provided service to Sunnis solely while accommodating ideological approaches in its structure. Alevis also demanded returning of tekkes to Alevis, investigation, apology and compensation regarding Dersim, Kahramanmaraş, Çorum, Sivas and Gazi incidents, prevention of discrimination in all spheres of life and becoming of Alevis “the other” especially after the rise of tension with Syria (Milliyet, 17 January 2011).

But despite Alevis’ claim that the same demands have been repeated, there is discord among Alevis, as explained above, not only regarding the organizations but also demands voice by these organizations. Cem Foundation and İzzettin Doğan, along with Alevi Foundations Federation and Ehl-i Beyt Foundation, have made claims different from the other Alevi organizations such as Alevi Bektaşî Federation, in a more “accommodating” manner to seek common ground with the state without challenging the status quo much. Doğan and Cem Foundation never used ‘diversity or identity discourse’ while ‘equality and democracy for all discourse’ was rarely used, let alone using ‘fighting for all, with everyone’ discourse. Their demands differ that the demands announced by İzzettin Doğan were about Alevi-Bektaşî-Mevlevîs receiving a one-third share of the religious services budget, re-structuring of DRA, inclusion of Alevism in religious culture and moral knowledge courses. Doğan also asked for state support for the cemevis, allocation of TV and radio hours to all faith groups and playing of saz, traditional Turkish instrument, to be advised to be taught at schools (Milliyet, 29 December 2008). But Alevi *dedes* already stated that being on the state payroll would mean rejection by Alevi society as such an act would mean serving the state rather than the community. Alevi *dedes* added that they would not accept charity or anything from the government especially that it came from all sorts of sources, including brothels (Milliyet, 30 November 2008).

CHAPTER 3

ALEVIS VIS-A-VIS RULING AKP AND OTHER PARTIES

During the pre-AKP period, in early 2000s, Ahmet Necdet Sezer's election to presidency was perceived positively by Alevis as Sezer used to be the president of the Constitutional Court and so was expected to understand rule of law and act accordingly (Milliyet, 17 August 2001). During Sezer's presidency it was expected, given his previous messages, that Alevism would be formally accepted by the state, a necessity for democratization as claimed by author Reha Çamuroğlu (Milliyet, 15 August 2001). But the status quo did not change with Sezer's presidency or the DSP-ANAP-MHP coalition government which was in power between 1999 and 2002. The AKP came to power in 2002, riding on the wave of criticism targeting political and economic failures of the coalition government along with a newly-designed identity and agenda to become the ruling party for more than a decade and transform the country, nation and state.

With the hope of being treated as full, equal citizens in a modern and secular system Alevis had been supportive of Republicanism. But the history of the new Republic meant more discrimination and violence for the Alevis. Thus conjunctural change of direction, as it happened with AKP government, is not a new experience for Alevis who became the subject of state policies due to shifts in domestic or international balance or plain vote concerns. Alevi demands in this period have both persisted and changed following the early form in 1990s, the period of Alevi Renaissance.

In the following section, the 2002-2014 period will be explained with information about the context, regarding party politics including AKP and Prime Minister Erdoğan or state reforms, to name a few. In the next section major Alevi issues and demands about cemevis, Directorate of Religious Affairs and sphere of education will be analyzed.

3.1.State and Alevism-Reform Attempts:

Though previous reforms changed laws and the Constitution, these changes did not target Alevi issue directly, rather banishing death penalty or widening liberties of all by removing limitations. These reforms were means to meet the Copenhagen Criteria and harmonize with EU legislation and standards while Turkey accelerated membership efforts as

an EU candidate country. The first government reform attempt to address Alevi issue directly during AKP rule was Alevi Opening and Workshops, which were followed by the Democratization Package of 2013.

3.1.1. Alevi Opening (Açılımı) and Workshops:

The beginning of the Opening was marked with a symbolic gesture based on Sunni traditions, perceived as the standard for all Muslims owing to ‘unity around Islam’ monism, aligned with the ‘unity of the state and nation’ discourse. So the gesture caused resentment on Alevis’ side. Furthermore, state officials’ perpetual categorization of Alevism as part of Islam, repeating ‘unity around Islam discourse’, has been another source of resentment among some Alevis as they reject such categorizations, comparisons or debates. Prime Minister Erdoğan took the first step for the Opening in November 2007 when he appointed Alevi scholar-turned AKP MP-Reha Çamuroğlu as his advisor to initiate Alevi reforms in 2008 (Milliyet, 24 November 2007). To begin the process, 1000 Alevis were invited to a Muharrem iftar dinner organized by the Prime Minister but Alevi leaders did not react positively, stating that they rather wanted consitutional guarantees, adding that Alevis would not promote Muharrem fasting as they fasted to mourn (Milliyet, 23 November 2007). Furthermore, the proposal about putting dedes on state payroll and form a state organization for Alevism was severely criticized by Alevi leaders, except Cem Foundation President İzzettin Doğan, as violation of secularism and Alevi traditions. On the government side, State Minister and former President of DRA Sait Yazıcıoğlu supported Alevi Opening to address an old problem, adding “we perceive Alevism as part of Islam and want to bring peace within the state structure without aiming to interfere in or change anyone’s faith” (Milliyet, 7 December 2007).

Early in the process of the Opening, Alevis began labeling the Opening with the ‘secret agenda discourse’ which is popular among AKP dissenters, especially CHP, referring to the *takiye* practise of Islam which means resorting to dishonesty when need arises. After the plan was made public, an announcement by Alevi artists and intellectuals was published in newspapers in December 2007 calling the Opening “not genuine and following a secret agenda” (Milliyet, 15 December 2007).

Those attending the iftar dinner, representing six Alevi organizations out of a total of 279, called it a success while the protesting leaders called it a trick to divert attention from the real demands of Alevis, repeating the ‘secret agenda discourse’ (Miliyet, 13 January 2008). On the AKP side, AKP MP Çamuroğlu, using the much-used “conspiracy by enemies”

discourse, saying “those fearful of losing power initiated the attacks with resentment”. An AKP MP, of Alevi origin, Ibrahim Yiğit, categorized Alevism as traditionally done by state officials, saying “those perceiving Alevism as not within Islam didnt join the iftar dinner”. In addition, taking the ‘unity around Islam discourse’ to a new level that Yiğit proposed adopting Sunni traditions in Alevism as he defined iftar dinner as starting a tradition in Alevism with mass iftar that lacked in Alevism (Milliyet, 11 January 2008).

Shortly afterwards, the Istanbul Mufti not only continued the ‘unity of Islam discourse’ and monism perception as traditions of Turkish state officials but also disdained Alevi faith by categorizing mosques as superior and “only place of worship for Muslims”. So in June 2008, AKP MP Çamuroğlu resigned from his position as Prime Minister’s consultant following remarks by Istanbul Mufti Çağrııcı that “mosque and cemevi are not equal and so cemevis can not be considered place of worship” (Milliyet, 13 June 2008). Çamuroğlu was stated to have lost hope about Alevi Opening, given the attitude and rhetoric of AKP members regarding Alevis, Alevism and Alevi demands.

According to the results of a February 2009 opinion poll, the ‘secret agenda discourse’ used by some political parties, especially CHP, and sometimes Alevis seems to be equally adopted by the public. Though supporters of each party seem suspicious about other parties’ agenda and identity rather than taking a principled and questioning approach. According to the research conducted in 33 provinces it was reported that 46 % of participants labeled Alevi Opening as “insincere and geared towards elections”. But these percentages climbed to 71 % and 74 % respectively for MHP and CHP supporters and dropped to 21 % for AKP supporters, providing a clear link between perceptions of intent and identity and party affiliation. Likewise, 52 % of participants used similar terms about the “Çarşaf Opening” of CHP, labeled so for CHP wooing the conservatives by accepting women with hijab into CHP membership and promoting it, for which the percentages of those suspicious climbed to 67 %, for AKP supporters, and dropped to 21 %, for CHP supporters (Milliyet, 9 February 2009).

Before the Alevi workshops began in mid-2009, the detailed roadmap about seven round of workshops, to be followed with a report to be presented to the government, was announced to evoke an image that the process is well-planned and taken seriously. The aim was announced as “the Opening would be based on a wide societal consensus and not propose a singular model but rather include all ideas, giving voice to all, attended by all”. The aim seemed to repeat the discourse about “hearing and learning” Alevi demands, as if the demands would be voiced for the first time and aiming inclusiveness, leaving the much-

repeated monism approach aside and employing the much-used Alevi discourse of 'equal citizenship and democracy' as a rare attempt (Milliyet, 26 May 2009).

During the workshops which began on June 3, 2009 in Ankara, confirming AKP discourse about 'lack of unity among Alevis discourse' regarding demands, Alevis failed to reach convergence regarding their major demands. The few issues on which organizations with differing views, such as Cem Foundation, Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association and Alevi Bektaşî Federation Association, reached consensus were about granting legal status to cemevis and transformation of Madımak Hotel site into a museum (Milliyet, 4 June 2009). But differences persisted regarding having Alevi *dedes* on state payroll and compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses. While some, such as Alevi-Bektaşî Foundation, asked for banishing these courses others, such as Cem Foundation's İzzettin Doğan, wanted to have Alevism included in the content of textbooks of these courses and others wanted these course to be elective.

The 'freedom and democracy discourse', normally used by Alevis, was repeated by the government as a rare attempt, during the workshops when Minister Faruk Çelik said "workshops were needed to prepare the free and democratic environment necessary" (Milliyet, 9 July 2009). Çelik also attacked the 'secret agenda discourse', comparing the present with past exploitation of the issue, stating "AKP is genuine about solving the issues that have been exploited by others so far". But DRA continued categorizing cemevis, their status persistently compared with mosques, as cemevis have been perceived as a threat to Sunni Islam shaped around monism. So during Alevi workshops DRA rejected granting legal status to cemevis as an alternative to mosques, stating "such a decision can lead to deterioration within Islam but we wouldnt refuse financial support provided by the state to cemevis" (Milliyet, 20 August 2009).

The preliminary report prepared after the seven workshops held during eight months, including items such as making DRA independent or keeping the compulsory nature of religious culture and moral knowledge courses, seemed to listen to Cem Foundation demands and not other organizations. Another Cem Foundation demand, training of *dedes* and putting them on state payroll, was left out as a debatable topic while transforming the site of Madımak Hotel into a park was proposed instead of a museum. Finally introducing a new tax called "Religion Tax" to be paid by citizens of all faiths was proposed, stating that cemevis should enjoy same benefits as other places of worship (Milliyet, 7 February 2010).

At this stage Alevi Opening was amalgamated with similar government-led projects, such as the Kurdish Opening, to form the Democratic Opening of AKP to be voted for in a

referendum, to change the 1983 Constitution, in September 2010. Just after the Alevi Opening became part of a large project of democratization, Prime Minister replaced the similar ‘brotherhood discourse’ and ‘unity discourse’ with ‘them against us discourse’ to accuse the opposition to win the referendum through polarization. One major instance occurred when Prime Minister Erdoğan, during this new era marked by the referendum campaign, announced “the nay-sayers to the referendum are fearing that they would lose their power because after the proposed changes Alevi dedes will no longer be powerful in the judiciary” (Milliyet, 30 August 2010). Later Erdoğan took these early comments further, stating that Alevis in the judiciary sentenced him into prisonment in the 1990s which later endangered his political tenure.

After the referendum was concluded with the acceptance of changes into the 1982 Constitution, finally in April 2011, the Alevi Opening Report was announced. Alevi Report did not seem to address or solve major issues, rather proposing solutions lacking novelty as also made obvious by the content of the preliminary report (Milliyet, 10 April 2011). The supporters of the Report transformed ‘unity discourse’ into ‘lack of unity among Alevis discourse’ regarding their demands to justify the state of the Report, as was done later for 2013 Democratization Package. These comments ignore the fact that Alevis have voiced same demands several times, to which Erdoğan and AKP leaders reacted and commented about. The Report also attempted to define and categorize Alevi faith, in line with the previous state and AKP attempts to reject cemevis as place of worship, based on the ‘unity in Islam’ discourse. While the Report defined Alevism as vague regarding its sphere of faith, it failed to address major Alevis demands by proposing founding of Hacı Bektaş University in Nevşehir and making Aşure Day formal holiday. Addressing major demands such as the legal status of cemevis was left to the TBMM, to change Revolutionary Laws, regarding legal status of cemevis. Much-debated compulsory religious education issue was addressed with vague remarks, stating that the content needed a re-structuring to be inclusive, requiring the input of Alevis about their faith, adding that changes into the Constitution were also needed. Instead of founding the Madımak Museum of Shame a part of Madımak hotel was proposed to be turned into a commemoration site. Regarding DRA, it was proposed that DRA should not serve Sunnis only so a new structure would be required as it was reported that Alevis did not wish to be represented under the umbrella of DRA (Milliyet, 1 April 2011).

On the opposition side, CHP leader Deniz Baykal, after the workshops, linked the much popular ‘unity discourse’ and CHP’s popular ‘secret agenda discourse’, ‘*takiye* discourse’, about AKP. Baykal stated at a meeting that all Openings were an attempt to divide

the people and state and manipulate the agenda towards issues which were not aimed to be solved in the first place but exploited by AKP (Milliyet, 26 December 2009). Like CHP, MHP used the ‘secret agenda discourse’, implying dishonesty and secret intentions, against AKP as MHP MP Edip Yalçın stated that AKP made claims to receive votes from all groups in the society though AKP’s real identity is prejudiced against Alevis. “MHP embraces Alevis as both MHP and Alevis represent the Turkish culture descending from Central Asia” said Yalçın, using ‘Turkishness and Turkish Islam discourse’ to unite MHP and Alevis and woo Alevis. BDP, using every opportunity to unite Alevi and Kurdish causes, stated “ Openings aim talking and not solving problems, as has been the case for Kurdish Opening”, using the ‘unity discourse’ to unite Kurds and Alevis this time. BDP also attacked its rivals, such as blaming AKP with “paying lipservice”, resorting to ‘secret agenda discourse’, and CHP with “hypocrisy, tardiness and dark legacy”, using the AKP’s much-used “CHP’s dark legacy” discourse (Milliyet, 18 October 2013).

While Alevi leaders criticized the Openings such as non-consequential or promoting AKP agenda instead, repeating ‘secret agenda discourse’, Alevi Bektaşî Federation’s former President Turan Eser used the ‘diversity and identity discourse’. This discourse about being “different” is rarely used by Alevis as such a discourse is likely to be rejected and even attacked by the ‘unity discourse’ and monism rhetoric regarding the national identity and state ideology. Addressing the much popular unity discourse, used to refer to both the nation and Islam, Eser enlisted two factors as preventing the solution: the state put under formal state religion and the theological approval of DRA and AKP avoiding diversity and pluralism which clash with the formally adopted view about monism regarding Turkish-Sunni Islamic synthesis (Milliyet, 22 January 2013).

In summer 2013 State Minister Bekir Bozdağ repeated the ‘dark legacy’ of CHP to blame CHP for the past with its present implications, blaming CHP as the culprit for legal obstacles to Alevi demands. He argued that the CHP introduced 1920s’ Revolutionary Laws which banished tekkes, convents and usage of titles such as *dede*, as a step to effect public visibility of Sunnism as well. Bozdağ also claimed that it was CHP which was in power during Sivas and Kahramanmaraş Massacres along with Dersim incidents, adding that Alevi Opening would continue with concrete steps. Regarding inclusion of Alevism and Bektashism in the religious education textbooks, Bozdağ stated that steps which “Alevi brothers” would find positive will continue in the future, amalgamating the vague ‘brotherhood discourse’ with the ‘unity around Islam discourse’, rather than proposing objective standards or concrete solutions (Milliyet, 9 July 2013). In reaction to this announcement, Alevi leaders stated that

they wish to be called *citizens* with full rights rather than *brothers* as called by the Prime Minister and Minister Bozdağ, in line with the much-used Alevi discourses of ‘equal citizenship’ and ‘democracy for all’. At the time of this announcement, the Democratization Package of fall 2013 was expected to include naming of two universities after Alevi dignitaries, such as Pir Sultan Abdal and Hacı Bektaş, and inclusion of Alevism in textbooks of religious culture and moral knowledge courses (Milliyet, 27 June 2013). The expected plan seemed to address minor issues or rather answer Alevi demands in a manner to fit the government agenda.

3.1.2. The Democratization Package:

As Alevi and Kurdish Openings came to a halt with the 2010 Constitutional reform referendum, in the following period there was an expectation regarding next wave of legal changes to target Kurds and Alevis and solve their problems by removing the limitations of 1982 Constitution. The first step to target Alevi and Kurdish expectations was about the government forming The Wise Men Group, *Akil Adamlar*, to meet with the inhabitants of each geographical region to prepare a report, based on their findings, to serve as the guideline for the Democratization Package to be announced in fall 2013 (Milliyet, 4 April 2013).

During the Wise Men Council meetings with the public, held in spring 2013 Cem Foundation President Professor İzzettin Doğan, also a member of Wise Men Council, demanded forming a separate Wise Men Council for Alevis (Milliyet, 12 April 2013). Doğan added that the Kurdish Peace Process did not address equality for everyone so Alevis felt excluded. In the Wise Men Report Alevis’ concern about being isolated was also underlined, reporting that there was a need for a separate Alevi Opening (Milliyet, 26 June 2013).

The late September 2013 Democratization Package caused frustration among Alevis as the Package had only one item addressing Alevis: re-naming of Nevşehir University as Hacı Bektaş University. The government side’s discourse about the Package was shaped around monism, referring to ‘unity of Islam’ and ‘unity around Islam’ by underlining similarities between Sunnism and Alevism. The criticisms, on the other hand, were answered with ‘lack of unity among Alevis discourse’, stating lack of unity among demands. Prime Minister Erdoğan explained lack of substantial changes to Alevi rights with the lack of unity among Alevis or their demands, adding that reformist AKP would grant rights upon Alevis achieving unity themselves (Milliyet, 1 October 2013). A similar explanation was provided by columnist Doğan Heper who said that the government was expecting to receive a common

demand from Alevis, saying “Alevis were divided about even the very basic issues, such as what their religion or method or place of worship were” (Milliyet, 10 October 2013). Later at AKP camp in Kızılcahamam, Erdoğan continued his defense as he underlined the similarities between Sunnism and Alevism around Ehl-i Beyt (Milliyet, 3 November 2013). In the meantime, State Minister Egemen Bağış said that a new Package was being prepared for Alevi citizens by the reformist AKP government, as was also done by Minister Bozdağ before (Milliyet, 13 October 2013).

In response, unlike AKP’s discourse focusing on unity between Alevis and Sunnis or Alevis lacking unity, Alevis used the discourse of ‘equality for all citizens’, disregarding AKP’s claims about Alevis lacking unity. In early November 2013, Alevi organizations, CSOs, unions and associations held the *Equal Citizenship for Alevis* meeting, announced to seek the rights of 76 million, in Kadıköy, Istanbul with the attendance of thousands (Milliyet, 3 November 2013).

3.2.Alevis and Party Politics:

According to a 2001 Ruşen Çakır feuilleton, Alevis were reported to be dissatisfied with CHP, the traditional address of Alevi votes. Alevis complained about the limited Alevi presence in political parties and TBMM which served more as “window-dressing” to lure Alevi support though not too obviously, so as not to push Sunnis away (Milliyet, 17 August 2001). Alevis claimed that even parties on the left, CHP especially, could not dare addressing issues such as Madımak openly and so at times lost votes to other parties and even those on the right. Similar concerns were voiced in 2002, preceding the general elections, in a Milliyet feuilleton where Alevis complained about being remembered before elections, to be used as *ammunition*. Alevis complain about being perceived as “vote inventories” for political parties which try to balance Alevi and Sunni voters, a nearly impossible act leading to an impasse for Alevi demands. But Alevis also refrain from voting for Alevi parties, refusing to participate in “identity politics” or using ‘diversity and identity discourse’ as deviation from ‘national unity discourse’ and so loyalty to the state (Milliyet 18 August 2002).

When we analyze the Alevis-politics relationship through existing political parties we can conclude that Alevis believe that parties on the left see their votes as “guaranteed” while those on the right think of Alevi votes as impossible to lure and so ignore them mostly. When parties on the right targeted the attractive mass of millions of Alevi votes by using new rhetoric, as a rare attempt, leaders such as Ali Balkız, former leader of Pir Sultan Abdal

Association, thought that there was no compatibility and rather exploitation, referring to the occasional “Turkishness of Alevism” statements by MHP. Alevis underlined social policies as well as genuine secularism and love of Atatürk as issues which matter to them when voting. One such example has been that they considered voting for YTP, the liberal party led by former socialist ministers İsmail Cem and Kemal Derviş in 2002 elections (Milliyet, 16 August 2002). So it can be said that Alevis vote on the basis of the rhetoric and values of the parties rather than actions, even though actions of various political parties seem to be the same so far: inactivity and passivity.

In order to ask for change without any assistance from the existing political parties, in fall 2008, Alevis came up with the idea of a new political party but even while proposing to form a new party to support Alevi cause ‘equality for all discourse’ was proposed, rather than the ‘diversity and identity discourse’, to embrace all on the left and address whole country’s problems. Alevi leader Turan Eser proposed that Alevis could form the basis for a new political party on the left, involving all colors on the left, to replace all existing parties and become a formidable alternative for social democrats (Milliyet, 10 September 2008; Milliyet, 1 September 2008). But the party could not be formed.

Before 2007 elections, the right-wing parties, ANAP, DYP and MHP, wooed Alevis with different discourses and though there was some sympathy on the Alevi side due to years of frustration with the left-wing parties Alevis stated that parties on the right continued to have a rather assimilationist attitude (Milliyet, 15 January 2007). As stated above, Alevis’ criterion is “secularism”, fearing and suspecting the right-wing parties to have an assimilationist and even sharia-oriented agenda, again resorting to the ‘secret agenda discourse’ shared by Alevis, seculars and CHP.

3.2.1. ANAP

ANAP, though a right-wing political party, used different, at least sympathetic, discourses that doesn’t focus on any form of ‘unity’ or ‘conspiracy by enemies’ targeting unity. ANAP’s discourses are bolder, daring to focus on political exploitation of Sunni fear and ignorance towards Alevis, while functioning secularism is presented as a means for EU membership. ANAP sounded outspoken and even revolutionary with its discourse about “secularism as a means” while criticising other parties, as all parties do, and DRA or exploitation of religion, unlike any other right-wing party. But the statements made sounded like rhetoric to be used for political and especially electoral competition, rather than an

explicit policy choice. In 2002, the then ANAP leader Yılmaz said “a secular state cannot have a religion so Turkey can become an EU member by strengthening secularism as opposed to the current situation where parties exploit religion in return for votes or the state decides about religious education which should not be compulsory and rather be left to individuals and groups of faith” (Milliyet, 26 April 2002). ANAP MP Ali Talip Özdemir went further, suggesting that DRA has become hegemonic while parties which were ignorant about Alevism feared losing fanatical Sunni votes and exploited the atmosphere of fear and ignorance so he proposed a structural transformation regarding the state and political parties (Milliyet, 26 April 2002).

3.2.2.AKP

AKP’s efforts in 2001, when AKP was established, to include Alevis as well didn’t receive much support from Alevis as they perceived the gestures and acts as “window-dressing” and even as *takiye*, having a secret agenda. Alevis’ reasoning was that AKP, in their view, was a Sunni-based party refusing secularism and mainstream Alevis would not support acts against secularism or Republicanism (Milliyet, 18 August 2001). In addition, AKP leader Erdoğan, was also perceived as not genuine as his use of provocative, populist and simplifying claims such as “If Alevism is about loving Ali, then I am Alevi too”, repeating ‘unity around Islam discourse’ towards simplifying and uniting Alevism with Sunnism. Furthermore, Erdoğan’s sending bulldozers to Karacaahmet Sultan Dergahı for demolition during his Istanbul mayorship in 1990s has not been forgotten by Alevis. The suspicion held against Erdoğan, in line with AKP’s suspected position regarding secularism, was perceived as the likely force to destroy secularism, a topic most sensitive for Republican Alevis who perceive secularism as the guarantee, if not perfect, for their survival and liberties.

In 2010, Erdoğan and AKP seemed to have parted ways with Alevis, attacking and even insulting Alevis openly, using the ‘us versus them discourse’ in the most negative and unprecedented manner that with CHP’s ‘national unity under attack of sharia’ rhetoric, a serious polarization would eventually arise. In addition Alevi identity of the new leader of CHP Kılıçdaroğlu was also targeted by Erdoğan in his campaign (Milliyet, 30 August 2010). As this strategy endured, in May 2011, columnist Aslı Aydıntaşbaş criticized Erdoğan’s tactics and rhetoric used during and after the referendum, underlining Alevi background of CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu, insulting Alevi faith and blaming Alevis with ruling th judiciary. Aydıntaşbaş called the situation “a separation to leave permanent scars after elections”

(Milliyet, 2 May 2011). Though Aydıntaşbaş also warned that similarly CHP should refrain from using the ‘secularism in danger’ or ‘sharia danger’ rhetoric against AKP.

Alevis explained Erdoğan’s attacks and insults against their faith as a tactic and rhetoric to cover up incompetence, taking the rational course of action, while referring to interests of all and so the nation as a whole, rather than Alevis only. Referring to the same disturbing attitude of Erdoğan, in late May 2011, in an open letter to the Prime Minister Alevi Bektaşî Federation announced that Prime Minister Erdoğan rather used Alevis as part of his election campaign, as do unproductive politicians, by talking about cleavages so shallow and empty politics was the outcome rather than real change, damaging the country and its interests (Milliyet, 25 May 2011).

As an attempt to make up for these early attacks and rather remind the country and Alevis of ‘dark legacy of CHP discourse’ Erdoğan made a statement about Alevis and CHP, shifting the political agenda in the midst of criticisms against AKP about handling of Kurdish problem and PKK. It was November 2011 when Prime Minister Erdoğan apologized to Alevis about state actions during and after Dersim riots during the rather unrelated context of AKP Group Meeting in TBMM (Milliyet, 23 November 2011). Erdoğan referred to CHP MP Oymen’s 2009 remarks about the then deaths in Dersim as “collateral damage”, while calling Alevi victims “religious victims” rather than Alevi, drawing religious connections around monism rather than ethnic cleavages. Erdoğan also said that though CHP was in charge then, if need be, he would apologize in the name of the state while also announcing that all were the doings of CHP as reflections of general CHP mentality (Milliyet, 23 November 2011).

An infamous event regarding AKP-Alevi relations has been regarding the naming of the third bridge in Istanbul in summer 2013 as Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, evoking ‘unity discourse’ and ‘secret agenda discourse’. While Minister Binali Yıldırım defended this decision that the Alevi massacre claimed to be conducted by the Ottoman Sultan Yavuz Sultan Selim was a “legend” Professor İlber Ortaylı said “the name could be chosen as Yavuz is perceived as the man who united the Arab and Islamic world”, again referring to ‘unity under Islam’ discourse (Milliyet, 14 July 2013). On the critical side, BDP MP Ertuğrul Kürkçü, as did Alevi Associations Federation President Hüsniye Takmaz, criticized the naming of the third bridge after Yavuz Selim who made Sunnism dominant faith in the Ottoman Empire as he became the Caliph (Milliyet, 9 June 2013). Kürkçü said “the efforts to name the bridge should also be taken as efforts to bring the remnants of political Islam back”, getting close to CHP’s ‘takiye and secret agenda discourse’ while rejecting the ‘unity under Islam discourse’ (Milliyet, 31 May 2013). BDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş proposed

distinguishing between institutions and people and taking a rather objective and non-sentimental stand just as BDP and Alevis rejected ‘brotherhood’ and ‘unity’ discourses shaped around vagueness and subjectivity. Demirtaş drew the most colorful analogy, saying that Erdoğan seemed to think of the bridge as his personal belonging, a matter to be decided solely by the Prime Minister himself like a family matter such as naming of a grandchild rather than a public project (, Milliyet, 3 June 2013). In addition, Alevi leaders criticized naming universities after Alevi dignitaries, such as Nevşehir University to become Hacı Bektaş University as proposed by 2013 Democratization Package, with the analogy of “sheep trade bargaining style”, referring to clientelist and subjective approaches preferred to official changes based on objective standards to secure equal citizenship and secularism (Milliyet, 29 June 2013).

Prime Minister and AKP leader Erdoğan has been an important actor, even a factor, regarding Alevi issue given his background, identity, attitude and rhetoric. On the positive side Erdoğan has been the first Turkish Prime Minister to visit Imam Ali’s grave in Iraq and a cemevi, in addition to apologizing for Dersim riots though these gestures bore little result in the material sense. As explained in other sections, Erdoğan developed an intense and rather volatile relationship with Alevis, given his words, rhetoric and actions directed at Alevi faith and Alevis. Erdoğan’s discourses about ‘national unity’, ‘brotherhood’ and ‘unity in Islam’ and ‘unity around Islam’ were interpreted by Alevis as “assimilationist” and adversarial ones like ‘us versus them’, ‘conspiracy by enemies’ or ‘separatism targeting unity’ discourses caused strong reactions among Alevis while Erdoğan refrained from using ‘democracy and human rights for all’ and ‘equal citizenship’ discourses.

In the aftermath of Gezi riots, which will be discussed in the following section as an incident to have accelerated polarization, in an attempt to mend the strained relations with Alevis and evoke sympathy among Alevis Erdoğan went back to ‘unity around Islam’ discourse, blaming critiques with conspiracy or sectarianism to silence ‘diversity and identity’ discourse. Alevis, on the other hand, responded with ‘equality before law as citizens’ discourse, without discussing Alevi faith or similarities with Sunnism, referring to violation of secularism by such faith-categorizing statements made by a Prime Minister. Erdoğan announced during an iftar dinner in July 2013 “I am a perfect Alevi if Alevism is about loving Ali, Sunni and Alevi are the same that they are all Muslims but there are those who plan dividing the country with sectarian clashes and friction as part of a big conspiracy plan” (Milliyet, 18 July 2013). This remark was followed by numerous criticisms, one of which was voiced by Hubyar Sultan Association President Ali Kenanoğlu who said that the perception of

Ali and his philosophy was different in Sunnism and Alevism (Milliyet, 18 July 2013). Saying that the job of the Prime Minister was about being and acting as a just Prime Minister governing with fairness and fighting with discrimination, Kenanoğlu added “such announcements mean categorizing and describing Alevi faith and are also perceived as mocking by Alevis because such statements imply that being a good Alevi means acting like the Prime Minister does” (Milliyet, 19 July 2013).

In late November 2013, in another gesture, Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that his grandson would be called Ali, adding that names such as Hasan, Hüseyin and Ali are part of common heritage to unite around common suffering and pain within the boundaries of Islam (Milliyet, 16 November 2013). Unfortunately such gestures, such as calling himself “best Alevi if Alevism is about loving Ali” before, have drawn severe criticism of Alevi community. But Erdoğan repeated similar comments, to continue with his subjective approach, rejecting any formal or objective steps, to rather offer short-term answers and appeal to the sentimentality of Alevis.

3.2.3. CHP

CHP, the traditional address for Alevi votes, has been perceived as “better than the others” by Alevis though CHP, like other parties did, provided no improvement regarding Alevi demands. The new leader Kılıçdaroğlu was hailed with enthusiasm to change this situation but even then CHP was criticized by Alevis for not addressing Alevi issues and asking for votes with the use of shallow, empty rhetoric as opposed to concrete policy proposals (Milliyet, 27 June 2014).

Though CHP has been supportive of the ‘equal citizenship discourse’ in general, some groups within CHP, such as the *ulusalci*, rather prefer the ‘national unity’ and ‘conspiracy by enemies’ discourses against ‘diversity and identity discourse’ and claims. These discourses are also popular with AKP though AKP’s discourse is based more on ‘unity around religion’, namely Sunnism. Ulusalcı group has followed the classical statist tradition towards Alevis, taking a distant approach, as well as defending a stained past, if not shady, in the eyes of Alevis given the Revolutionary Laws of 1925 and the track record of the state during Early Republican Riots. One such incident took place on November 10, 2009 when CHP MP Onur Öymen called those who died during Dersim Riots “collateral damage” when he said that death of civilians during riots is an undesirable situation which can not be avoided. Öymen also proposed that the Turkish state’s actions during Dersim Riots should be taken as a model to

deal with terrorism. Öymen later stated that his words were twisted to provoke Alevi and Kurdish citizens by giving the image that he had an attitude against Alevis (Milliyet, 13 November 2009). Alevis, on the other hand, asked for resignation of Öymen along with CHP MPs with Alevi origins who applauded this November 10 speech at TBMM. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the then Deputy CHP President and an Alevi, retorted to saying that he didn't applaud the whole speech by Öymen but rather the parts that he approved but this explanation did not end but rather increased criticisms (Milliyet, 22 November 2009). In the aftermath, protests erupted that 300 people, including three mayors, resigned from CHP protesting Öymen's comments (Milliyet, 23 November 2009). Despite protests, resignations and its heavy dependence on Alevi votes, CHP continued supporting 'national unity discourse' of the secularist *ulusalci* camp, rejecting and even accepting attacks against 'diversity and identity discourse'. This position is important in relation with the questioning of loyalties and especially Alevis' feeling stuck with CHP, called "better than others", which proved not too different in terms of promoting national unity at the expense of diversity and justifying past destruction of diversity by means of violence.

Alevi leader Ali Balkız provided a good summary of actions, of AKP and CHP in relation with Alevis, to receive votes with promises and empty rhetoric without answering demands in order to balance Sunni votes as mass parties, promoting 'national unity'. Balkız questioned the traditional Alevi support for CHP for which Dersim debates initiated by Öymen should be a turning point. Balkız said "the incident demonstrates that CHP continues with the tradition of creating Turkish Sunni identity, of which Alevis are still aware but vote for CHP to support secularism as there is no other party to meet that objective" (Milliyet, 15 November 2009).

Alevi identity of CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu became an issue when he was elected as the party leader in 2010 as reactions to Kılıçdaroğlu's identity represented two positions: On one hand, old leadership claimed that CHP, without referring to 'diversity and identity', can rather appeal to masses with 'national unity discourse', as done by the secularists. Columnist Aydıntaşbaş commented that the former leader Baykal, who had to leave leadership after a scandal, commented that with Kılıçdaroğlu's leadership the party would be more geared towards promoting ethnic and sectarian identity and cleavages so would not be able to fight with AKP well by appealing to a mass population, as it used to before (Milliyet, 27 February 2012). On the other hand, Alevis expected this change to represent concrete changes and not just at the level of rhetoric, changing the general direction of the party would mean leaving empty rhetoric behind, fulfilling promises to provide 'equal

citizenship for all'. Alevi leaders, Balkız and Gümüş, announced that Alevi community was pleased with an Alevi leader and especially that such a situation could mean meeting the general demand about changing leadership, adding that CHP policies should also change with the status quo challenged (Milliyet, 19 May 2010).

Just like the identity of Kılıçdaroğlu, CHP's own identity and especially its past, presented with 'dark legacy discourse' by AKP, proved problematic in November 2011 when AKP began a new debate about CHP's role during Dersim riots when Prime Minister Erdoğan apologized to Alevis on behalf of the state (Milliyet, 24 November 2011). This tactic was interpreted by columnist Aslı Aydintaşbaş as targeting Kılıçdaroğlu because if he spoke he could be blamed as Alevi supporter, reminding everyone of his roots to provoke Sunnis against him, and if he didn't speak then he could be blamed as a coward (Milliyet, 24 November 2011). AKP amalgamated the 'dark legacy of CHP discourse' with Kılıçdaroğlu's Alevi identity which became problematic as Kılıçdaroğlu rather ignored such comments, without rejecting or owning such claims. In the meantime CHP became defensive, firing or attacking those criticizing CHP's legacy and past, within CHP itself. Accordingly, Alevi Bektaşî Federation President Balkız called the apology by Erdoğan "not genuine" as he stated that Erdoğan was trying to exploit the past to hurt Kılıçdaroğlu and CHP. Balkız said Erdoğan ignored the role of prominent CHP figures who formed DP later, such as Adnan Menderes who supported the Army operations during the riots as a CHP MP, adding that Dersim incident was part of a continuum targeting Alevis (Milliyet, 27 November 2011).

3.2.4.MHP

The interesting fact is that Alevis claim to be pure Turks due to their isolation and so is their culture, again due to isolation in remote villages, representing the core of Turkish nation and "Anatolian Islam". So it is only natural that they should be targeted by MHP, the ultra-nationalists, as their voter base but instead Alevis were discriminated against by the state and the majority while MHP ignored or even attacked Alevis in the past. This potential has never been realized and instead there has even been some antagonism in this relationship probably due to the Kurdish elements in Alevi population and the strong effect of Sunnism in the nationalist camp and so MHP.

In 2000s MHP began using 'unity around Anatolian Islam discourse', targeting unity around Alevism as the true Turkish Islam though without facing the past and alleged participation of MHP in violence against Alevis in the pre-1980 period. The sentimental

'brotherhood' rhetoric, usually used by AKP when deemed necessary, was also used by MHP, referring to unity again. In 2006, MHP began wooing Alevis, underlining Alevis' pure Turkish roots to represent "real Islam" and "Turkish, Anatolian Islam", in an effort to bring historical identities under one umbrella to establish societal peace and democratic pluralism, according to columnist Taha Akyol (Milliyet, 9 August 2006). But an August 2007 invitation by MHP for Alevis to join their gathering at Tekir Yaylası in Kayseri was not accepted by Alevis. Alevi Bektaşî Federation President Selahattin Özel said ""we want MHP to apologize and face the past first", referring to the pogroms of late 1970s which took place in Kahramanmaraş, Çorum and Malatya (Milliyet, 14 August 2007). In November 2008, after AKP's Alevi Opening began MHP leader Bahçeli stated that they would not ignore the problems of Alevis and that they would contribute to begin the process of understanding and dialogue. In the following days, when Alevi leaders visited TBMM Presidency to repeat their demands MHP leader Bahçeli announced that they would provide concrete suggestions if asked by the government or Alevi *brothers* regarding the Opening which should be continued (Milliyet, 9 June 2009).

But after the warming up of relations with Alevis, MHP resorted to using Alevi Opening as a deficiency on the side of AKP when campaigning for the 2010 referendum. MHP, repeating its classical 'national unity' rhetoric, condemned other approaches or claims about alternative identities, be them ethnic or religious or both, as "separatist". Even more, regarding Erdoğan's rhetoric about Kılıçdaroğlu's roots and identity, MHP leader Bahçeli stated that AKP was disturbed with an Alevi *brother* becoming the leader of a political party, provoking cleavages on the basis of ethnicity and faith (Milliyet, 3 June 2011). MHP seemed to target unifying Alevis and Sunnis under 'Turkish national unity discourse', based on ethnicity and faith, while rejecting and attacking claims and discourses about 'diversity and identity' as they were labelled as "separatist", a tactic also used to attack AKP when possible such as when Erdoğan referred to CHP leader's identity.

3.2.5.BDP

Last but not least, when approaching Alevis, unlike other leaders, Kurdish leaders used the wide range of similarity and unity, diversity and identity and discrimination discourses in different contexts. They tried to connect Kurdish and Alevi causes under "similarity and unity" on the basis of Kurdish nation and union, all discriminated against as "others". On the other hand diversity is linked with alternative identities though 'equal

citizenship and fighting for the rights of all discourse', including the Sunni Turks, is not used as much as Alevis do. Alevis have preferred the use of 'equality and equal citizenship' along with 'fighting for rights of all' discourses without focusing on alternative identities much. The reason may be Alevis' being closer to the state discourse of national unity, targeting to be granted rights without rebelling against the state or Turkish elements within Alevi population and faith being distanced from the Kurdish unity discourse may be playing a vital part too. Furthermore, BDP also criticized DRA, unlike most political parties, as violating secularism at the expense of all faiths other than Sunnism, ignoring diversity of faiths.

As early as 2001 HADEP, Halkın Demokrasi Partisi or People's Democracy Party, began targeting to become more than a regional party by luring both Alevi and Kurdish votes, focusing on democratization as well as identity claims (Milliyet, 1 December 2001). In the following years, the president of BDP, founded after closing of HADEP, BDP's Selahattin Demirtaş also linked two issues, Alevi and Kurdish causes, though underlining Kurdishness more, to attract votes from CHP, criticizing CHP as depending on Alevi votes without fighting for the Alevi cause. BDP criticized CHP and Kılıçdaroğlu also for the legacy of CHP, especially regarding the riots of 1920s and 30s that CHP should own and apologize for the incidents and give up own claims about defending the rights of Kurds and Alevis. Demirtaş argued that CHP leader, being a Kurdish Alevi, is in an awkward position as trying to defend CHP's position and legacy which does not have a positive track record about Alevis and Kurds along with an empty rhetoric (Milliyet, 5 May 2013). BDP also claimed that Alevis would suffer in an Islamist environment as will "others" who are different from the majority and dominant faith so it is only natural for the Alevis to support Kurds in the Peace Process as fellow "others" discriminated against. Along similar lines, in BDP's Second Congress, BDP co-president Gültan Kışanak invited Alevis to fight together against the monist mindset together trying to establish the unity of Kurdish nation (Milliyet, 14 October 2012). In early 2013, Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir and BDP leader Aysel Tuğluk attended and spoke at the Alevi Conference held in Diyarbakir, saying "we hope a Kurdish union will follow as Kurdish and Alevi causes are the same: fighting for the rights of the two oppressed peoples, Kurds and Alevis, against the system in order to be treated as equal citizens so we should support each other" (Milliyet, 3 February 2013). In another speech, with a rare use of 'equal citizenship discourse', Demirtaş said that they wanted to be equal citizens as different peoples of different faiths and ethnicities rather than being called "brothers" (Milliyet, 26 February 2013). It was also Demirtaş, at the Alevi Dialogue Meeting, who criticized DRA, saying "DRA is unnecessary as such an organization with the mission of promoting one faith over

others violates secularism while promoting one faith in a land of diverse faiths and sects creates all sorts of problems” (Milliyet, 22 February 2013). In a rare Alevi response to these attempts by BDP leaders, Third Alevi Grand Assembly decision was in favor of supporting the Kurdish Peace Process, to act together as Kurds were under pressure just as Alevis were and that Alevis wanted peace for everyone discriminated against so a societal interference was targeted via meetings and demonstrations all over the country. It was also stated that Alevis wanted unconditional peace with the society, and not the state as part of a government-led project, where everyone would treat everyone else fairly after facing and owning mistakes of the past (Milliyet, 12 May 2013).

3.3.Events Related to Alevis and Alevism:

3.3.1.Gezi Parkı Riots:

Gezi Parkı riots, other than being one of its kind in Turkish history as a civil initiative apparently without any prior organization or ideological background to protest the government for months covering all country, were labeled an Alevi riot (Milliyet, 25 November 2013). Mass riots, which lasted 112 days in more than 80 provinces and during which six Alevi citizens died and more than four thousand wounded out of the three million and six hundred thousand participants, began as an environmental protest in Istanbul’s Gezi Parkı on 31 May, 2013. But soon they spread to the entire country, owing to the violent response of the riot police and the aid of the social media, and became anti-government demonstrations to attract wide international interest (May, 2013). The movement was compared to other social protest movements throughout history, from the May ‘68 to anti-capitalist Occupy Wall Street protests, covering a wide area of interests (Göle, 2013). In this regard, the protest movement is important to not have demonstrated resistance to the state on such a mass scale but also have removed cleavages such as class or secular-Islamist divide as a wide range of people converged around a wide range of issues, from LGBT rights to environment and anti-capitalism. But despite this converging aspect of the protests, the protests also marked the acceleration of polarization in Turkey, given the politicians’ discourses identifying the organizers as “interest lobby” and protesters as “looters” (Milliyet, 10 June 2013).

During and after the riots AKP leaders and Erdoğan, amalgamating a few discourses, used the ‘*us*, Sunnis, versus *them*, Alevis, acting in collaboration with CHP and foreign

conspirators targeting national unity discourse' frequently. Prime Minister's analysis of riots included remarks about *Sunni neighborhoods*, a term never used by a Turkish Prime Minister before (Milliyet, 7 June 2013). These comments followed previous remarks by Erdoğan who said that "52 Sunni citizens were killed" as he referred to Reyhanlı explosions which took place in Hatay in May 2013 (Milliyet, 17 June 2013; Milliyet, 14 June 2013). During and after Gezi Parkı riots Prime Minister Erdoğan accused CHP of provoking the massive Alevi involvement in the riots as he also claimed that CHP which tried to link Reyhanlı explosion with Syrian forces was working on starting a sectarian clash via such provocative events (Milliyet, 14 June 2013). AKP's discourse was challenged by CHP, blaming AKP and Erdoğan with sectarianism rather than responding with the 'national unity' discourse back. CHP rejected and protested against AKP's claims, blaming the government with creating hatred upon growing sectarianism but failing to link these claims with the much popular and much sentimental 'separatism discourse' (Milliyet, 15 June 2013). Regarding the riots, MHP used the 'equal citizenship' discourse, leaving its usual 'national unity under the trilogy of Islam, Turkishness and flag discourse' aside. MHP's reaction to the death of Ali Ismail Korkmaz, killed during Gezi Parkı protests, was voiced by Tuğrul Türkeş, Deputy President, saying "Ali Ismail Korkmaz is a human being, an equal citizen of the Turkish Republic", in response to government allegations that Ali Ismail Korkmaz was "a leftist, an Alevi, an atheist" (Milliyet, 8 February 2014).

In the aftermath of the riots, the government did not refrain from using the "Alevi riot" label to underline the 'us versus them discourse' presented as a threat to "national unity and welfare". Columnists, in the meantime, drew attention to dissatisfaction with the system which polarized the society to be evoked and strengthened by a popular AKP discourse of 'us, the Sunnis, versus them, the others'. In the meantime, 'national unity', the other most popular discourse of AKP, was being transformed towards being centered around Islam rather than ethnicity. In late November 2013, the state report about Gezi Parkı riots concluded that 78 % of the participants was Alevi (Milliyet, 25 November 2013). Regarding the report, columnist Kadri Gürsel said that such a report would strengthen the making of Alevis "the other" though Gezi was the movement of the "dissatisfied" and especially Alevis as the most dissatisfied (Milliyet, 28 November 2013). Nagehan Alçı, another columnist, of pro-AKP camp this time, shared the same view, adding that the other large group of participants was the liberal, white Turks who lost their privileged position", voicing the *new Turkey*. *New Turkey* is an AKP era term popular among AKP supporters as the new, just system where power was transferred

from the minority of the secular, educated elite to the majority of losers of the old system, the underprivileged masses (Milliyet, 1 December 2013).

3.3.2.Syrian Friction:

Alevis, like Kurds, are suspected to have foreign ties, especially related with Iran given the Shia elements in Alevism, as well as other Alevis in the region, such as the Alewites in Syria. The sectarian war in Syria, fought between Sunnis and Alewites since 2011, was expected to spread to Turkey while reports circulated that the militants, some actual jihadists, within the immigrant population, made up of Sunni Syrians largely, planned targeting Turkish Alevis next (Milliyet, 29 April 2011).

AKP's 'national unity discourse' seemed to be replaced with 'us versus them discourse' especially after the Syrian civil war and immigration to Turkey grew, creating much fear and resentment among Alevis in Turkey who seem to feel justified in their suspicion about AKP's real face and its 'secret agenda'. Furthermore concerns were raised about a serious threat that sectarianism and civil war or regional war based on religious cleavages could spill over to Turkey (Milliyet, 16 October 2012). There is also the danger of complicating the domestic rivalries, between seculars and conservatives and between Turks and Kurds, with another one that also intersects with the already existing rivalries: between Alevis and Sunnis (Milliyet, 10 September 2012; Milliyet, 9 September 2012).

Reports stated that first of all Alevis in Hatay were concerned about and disturbed with the hawkish foreign policy of the government towards Syrian President Assad and many complained that the immigration wave caused friction and even more, exposing of the faulty lines between sects (Milliyet, 15 June 2011). Syrian refugees in the southeast were said to have increased sectarianism as the refugees began asking about religious backgrounds of their hosts so that an increasing awareness felt by local people about their own differences has been on the rise in addition to low tolerance felt towards refugees in the region (Milliyet, 21 September 2012; Milliyet, 28 August 2012). Discrimination and sectarianism in refugee camps in southeastern Turkey reached such a level that 150 Syrian Alewites had to come to Istanbul to be accommodated by Gaziosmanpaşa Cemevi (Milliyet, 1 September 2013). Furthermore, AKP's claimed support for Syrian ultra-religious faction, Al-Nusra, has grown the fear and disturbance of Alevis in Turkey even to a larger extent (Milliyet, 16 August 2012; Milliyet, 30 January 2014).

The government seemed to support, or at least did not refute, claims about sectarianism such as when AKP Deputy President Hüseyin Çelik stated that CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu had a special sympathy towards Syrian leader Assad due to their affiliation. Çelik changed his words when Alevis reacted strongly, saying that he was referring to CHP's authoritarian character rather than any religious affiliation (Milliyet, 11 September 2011). One of the turning points regarding this matter has been the Reyhanlı Explosions, in which 52 people died in May 2013, was later referred to by the Prime Minister Erdoğan as "52 Sunni citizens died" and widely cited by the shocked Alevis later as an act of unprecedented inappropriateness and hostility by a Prime Minister.

3.3.3. Foreign Interpretations:

We may also need to look into the international, European specifically, political scene to understand the political reactions towards and interpretations of Alevi issue, involving different international actors and improve our analysis to reach meaningful conclusions. European politicians used discourses regarding secularism, freedom of faith and modern state system when approaching Alevi issue and communicating with Alevis and Turkish state. Their discourse and statements resembled those of Alevis, focusing on democracy, equality and liberties, but not those of AKP which rather uses 'unity', 'conspiracy by enemies' or 'brothers' discourses.

In January 2011, German Parliament President Lammert stated in a visit to an Alevi organization, European Alevi Associations Federation, in Cologne that with its system of state controlling religion, Turkey was not eligible to join EU along with modern states where religion and state affairs are separated and everyone enjoys freedom of faith (Milliyet ,14 January 2011). In April 2011, responding to State Minister Babacan's remark about EU being "a Christian Club", Stefan Füle, the EU Commission Member responsible for EU Enlargement, stated that Turkey should respect freedom of faith, especially that Alevis and non-Muslim communities couldn't exercise their faith without unnecessary restrictions. On another occasion, EU Commission member responsible for EU Enlargement Stefan Füle stated that Alevi Opening hasn't been fruitful in terms of material outcomes. Füle said "major issues such as legal status of cemevis, compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses and presence of religion section in ID cards continue as they did before" in response to a petition by an MP at European Parliament about the role, power, and influence of DRA in

relation with Turkey's responsibilities regarding human rights in line with international law and commitment as a neutral state (Milliyet, 1 April 2011).

Connecting Alevi and foreign dissenters, to present their actions and rhetoric as 'conspiracy by enemies' against 'national unity', a popular discourse used by Erdoğan when criticized has been regarding political and non-Islamic elements in Alevism. In early May 2014, during a heated debate Erdoğan was responding to criticisms by the German President Gauck regarding latest developments in Turkey such as issues with freedom of press, separation of powers and protection of the neutrality of the judiciary (Milliyet, 3 May 2014). Prime Minister Erdoğan commented that "in Germany there is an Alevism practiced without Ali", referring to non-Islamic elements in Alevism and especially urban Alevism which is more about a lifestyle than faith. Erdoğan used the 'conspiracy by enemies discourse' targeting 'national unity', categorizing foreigners along with non-Islamic elements in Alevism and atheists, referring to German President Gauck's past as a priest to explain his adversarial position against both AKP and Turkey, presented by AKP as an amalgamated entity since the 2013 Gezi riots (Milliyet, 29 April 2014). Similarly, in late May 2014, when protested by Alevi crowds regarding police brutality in Okmeydani which led to the death of two Alevi citizens, Erdoğan resorted to the same rhetoric, "Alevism without Ali" to categorize Alevi protesters as atheists or those outside Islam, not acting in support of AKP and Erdoğan as Muslim brothers but rather dissenting.

Regarding foreign political comments about Alevis, Alevism and Alevi demands EU Progress Reports played a pivotal role. As is the tradition for Turkish state to be criticized severely in such reports, with its problematic practices and discourses, in each annual report it is repeatedly reported that Turkish state continues enforcing restrictions on religious freedom and the situation has not improved.

Alevi issue has been included in all EU Progress Reports since 1998, except in 1999, where Alevis were defined as "not having a religious leader on the state payroll" while the criticisms directed at Turkish state got more severe in time. The 2000 Report included remarks about lack of the Alevi identity in the content of textbooks of compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses and lack of financial support while the lack of representation within DRA was added to these comments in 2001 (Milliyet, 10 November 2007). Discrimination, legal status of cemevis and failure to enforce ECtHR decision about compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses were also added to the reports later. EU Commission did not provide a description of Alevis at first but in 2004 report

calling Alevis “part of non-Sunni Muslim minorities” caused heated debates in Turkey (Milliyet, 17 October 2004). As a result, in 2005 report this description became “non-Sunni, Muslim Alevi community” and later the issue of description did not carry this much weight while the “equal status to all faiths” issue became more important regarding secularism (Milliyet, 9 November 2005).

The use of the concept of “minority” has attracted a wave of criticism, evoking the negative image of minorities among members of both majority and minority groups in Turkey as a reminder of the past fears inherited from the demise period of Ottoman Empire. The minority definition provided by EU to address a major problem regarding secularism, liberties and democracy in Turkey has rather re-opened a wound in Turkish identity and history: minorities as second-class citizens and traitors. So not only those defending the mainstream “national unity” position, including the Army, politicians and some columnists, Alevis also reacted against use of this term, not to be seen as second-class citizens in need of protection or even worse, ‘pawns of foreign forces’ as targeting ‘national unity’, repeating ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’. Likewise, the term was called “a concession pushed by the EU”, by the then President to be rejected by Minister Hüseyin Çelik, defending AKP’s position as “listening to the people” and not the EU or foreign pawns, protecting national unity against traitors (Milliyet, 18 September 2006) and repeating unity discourse by referring to shared faith.

The issue of calling Alevis a minority has been perceived as a negative comment and even provocation, in 2004, such that after the EU Progress Report was announced DYP MP Agar stated that Alevis and Kurds are founders of the Republic so cannot be considered “minority” (Milliyet, 12 October 2004). Columnist Mehmet Ali Birand’s words about “treating Alevis and Kurds as minorities” may explain the sentimental aspect of this negative perception as granting minority status is perceived as paving the path to destruction of unity rather than to democratization via granting and protecting rights (Milliyet, 15 October 2004). While columnist Güneri Cıvaoğlu claimed that Alevis and Kurdish leaders reacted to being called “minority” in a way to “disappoint those trying to divide Turkey” (Milliyet, 14 October 2004), conservative columnist Taha Akyol wrote that such reports should not address *unity* of the state, stating that “minority” issue has been a thorny one for Turkey since the seventeenth century and rather been interpreted as foreign intervention (Milliyet, 21 October 2004). The military, also commented on the content of the EU Report that “nation is a whole and if perceived as made up of parts, then unity of state would be destroyed”, adding that calling Kurds and Alevis “minority” targets the interests and security of Turkey (Milliyet, 3

November 2004). The then President Sezer also got involved in these debates as he stated that the minority status for Turkish citizens of Alevi-Bektaşî and Kurdish origin was pronounced as a concession to the EU in the membership talks (Milliyet, 4 September 2006). Rejecting these claims, Minister Çelik announced at Hacı Bektaşî festivities that Alevis share the same faith so refuting claims that present Alevis as a minority, adding that Alevism will be included in religious culture and moral knowledge courses in high schools due to the people's demand and not that of the EU (Milliyet, 18 September 2006).

Following these reactions, in 2005 EU Progress Report, where the word *minority* was replaced with “religious groups” term, it was stated that no progress was made regarding the religious freedom of these groups as demands about compulsory religious education courses or legal status of cemevis were not met. The report underlining the Sunni content of these courses in addition to calling minorities as “untrustworthy or harmful to the state and nation” in school textbooks drew attention to the *de facto* discrimination against minorities. The Report added that Turkey needed to interpret minorities in a wider sense than the current, narrow interpretation and enforcement of Lausanne Treaty to adopt contemporary, universal standards (Milliyet, 5 November 2005). In the 2007 report, the objectivity and pluralism criteria mentioned in the related ECtHR decision regarding the content of compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses were underlined as basic tenets of a democratic society (Milliyet, 6 November 2007). The EU Commission which perceived Alevism as an organized faith kept drawing attention to granting of equal status and rights to Alevism as is proposed regarding other organized faiths in EU Progress Reports.

3.4. Contested Issues:

Conflict issues between a significant part of the Alevis and the Turkish State are centered on cemevis, the compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses and DRA though there is divergence regarding exact demands, as explained above.

3.4.1. Cemevis:

The legal status of cemevis has been an issue since 1990s, the date when Alevis began demanding the right to practice their faith fully, referring to cemevis' status as well as issues about education and the role and influence of DRA. Alevis demand granting of legal status to cemevis to receive financial support from the state, costs such as construction and basic amenities of cemevis to be paid by the state, in addition to granting of official status to Alevism. The monopoly of mosques, according to monism principle of Sunnism, and increasing weight of religion, Sunnism specifically, during AKP era has led to the accelerated questioning and categorization of Alevism by state officials and politicians in addition to rejection of these demands.

In addition to getting involved with the cemevi debate by defining and categorizing Alevism DRA officials proposed the interesting argument about "DRA creating and serving unity", proposing unity as a founding principle of the Republic, by referring to 'national unity under Sunnism'. Demands about granting legal status to cemevis were addressed, by DRA again, using the popular 'separatism' targeting 'unity of nation and Islam' discourses. In addition, the 'secret agenda discourse', much-used by AKP dissenters, began to be used by the right-wing and accentuated with the proposition that "Alevis have a secret plan to claim land from Turkey". Use of these discourses is in line with the standard treatment of using 'conspiracy by enemies' and 'separatism' discourses against those claiming 'diversity and alternative identities'. In a 2001 feuilleton by Ruşen Çakır and İhsan Yılmaz, cemevis' status as a place of worship was discussed where religious scholars, such as Professor Saim Yeprem of Marmara University and former President of DRA Professor Süleyman Ateş, said that mosque is the only place of worship for Muslims . These statements denied Alevi claims that Alevis and Bektashis never went to mosques since the Kerbela killings as a reaction to Islam being misled away from the true path after that incident, as stated by Alevis. In the same feuilleton, the then President of DRA Professor Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz claimed that atheists provoked Alevis, presenting Alevism as if another religion and not part of Islam. Yılmaz called demands about legal status of cemevi as divisive efforts against the unity of Islam and the country. Yılmaz added "it is not possible for sects and faiths to be represented in DRA as such an act would be a violation of the founding principles of the Republic which aimed to create unity under the umbrella of DRA. Regarding this matter, ultra-nationalist researcher Dr.Abdülkadir Sezgin went further and claimed that Alevi intellectuals and NGOs wanted to

have their own state, calling Alevism as the other threat along with PKK. Here Dr.Sezgin, contributed to the ‘secret agenda’ claims often used by Alevis and CHP against AKP, this time referring to ‘separatism’ being part of an actual plan by Alevis, targeting unity of the state and nation (Milliyet, 18 August 2001).

The comparing cemevi and mosque tradition while rejecting cemevi as an alternative to mosque as another place of worship for Muslims, though no such comparisons or offering cemevi as an alternative have never been made by Alevis, not only violates secularism but also disrupt ‘national unity’, as suggested by an MP, Süleyman Yağız. The MP proposed *justice* approach while reminding DRA President that he is a state official and not a politician to get involved in public debates. The MP proposed that such impositions could serve the “conspirators trying to divide Turkey”, turning DRA and AKP’s favorite discourse around. In April 2008, the then President of DRA Bardakoğlu answered an MP’s question in the Parliament that they opposed granting legal status to cemevis as demands such as proposing cemevis as an alternative to mosque would lead to Alevis’ leaving Islam. Bardakoğlu repeated that mosque is the only place of worship for all Muslims and if this is rejected then that would mean creation of another religion. DSP MP Yağız who directed the question towards the Prime Minister stated in response that they didnt propose cemevi as an alternative and so Bardakoğlu should refrain from commenting on comparisons not made and descriptions should be left to those holding that faith (Milliyet, 9 April 2008). ANAP Deputy President Ali Arif Özzeybek also commented on this response by Bardakoğlu that this attitude would help those trying to divide Turkey so Bardakoğlu should rather focus on justice and reject imposing uniformity and pressure as a theologian, leaving such matters to be decided by the state (Milliyet, 10 April 2008).

Prime Minister Erdoğan, in addition to continuing with the habit of categorizing and questioning Alevism, used insults referring to a cemevi in a statement later defended and corrected by the DRA President . In this case the DRA President not only got involved in political debates but also spoke in defense of the Prime Minister in an unprecedented manner. DRA President, whose defense was refuted by Erdoğan’s other arguments in the same interview, also used the defense that confirmed the unequal status of cemevis. A much heated debate arose in summer 2012 when Prime Minister Erdoğan called a Karacaahmet cemevi a freak, *ucube*, as he alleged that it was built illegally and lacked a building license (Milliyet, 6 August 2012). He was condemned by Karacaahmet Sultan Association President Muharrem Ercan who said that a Prime Minister in a secular country should refrain from calling a worship place in such a manner. Ercan added that due to the lack of legal status for cemevis,

about 900 cemevis in all over Turkey do not have a proper license (Milliyet, 7 October 2012). A few days later DRA President Görmez rejected claims that Prime Minister Erdoğan called the Karacaahmet cemevi a “freak” and that he was rather referring to the legal status of the building rather than cemevi itself. Though in the mentioned interview, Erdoğan also brought up the issue of comparing cemevi and mosque, saying that Turkmen Alevi go to the mosque which is the proper place of worship for Muslims, repeating claims about the nature of Alevism and whether it is a sect within Islam or a different faith on its own. The statement met with criticism from CHP MP Ihsan Özkes, a retired Istanbul mufti, that DRA was involved in a political incident, becoming the religion office of AKP. But President Görmez continued with his involvement in the issue, trying to draw an inaccurate picture of the situation in Turkey, abroad this time. Görmez spoke as if an issue was created out of thin air, using the ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’ when defending the treatment of Alevi in Turkey abroad, saying “Anatolia belonged to Alevi who were rather presented as minority according to foreign sources as a hurtful, sad statement” in a visit to a cemevi in Germany (Milliyet, 9 October 2012).

As an alternative solution, foundations formula to solve the cemevis issue was proposed by Minister of Employment and Social Security Faruk Çelik but was not supported by anyone (Milliyet, 18 January 2013). While Erdoğan and DRA Presidents seemed to talk in accordance, DRA Presidents supported their arguments with ‘national unity under the umbrella of DRA discourse, proposing religion as the bonding glue and DRA to serve this purpose. But instead DRA serves and promotes one order over others, as stated by all parties involved, without practising secularism as neutrality of state and its officials in Turkey. DRA President and Prime Minister discussing Alevism and appropriate status of cemevis should be considered problematic, especially since their approach is religious rather than legal as should be done by state officials. Such definitions provided by the state or state officials have been protested by Alevi leaders that providing such definitions is not up to the state, especially a secular state, but only Alevi who do not define Sunnism in return so such a task should be rather left to those practising the faith (Milliyet, 20 March 2007). One such incident is when Prime Minister Erdoğan, as he had done before, insisted during an interview that cemevis are cultural centers and not places of worship as he believed that only mosques could be places of worship for Muslims just as church is the only place of worship for Christians. Erdoğan argued that, similarly, mosques are the sole place of worship for all Muslims, regardless of their order (Milliyet, 25 February 2013). These words were protested by presidents of Alevi associations, saying “ it is not a Prime Minister’s job and duty to describe methods or places

of worship and especially in a secular state such statements are unacceptable". Along similar lines, in 2007 in Abant meetings, the then DRA President Bardakoğlu stated that cemevis could not be considered an alternative to mosques and are rather cultural centers. Bardakoğlu stated that Alevism is a mystical richness within Islam rather than another religion or order while he criticized the demands about granting legal status to cemevis, defending DRA as a supra-religious, umbrella organization serving all (Milliyet, 26 March 2007).

Challenging the categorizing and judging approach held by the DRA and the government to reject and postpone the matter not to disturb the Sunni majority, AKP MP Çamuroğlu gave a speech at TBMM, focusing on 'equal citizenship discourse'. In line with Alevi leaders' statements, Çamuroğlu drew attention to the fact that religious matters should not be categorized or perceived by a secular, democratic state's officials who rather act in a non-adversarial and neutral manner. Çamuroğlu proposed the government to perceive the cemevi issue as a sociological matter rather than a religious one, saying that in democratic countries citizens should be given rights no matter what the government or ruling party members believe in or prefer (Milliyet, 1 July 2008).

The strategy of short-term bypassing or window-dressing operations regarding sensitive or problematic matters has been chosen many times to not disturb the Sunni majority who may feel that their faith is challenged, so instead concessions are provided to make the issue go away for a while. Such a strategy to solve the issue with a by-pass operation without granting rights or legal status was proposed, after meeting with some Alevi leaders in Izmir in early 2007, was used by Erdoğan, in addition to enlisting obstacles to strengthen his argument. Erdoğan then said that cemevis could be supported via mayorships and their budgets upon his orders but changing the legal status of cemevis would require a societal consensus and granting legal status to cemevis is not legally possible at the moment (Milliyet, 11 February 2007).

Also related with the status of cemevis is the issue of the funeral ceremony of combat-deceased Alevi soldiers. Even regarding a sensitive matter as the religious ceremony to be held for fallen Alevi soldiers, cemevis' status become problematic, leading to serious problems and discrimination to continue even in the face of and after death. First time the issue of having Alevi soldiers' religious ceremonies in cemevis, rather than the mosques where official ceremonies were also held, became publicly discussed was in late 2009 when an Alevi soldier's coffin was abruptly taken from cemevi to a mosque in the middle of the religious ceremony (Milliyet, 13 August 2009). When a petition made later was accepted by the Army Chief of Staff to change this practice this decision was interpreted by Ali Balkız of

Alevi Bektaşî Federation and İzzettin Doğan of Cem Foundation as “an important step towards granting legal status to cemevis” (Milliyet, 9 October 2009). But the practice continued, as reported by CHP MP İlhan Cihaner, where authorities continued to refrain from attending the funeral ceremony of combat-deceased Alevi soldiers held at cemevi and instead attended the funeral ceremony and prayers held in the mosque afterwards (Milliyet, 7 October 2012). While some Alevis complain about holding funeral prayers in the mosque for combat-deceased Alevi soldiers as violation of Alevi beliefs, the authorities brought the issue of the status of cemevis up as the obstacle to the officials’ attending the cemevi ceremony.

Despite the fact that the legal status of cemevis has not changed, a few local government decisions can be deemed positive, though not changing the status quo, during this period. Regarding these changes while DRA insisted on taking part in public debates, perceiving the matter within its jurisdiction as a religious matter, Alevis used the ‘national unity discourse’ in a rare manner. On the other hand AKP resorted to the usual legal obstacles excuse, including DRA in the matter as the subject-matter expert, referring to “harmony” as the ultimate goal of AKP. In 2008, a revolutionary decision was taken in Kuşadası at City Council that water consumption by cemevis would be billed as done in mosques (Milliyet, 3 September 2008). DRA President Bardakoğlu stated that DRA would support all social and political steps taken in favor of Alevi *brothers* though he underlined that it was not for the City Council to decide about status of cemevis as places of worship as it wasn't their duty and expertise to make theological interpretations (Milliyet, 12 September 2008). The decision was applauded by Alevi dede Kıranlı that it should be exemplary as a historical step for the unity of the country (Milliyet, 3 September 2008). In October 2008, Didim and Tunceli City Council decisions followed this pioneer decision taken in Kuşadası, regarding the billing of water consumption at cemevis as is done for mosques (Milliyet, 13 October 2008; Milliyet, 13 October 2008). In August 2011, a similar decision was taken in İzmir though AKP later announced that there could be legal problems because DRA stated that cemevis are not places of worship while underlining that AKP wanted no friction but only harmony (Milliyet, 23 August 2011).

Another positive, even historical, development took place in November 2011 when the *de facto* situation was protected and accepted by the court rather than using categorization of Alevism as an obstacle even though the judiciary also attempted to define and categorize Alevism here as has been the habit of various state institutions. Ankara Administrative Court rejected the court case about closing down Çankaya Cemevi Building Association, stating that cemevis are places of worship *de facto* so announcing their position as such is not violation of

any laws or the Constitution while adding that Alevism could not be considered a different religion but rather a system of beliefs like Bektashism or Sufism is (Milliyet, 2 November 2011).

Regarding another court case, CHP Tunceli MP Hüseyin Aygün took his case to Ankara Administrative Court regarding opening of a cemevi at the Parliament against TBMM's decision in summer 2012 when his petition was rejected by TBMM upon taking the opinion of the DRA (Milliyet, 10 July 2012). The case has been important as a court, in addition to the government and TBMM, seemed to depend on DRA's opinion, calling it even binding, to decide about matters related with freedom of faith and secularism. The other important point was that the court made an interesting interpretation to free the state of its duty regarding state's role to ensure practicing of different faiths while giving the state the right to have a religion itself as a license to violate secularism, especially regarding neutrality of the state. The related court case by MP Aygün was also rejected, reporting that the state having a religion or church is not a violation of secularism (Milliyet, 13 December 2012). In this court decision, there is also a referral to the state having a negative duty, due to Revolutionary Laws abolishing dervish lodges. So, the decision states, the state has no duty to ensure practising of different faiths is also not a violation of European Charter of Human Rights as this duty about ensuring practice of different faiths could be against the secularism principle. Lastly, the court decision claims that regarding such matters the opinion of the DRA is essential and binding.

The Mosque-Cemevi Project:

The project about building cemevis next to mosques drew a lot of attention, in the form of both criticism and applaud, as different parties made different interpretations, depending on different discourses and positions held. Both Sunni preacher Fethullah Gülen and Cem Foundation leader İzzettin Doğan defined cemevi-mosque project as non-assimilationist and Gülen underlined "unity and togetherness", Doğan also rightfully argued that Alevis wanted "equal citizenship" rather than special privileges imposed by foreigners. This way Doğan rejected the discourse used by the government to remind the public of 'conspiracy by enemies discourse', implying Alevis collaborate with foreigners, when faced with demands regarding different identities in different forms. But Doğan also drew attention to the fact that with pressure and not granting rights as equal citizens, Alevis could be provoked by "foreign conspirators" easily so in that case Turkey would be creating its own Achilles' heel. Here Doğan, using the 'conspiracy by enemies discourse, imply that a possible threat could be created by Turkey to be used against (Milliyet, 31 October 2013).

In late 2007, first mosque-cemevi was opened in Yozgat, where the first floor served as cemevi and the second one as mosque, as announced by AKP Yozgat MP Mehmet Çiçek that “cemevi is not an alternative to mosque and rather between home and mosque”, again comparing mosque with cemevi to downgrade cemevi (Milliyet, 30 November 2007). Regarding the famous 2013 mosque-cemevi project, preacher and *Hizmet* Movement leader Fethullah Gülen stated in a January 2014 interview with the BBC “we believe that this project is important for unity and togetherness as people praying together and getting to know each other would feel no hatred or fear”. Gülen also said that Alevis should be granted the same rights as those granted to the DRA, such as having the dedes on state payroll like the imams are (Milliyet, 27 January 2014). Cem Foundation President İzzettin Doğan stated that the project did not aim assimilation and the two places of worship could exist and pray independently without affecting faith or belief of anyone involved. Doğan added that the decisions regarding the pending court cases at ECtHR were presented to the Sunni voters as foreign imposition to give rights to Alevis (Milliyet, 11 September 2013). But Doğan said that Alevis, rather than seeking special rights, demanded the practising of article 10 of the Constitution to grant equal rights, such as granting legal status to cemevis and allocating a share of the general budget to Alevis. Doğan also stated that the Kurdish Opening and the solution process had to address both Kurdish and Alevi populations or otherwise the Alevi issue would be the soft spot of Turkey to be exploited by foreign powers (Milliyet, 31 October 2013).

The government not only supported the project but also blamed those against it as Minister Faruk Çelik, responsible for the Alevi Opening, differentiated between Alevis accepting and opposing the mosque-cemevi project. Minister Çelik categorized opposers as radicals with a ‘secret agenda’, with a rare usage of this discourse by AKP which normally prefers using ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’ to refer to opposers. While Çelik also categorized Alevism as an interpretation of Islam, he mentioned that state did not have a definition of Alevism, representing an irony as it seemed he has not been aware of, even regarding himself probably. The lack of progress regarding concrete solutions to legal status of cemevis was, this time, explained to be obstructed with “major debates” and so justified with protecting harmony and national unity. Minister Faruk Çelik, saying that he supported the mosque-cemevi project and called the dissenters illegal groups and youth, all provoked regarding the local elections and Presidential elections in 2014. Çelik said he agreed with İzzettin Doğan that Alevism was an interpretation of Islam, within Islam, adding that those supporting atheism belonged somewhere else while underlining that works continued

regarding granting legal status to cemevis and putting dedes on state payroll. Çelik also underlined the binding nature of the non-mutable third article of the Constitution and Revolutionary Laws and that attempting to change them would lead to major debates. Çelik added that the state did not have an Alevi definition so the mosque-cemevi project had nothing to do with the state (Milliyet, 14 September 2013).

On the other hand, Alevis blamed the cemevi-mosque project, rather called by most as the mosque-cemevi project, as assimilationist and so resorting to “secret agenda of Islamists” discourse (Milliyet, 11 September 2013; Milliyet, 10 September 2013). Regarding the project Alevis also used the ‘secret agenda discourse’ about the foreign powers, which Alevis blamed with trying to “create sectarianism”, in a rather rare manner. The only other exception has been when Alevis used the ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’ to explain the rise of Islam in Turkey as part of a US-led project, The Great Middle East Project, in the past several times, including İzzettin Doğan (Milliyet, 16 December 2012). In an early November 2013 conference 469 Alevi associations made an announcement, calling cemevi-mosque a project to assimilate Alevism and dissolve it in moderate Islam (Milliyet, 12 September 2013; Milliyet, 10 September 2013). The announcement also marked the foreign powers being mentioned by Alevis as the culprit for the first time, to promote and even create sectarian problems. Pir Sultan Abdal Associations Federation President enlisted Alevi demands again as conditions of a peace project, such as granting legal status to cemevis and respecting Alevi faith and cultural values, but under the circumstances where mosque and cemevi could not be considered equal he called this impossible. While the debate continued, European Alevi Associations Confederation President Turgut Öker called the project “an attempt to familiarize Alevis with the mosques”. Öker said that while mosques are being built in Alevi villages there are no cemevis in Sunni villages”, drawing attention to an interesting irony (Milliyet, 4 September 2013).

3.4.2.Education:

The sphere of education has been even more problematic with the religious education courses which became compulsory after the 1980 coup. So in many schools Alevi students either had to attend such courses explaining Sunnism solely or were insulted for their faith as “heretical” for not attending these courses as “good Muslims” should do (Milliyet, 15 January 2013). In addition to being socially problematic, the option of being exempt from these courses worked against the students in a different and again punishing way that in 2013, an

Alevi high-school student in Eskişehir could not graduate with high honors as she was exempt from religious education course to lose points in university entrance exams due to the exemption status (Milliyet, 26 August 2013).

During 2000s ECtHR received record number of applications from Turkey, regarding basic human rights. Leyla Şahin case about banning of headscarf in public sphere and Eylem Zengin case about Alevis' exemption from compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses have been the most famous examples regarding freedom of faith. In mid-2000s, the flooding of cases into the Court began to be filtered carefully, using importance criterion, so that minor complaints would not take the Court's time from focusing on important issues (Milliyet 16 May 2005; Milliyet, 3 January 2006).

European Court of Human Rights Decision-Zengin vs. Turkey:

In the landmark ECtHR case, filed in January 2004 by Eylem Zengin and her father Hasan Zengin against the Turkish state, the compulsory nature and largely Sunni content of religious culture and moral knowledge courses were in question. The Turkish state attacked the plaintiffs that the courses in question were inclusive and egalitarian towards all faiths, using Alevis' 'democracy for all' and 'equal citizenship' discourses as its defence. The Turkish state claimed that the content of these courses was not about Sunnism only and inclusive of all faiths so could be taught to students of all faiths, without violating secularism. So, it was claimed, the families suing the state did not have the right to undermine organization of education system. Alevis rejected these claims as false, insisting that their demands targeted practising of 'full democracy for all, to serve the rights of all', continuing with the use of an all-inclusive discourse. Alevi leaders reacted to the state's claims, saying "such false and non-serious claims, violating secularism and human rights, will guarantee the conviction of Turkey" (Milliyet, 7 April 2005). The applicants' lawyer and Alevi leader Kazım Genç added that in a secular country the state could not impose religious education and can only supervise teaching of religion. Genç argued that this self-imposed duty made the state religious in violation of secularism principle and especially as the content of these courses were about Islam, as also established by a 15 November 2000 report prepared by ECtHR upon request of Alevis (Milliyet, 4 October 2006).

The compulsory nature of these courses, another subject of complaint in the case, as imposed by the relevant article of the Constitution, was never addressed by the Turkish state. But Alevis called this situation "a bizarre consequence of the 1982 Constitution" which provided unprecedented Constitutional protection to teaching of religion unlike that of any

other topic or skill. Alevi applicants and leaders insisted that their application targeted 1982 Constitution which violated basic rights and liberties, to have full democracy where protection of human rights and freedom of faith would be enforced for all Turkish citizens. Kazım Genç stated that this case was the problem of all Turkish citizens and not Alevis solely, adding “we perceive the situation as a problem of democracy rather than religion” (Milliyet, 10 July 2006).

ECtHR decision, if positive, meant far-reaching results, stated Constitutional Law Professor Ibrahim Kaboğlu, as not only the courses but also the related Constitutional article would be in question, in relation with violation of secularism and international law, too then. Kaboğlu said that a positive decision reached by the ECtHR about this case would mean a turning point for Turkish state and legal system as either the content or compulsory nature of this course would need to be re-structured then. Kaboğlu added “such a decision will also establish that article 24 of the 1982 Constitution contradicts the European Charter of Human Rights” (Milliyet, 6 July 2007).

During the debates regarding this court case, ECtHR’s claims about violation of secularism regarding the content and nature of these courses drew a lot of criticism from DRA, a self-claimed party in international and legal debates. DRA, accused ECtHR, a supra-national institution, with having a “secret agenda” and categorizing Islam and Alevism, in an ironical way (Milliyet, 6 July 2007). These comments may be perceived as a reflection of seeing own motivations in the actions of all involved while trying to impose own values about the value and function of these courses, ignoring freedom of citizens. Acceptance of the case having merit by the ECtHR was interpreted by the then President of DRA Bardakoğlu as discussing whether Alevism was Islamic and so insulting Islam, having a political agenda. Bardakoğlu added that only two hours spent on religious education and culture was not such a big deal. The Deputy President of DRA Aydın also claimed that “abolishing the religious culture and moral knowledge courses will bring ignorance about religion in Turkey” (Milliyet, 6 July 2007). The outcome of the court case was in favor of the applicant Zengins, which Washington Times predicted to be *historical* if positive for the plaintiff (Milliyet, 25 May 2006).

The 2007 ECtHR decision underlined ‘equal citizenship’, ‘democracy for all’ rather than ‘diversity and identity’ discourse’, leaving aside minority concept, though *pluralism* was used as a standard to be reached (Milliyet, 9 October 2007). The decision, referring to pluralism, objectiveness and critical nature of the content of these courses, focused on human rights and freedom of faith *for all* rather than minority rights, to demand special rights and

protection, to tell the Turkish state to change the content and compulsory nature of these courses. The ECtHR decision stated that the curriculum should be “objective, critical and pluralist” so as to provide students with the ability to criticize faith and ensure that state keeps an equal distance from all faiths. The decision found the exemption practice problematic and used it as proof that the content of the courses are not pluralist or inclusive. It was stated that “religious education not in accordance with one’s own faith can not be provided by the state”, underlining the court’s interpretation of the curriculum of the Turkish religious culture and moral knowledge courses as covering Sunnism solely, using the exemption criteria of being non-Muslim proof that the curriculum doesn’t cover all religions. The court also decided that the need to identify own faith to use the exemption choice provided another violation of freedom of faith, in the form of having to disclose own faith. The practice for non-Muslim Turkish citizens to declare their faith in order to be exempt from these courses was criticized as violating Article 9 of the European Charter for Human Rights regarding freedom of faith (Milliyet, 10 October 2007). Turkish Ministry of Education announced that they would object to the decision which could mean more cases and compensation for Alevis as well as political consequences related with the EU membership talks. Olli Rehn, EU Commission’s then member responsible for enlargement, commented that EU Commission was waiting for the decision to be enforced regarding both compulsory nature and content of these courses (Milliyet, 31 December 2007).

As Turkish government did not object to ECtHR decision, during the legal period of three months, the ECtHR decision became binding for Turkey as well as being supported with the Turkish Supreme Court, Danıştay. Danıştay made the ECtHR decision part of domestic law, repeating conclusions reached in ECtHR decision and applying it to different cases. So the government criticized this negative outlook by Danıştay as crossing the line, though not criticizing DRA which made political comments about the case despite being an institution of a secular state. Danıştay decided in March 2008 against the compulsory religious education courses, amalgamating two cases, stating that the students should be able to be exempt, based on choice and not identification of faith. Danıştay stated that providing education of religious culture is a duty of the state but providing education of religion is rather a parental duty. The decision repeated ECtHR judgment that the content of these courses does not cover general religious culture, using ECtHR criteria such as objectivity and pluralism. Danıştay decision also meant removal of the duty of non-Muslims to state their faith for exemption. The decision also provided the opportunity for exemption for non-Sunni students with the criteria mentioned in the decision that “all religions perceived as equal in the content, to be

covered with objectivity and pluralism, teaching religious culture as aimed by the Constitution rather than one sect” (Milliyet, 4 March 2008). Interestingly, AKP MP Fırat complained that Danıştay crossed the line with this decision while Alevi Bektaşî Federation President Eser believed that this decision “said no to Islamization” in a state which claims to be secular and democratic but has compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses.

Regarding this matter DRA’s comments and criticisms, along with its insistence on providing consultation to the government regarding religion-related issues, did not provide the image of an organization of a secular, democratic state operating upon consistent procedures and principles, as justly stated by Alevis as well. It is also important that claims by the government to have changed the content of the debated courses, adding limited and arbitrary content, can be considered such a short-term strategy. DRA’s then President Bardakoğlu criticized the Supreme Court’s decision severely, saying that it was not upon Danıştay to decide about religion and Islam without consulting with DRA. Bardakoğlu stated that Danıştay repeated ECtHR’s mistake, claiming that the content of these courses has been changed since Zengin application to ECtHR was made (Milliyet, 6 March 2008). CHP MP and former ECtHR judge Rıza Türmen rejected the claims of the Turkish state, stating that the changes in the content were already known by the ECtHR before the decision was made. Türmen added that a few pages added to the textbooks would not make the content “objective, pluralist and equi-distant towards all faiths” as a textbook about religious culture should be (Milliyet, 10 November 2009). Alevi Bektaşî Federation President Eser reacted strongly to these remarks that Bardakoğlu acted like the *ulema*, religious scholars, of an Islamic state to be consulted with as a power above the law, an attitude that could only be called scandalous for an official of a secular, democratic state (Milliyet, 6 March 2008). Just after these statements were made, a court decision from Antalya also granted exemption status to an Alevi student on ground that secularism principle and European Charter of Human Rights were violated (Milliyet, 9 March 2008).

Furthermore the government and state officials insisting on not changing the related article of the Constitution to keep as an obstacle to removing the compulsory nature of the courses, despite AKP’s habit of making fast legal changes when deemed necessary by AKP, can only support this short-term strategy in terms of justifying the status quo. Meanwhile, in a TV interview Minister of Education Çelik stated that first of all as long as article 24 of the Constitution is in effect these courses needed to be compulsory. Çelik added that the content of the course has changed since the related applications were made in 2005 but Constitution would not be changed, implying compulsory nature of the courses would not be changed.

Çelik added that it is only normal to teach such a course with a content about Islam dominantly in a predominantly Muslim country, saying that Constitutional changes and a societal consensus would be required to include Alevism in the content (Milliyet, 5 March 2008). The other actor in this debate, the EU, stated, informally, in March 2008 that they thought religious culture and moral knowledge courses being compulsory was not in accordance with EU principles. So EU did not approve this issue found tricky and complex, adding that in membership talks with EU, this issue about which the Turkish government has been inconsistent would be eventually addressed (Milliyet, 11 March 2008).

In April 2008, Alevis announced, as the six-months period for enforcement of the decision was over, that they would take the case to EC Council of Ministers so that it could become a criterion for Turkey's EU membership and face various sanctions (Milliyet, 8 April 2008). But Turkey refrained from changing the compulsory status of the courses or objecting to or enforcing the decision during these six months. Turkish state insisted that the ECtHR decision was invalid as the content of the courses was changed before the ECtHR decision was made, announcing that Alevism, cemevi, semah and cem would be included in twelfth-year religious education textbooks (Milliyet, 19 March 2008). Despite this change, many Alevis were not satisfied with the new content providing some, though inaccurate and limited, information about Alevism and the fact that Sunni teachers were teaching these courses (Milliyet, 8 April 2008).

The expectation that the compulsory religious education courses would be abolished following the ECtHR decision led to raised hopes among Alevis, expecting changes into the nature of these courses, after the content was modified, though proven to be still problematic. When the possibility of making these course elective arose, the tradition of using 'unity with Islam discourse' to present these courses as "the glue to unite the nation" rhetoric continued among religious scholars. One such scholar was controversial theologian Hayrettin Karaman who commented that it would be "separatism" to make the compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses elective (Milliyet, 1 October 2008). But soon Alevis were even more frustrated than before when the matter became worse as in addition to keeping the compulsory nature of the religious education and culture courses extra courses about religion were offered as elective courses (Milliyet, 2 January 2011). These formally elective courses, being offered alongside a wide range of other elective courses became compulsory in a *de facto* manner, owing to pressures and lack of teaching staff to teach elective courses with non-religious content. Here it should be noted that secular Sunnis have also been disturbed with the developments regarding religious education courses. One such comment was voiced by

CHP MP and former ECtHR judge Rıza Türmen who said that Turkish state and AKP government violated the ECtHR decision as content of religious culture and moral knowledge courses have not been or become universal and inclusive (Milliyet, 21 October 2010). Regarding this matter, Türmen proposed the solution as offering different textbooks to Sunni and Alevi students though the dissenters were in consensus that religious education courses should not be compulsory either *de jure* or *de facto*, via societal pressures or other sources of discrimination.

Exemption from Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Courses:

The exemption option has been provided to non-Muslims only, an option that could be used when documented in ID cards. But this has been a problematic and undemocratic practice not only for non-Muslims but also Alevis. Even though some Alevis considered Alevism more a lifestyle and morality than religion, many Alevis consider themselves Muslim while all seem to prefer not to debate the details of their faith as belonging within or outside Islam, as is their right as citizens of a secular and democratic state.

The first issue about exemption was that Alevi students who were exempt from these courses faced discrimination and pressure in all forms, from the school administration, teachers and other students, as explained above (Milliyet, 15 January 2013). A related matter was addressed by President of YÖK, High Education Council, announcing that questions about religious culture would be included in LYS and YGS exams and though he underlined that the questions will address general religious culture, the decision caused debates and concerns among students and parents (Milliyet, 26 February 2013). In addition, as explained above, an Alevi student exempt from these courses lost points in university entrance exams in 2013, due to the score calculation system (Milliyet, 26 August 2013).

Using the monism pinciple to promote “unity in Islam” and “unity around Islam”, referring to the monism of faith and people gathered around Islam, the government advised those wishing to be exempt from these courses to declare not being Muslim. But using the option of removal of religion section in ID cards was a problematic one, called “separatist” at the time by the DRA. So more criticisms towards the government were voiced when Minister of Education offered Alevis to have their religion stated in their ID as “Islam” removed to be exempt from these courses, referring to a court case regarding removal of religion section in ID cards (Milliyet, 6 July 2009). Sinan Işık, a worker from Izmir, took his case to ECtHR about having the religion section in his ID card removed when he could not have “Alevi” written in his ID card instead of “Islam” in the religion section after years of struggle and won

in the ECtHR (Milliyet, 2 February 2010). A supporting comment was made by Hubyar Sultan Association President Ali Kenanoğlu. Kenanoğlu stated that having his religion stated as Islam in his ID card led to his petition to have his daughter exempt from compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses rejected as the state then claimed that members of Islam could not be exempt from these courses. Defending another violation of secularism, having a religion section and not being able to have own preference written in ID cards, has drawn DRA into debates, using the usual ‘separatism targeting unity discourse’ to justify a practice considered unacceptable in a secular and democratic environment.

Alevi parents began using the court route, when it became obvious that the state would resist enforcing the ECtHR decision and encouraged by the Supreme Court decision. But the government did everything to challenge them: pressing courts to deny exemption status, modifying content of high school and university entrance exams to include questions about religious education courses and as stated above, even proposing Alevis to declare themselves non-Muslim by having their ID cards modified.

Content of Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Courses:

The much-debated issue of the content of religious education and moral knowledge courses has been volatile and without much progress. The issue has been handled with an unprofessional attitude as each year’s textbooks included missing or incorrect information or Alevism was rather presented as a “cultural phenomenon” rather than faith, in line with monism principle.

If we look at the history of changes into the content of religious culture and moral knowledge courses, we will see that as early as 2005, it was proposed that Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli were to be included in the textbooks of these courses as part of EU Harmonization Package, though without making any referrals to Alevism (Milliyet, 9 November 2005). Disregarding presence of Alevism as a faith and rather presenting it as a cultural phenomenon with excuses seemed to disturb all Alevis. Even figures close to the state such as İzzettin Doğan who resorted to a term rarely used, possible unrest, to define their disturbance. In late 2006 in the corrected religious education course textbooks, Alevism was either misrepresented with false or missing information such as cemevis never being mentioned as places of worship or belittled, as stated by Alevi leaders such as İzzettin Doğan or scholars such as Ali Rıza Uğurlu. A Minister of Education authority defended the decision, saying that it was purposeful as Alevism occurred much later and in a political way while İzzettin Doğan called the situation “a trick dynamiting peace” (Milliyet, 13 October 2006).

Instead of consulting with Alevis, the content first didn't include right information and then went back to the original practice of ignoring the presence of Alevism in some textbooks and defining and categorizing it as "part of Islam", rejecting differences which challenge Sunnism. In fall 2007, when it was learnt that Alevism would not be included in the new textbook for religious culture and moral knowledge courses Alevi leaders reacted negatively. İzzettin Doğan called Turkish state "a Sunni state" and Alevi Bektaşî Federation President Selahattin Özel stated that no information was better than wrong information. Interesting enough, this time even two AKP MPs with Alevi origins also reacted, saying "Alevism is true Islam" and "secular states cannot have a religion" (Milliyet, 15 September 2007). After these debates, Alevism was not included in textbooks for seventh and eleventh-year students while it was mentioned as an interpretation of Islam in textbooks for eighth-year students.

Despite criticisms and protests, the government continued with the tradition of changing the content of textbooks without consulting Alevis, ignoring the fact that ECtHR decision referred to the removal of compulsory nature of these courses too. In November 2010, following protests by Alevis in various cities, it was announced that Alevism, as well as Caferism and Nusayrism, would be included in the textbooks of twelfth-grade students with a detailed and upgraded content along with images of Alevis' own choosing (Milliyet, 13 November 2010). In September 2011, Alevi-Bektashism, along with Nusayrism, was included in textbooks of religious culture and moral knowledge courses from fourth till twelfth grade. State Minister Çelik announced that the textbooks would be corrected as suggested by ECtHR decision to make the content objective and pluralist. Çelik stated that Alevi-Bektashi prayers, practices such as semah, Muharrem fasting, Imam Ali's life and contributions, cemevis and basic tenets of Bektashism were to be covered in the textbooks. After this announcement was made, CHP Tunceli MP Hüseyin Aygün presented a report which included mistakes and missing information in a long list such that Alevi practices were called traditions or concept of god in Alevism was explained only in terms of Sunnism (Milliyet, 13 September 2011). Alevi Bektaşî Federation also rejected this decision by the government as they stated that ECtHR decision was about banishing the compulsory nature of religious culture and moral knowledge courses and not just changing their content (Milliyet, 28 September 2011).

While the content of religious culture and moral knowledge courses were changed in an arbitrary manner, to be offered to Alevis and other non-Sunni minorities in a carrot-and-stick manner, the government seemed determined to teach Sunni Islam to all students of all ages, even at the kindergarten level, continuing with the violation of secularism and ECtHR decision. Minister of State Faruk Çelik repeated that these courses provided religious culture

and information and it wasn't possible for students living in this geography to not learn these issues even if they were atheists (Milliyet, 10 March 2008). Çelik, in a December 2010 interview, stated that, if desired by parents, religious education could also be provided in kindergartens (Milliyet, 21 December 2010).

Sunni scholars and DRA seemed to perceive and present the content and compulsory nature of religious culture and moral knowledge courses as “serving unity”, focusing on similarities, DRA and Sunni scholars labelled dissenters as “separatist radicals”, adding the usual ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’ to imply that Alevis demanding rights act as separatists in collaboration with enemies of Turkey to divide the country. Furthermore, the Şeyhülislam analogy made by State Minister could be called “unfortunate” as Turkish state defines itself as “a democratic and secular state” rather than an Islamic one where Seyhulislam would have discretion about political matters as well. While Alevis organized demonstrations to have ECtHR decision enforced and voice their *usual* demands, State Minister Sait Yazıcıoğlu, in response, stated that they didnot pay attention to such “radical” demands (Milliyet, 10 November 2008). Yazıcıoğlu also defended the existence of DRA which, he said, resembled the post of Şeyhülislam and regarding Alevism, they focused more on the similarities though some people underlined the differences in a radical manner, harming the interests and peace of the nation. But the use of staunchly secular symbols such as Atatürk and foundations of the Republic to defend existence of DRA, a clear violation of secularism, made the ironical and inconsistent situation even more inconsistent. Diyanet Foundation reacted strongly to Alevi demands, calling demands about abolishing DRA as insulting the legacy of Atatürk and attacking the foundations of the Republic and that Alevi demands sounded like provocations of foreign sources and especially the EU, to reach their objectives about dividing Turkey (Milliyet, 11 November 2008).

While the religious education courses issue was debated, another matter to bring religion and education together in a controversial manner arose about allowing worshipping at schools, to complicate things even more. As complaints about compulsory, mass worshipping at schools grew the government, at first, ignored presence of such practices calling them “freedom”, began promoting Sunni worshipping at schools openly with legal changes. In 2006 and 2007 claims about mass prayers at schools were ignored or labeled as “part of religious freedom” by state officials while Ministry of Education took rhetorical action regarding worshipping at schools, making statements such as “schools are not the place for worshipping” (Milliyet, 23 January 2008). In August 2008, as a reaction to the proposal prepared by AKP MP Edibe Sözen about “protecting children and the youth” stating that the

state is obligated with founding of places of worship of all faiths in schools, Alevi proposed that schools were not the right place for worshipping (Milliyet, 8 August 2008). The unofficial practices became official in 2013 as the issue was included in the Democratization Package requiring places of worship to be built in common places “upon demand. The decision burdened schools or organizations of various forms with building places of worship but its application to Alevi was a “big unknown”. But the Ministry of Education announced that they would begin working on the issue if a demand was to be made” (Milliyet, 9 September 2013).

Last but not least, some examples from everyday school life can also provide the full picture of the context of education regarding Alevi. In addition to the state and government’s negative attitude and insistence on making the education sphere increasingly Sunni, the school administrations also supported this practice, harassing and insulting Alevi students and teachers. Such practices repeated by different actors can make the environment more suffocating, even for those that are not “different”, imposing an unbearable level of uniformity and pressure on everyone. In addition, teachers who should act as role models in terms of educating future generations instead preaching and even practising hatred and discrimination can be considered alarming. But the government seemed to ignore and not take much notice of such incidents as part of a growing trend, ignoring presence of such a friction and aggression towards Alevi at schools. In 2007, the case of three female Alevi students leaving Amasya Meslek Lisesi due to pressures by the teachers was addressed by a TBMM Commission report calling the incident as “bullying by other students” (Milliyet, 29 November 2007). In another incident where an Alevi student was bullied and beaten by a teacher at a school in Esenler, Istanbul for not fasting in Ramadan, three AKP MPs rejected the conclusion of the related TBMM Commission Report, saying “it gives the impression that there is an Alevi-Sunni issue” (Milliyet, 13 December 2007). The issue of Alevi teachers facing insults about ethnicity, faith and discrimination where other teachers didnt want to work alongside an Alevi who didnt attend group prayers has also been brought to TBMM meetings by CHP MP Aykan Erdemir in March 2012 (Milliyet, 3 March 2012). But the more interesting fact was that the teacher was later sued by the harassing education institution itself. There has been no record of schools going beyond mere warning directed at perpetrators in discrimination and harassment cases. A rather scandalous event happened in early 2014 when a religious education teacher in Amasya said in classroom that a Sunni marrying an Alevi should be punished with 14 lashes and killed if they have children together. But despite the

complaints the school principle refused to punish the teacher or even start an investigation (Milliyet, 2 January 2014).

3.4.3. Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA):

Debates about the DRA's existence, role and functions by laypeople, academics and politicians can be summed up centered around two positions: Alevi, among others, proposed abolishing the DRA while others, such as Professor İřtar Gzaydın, Professor Samim Akgnl and Cem Foundation's Professor İzzettin Dođan, proposed changes into the structure and function of DRA. Professor Akgnl proposed a new structure to include organizations for non-Muslims and atheists and finance with contributions from believers on a choice basis, with three major changes: individual freedom to make personal choices, removal of obstacles to religious displays in public, such as the ban on wearing headscarf in public, and removal of obstacles to displaying non-religious acts in public, such as being able to hold civil funerals, drinking alcohol or not fasting in public during Ramadan (Milliyet, 25 January 2013; Milliyet, 24 January 2013).

It was in 2003 when the role and weight of DRA was discussed for the first time. Parliamentary debates in 2003 drew attention to the growth not only in size and cost but also influence of DRA, given new projects such as imam-teachers or imam-soldiers, in all spheres of life. During budgetary debates at TBMM, MPs criticized the gigantic budget allocated to DRA, including the cost of the book about DRA services which included more than 350 pictures of the then DRA President Yılmaz while CHP MP Kemal Anadolu questioned whether any Alevi personnel were recruited at DRA. In addition, the expansion of number of DRA staff, given the extra staffing of 30,000 people, was also discussed along with proposals regarding imams working as imam-teachers or in the military as imam-soldiers while CHP Istanbul MP Ali Kemal Kumkumođlu criticized DRA for not providing service to about ten million Alevi paying taxes. In response, State Minister Mehmet Aydın stated that DRA supported mosques as the *sole place of worship for Muslims*. In the meantime DRA repeated its "umbrella organization working for unity with neutrality towards all sects" discourse while contradicting itself with repeated categorizations of Alevism and cemevis, drawing unnecessary comparisons (Milliyet, 16 March 2003).

The then DRA President Bardakođlu was not found sincere by Alevi leaders when he made similar claims in 2004, regarding equidistance towards all faiths as Alevi leaders said the government rejected every thought but political Islam (Milliyet, 7 June 2003). Later labels

provided by Bardakoğlu seemed problematic as the practices and rhetoric he provided clashed with each other as he claimed being neutral and equidistant before categorizing Alevism as a sect. The culprit could be either part of a misunderstanding about the definition of secularism, neutrality and equidistance or simply that inconsistencies do not matter much in the Turkish context which is founded upon inconsistencies and ironies itself, regarding even basic definitions. Bardakoğlu, known as a moderate cleric who served as President of DRA between 2003 and 2010, tried reconciling modernity and Islam, saying “Islam can be modernized but not reformed”. Bardakoğlu added that Islam and politics should be kept apart, that “Turkey appears as the perfect example that Islam, secularism and modernity are compatible” while defining Alevism as a sect and cultural understanding under the umbrella of Islam (Milliyet, 2 February 2004). Shortly after being appointed as President of the DRA Bardakoğlu caused strong reactions on the part of Alevi leaders and even a prominent judge, a member of Supreme Court, calling his words “scandalous” and “ignorant” as he was said to “cross the line” given the analogy Bardakoğlu made by comparing Alevi and Acemendis, an ultra-religious Sunni group, and insulting Alevi with such an analogy (Milliyet, 12 November 2004).

After the proposal about changes into DRA Law the growth in role and influence of DRA was discussed again. The proposed changes into the DRA Law meant providing even more weight, influence and power to DRA, an ambivalent institution to exist in a secular state. These changes would not only worsen the already problematic issue of secularism but also confirm the “secret agenda” claims of CHP and Alevi directed at AKP, regarding its identity and agenda. The proposed changes about religious leaders gaining more weight and power regarding all spheres of life sounded incompatible and even disturbing for a secular state trying to solve its problems with secularism and democratic consolidation, especially where judiciary and politics are most problematic ones as their destruction could mean destruction of the democratic, secular system. Regarding these changes, in April 2010, Ali Balkız of Alevi Bektaşî Federation announced that the new DRA Law was targeting an Iran-style society with a budget getting even bigger, more staff and wider discretion, such as collecting and destroying publications deemed harmful. The institution was planned to reach such an authority that DRA staff were to be judged in court only with the permission of their superiors while DRA President would report to the Prime Minister directly and solely (Milliyet, 21 April 2010). Regarding another proposed plan about the role and function of DRA, the then President of DRA Bardakoğlu’s comments about Religious Services Outside Mosques Project as “religion covers all social life, going beyond religious services so clerics

should act as opinion leaders to interfere with social life” needed further explanation as to whether a new model was targeted where religious leaders would be acting as judges or politicians with the program (Milliyet, 3 October 2010).

Taking his self-claimed position as a party to debates about Alevism further to the international stage, Bardakoğlu criticised EU as he tried to place Alevis within Sunnism, mainstream Islam, also blaming EU with having ‘secret agenda’. Bardakoğlu’s comments aimed at undermining the credibility of EU in the eyes of Turkish public with a well-known discourse while defending the legitimacy and function of DRA as “umbrella for unity and avoid trouble”. In November 2005 Bardakoğlu stated that Alevi demands were rather political, adding that Alevis being called minority in EU Progress Report was “falling victim to ideological and political agendas” and demands about accepting cemevis as places of worship or their rituals as worshipping methods was a step and tactic to “remove them from mainstream”. Bardakoğlu’s comments about Alevi demands where he stated that banishing DRA would prepare the fertile ground for religious fights and Alevis were being victims of power struggle (Milliyet, 6 November 2005) was met with severe criticism from Alevis and opposition leaders, such as ANAP leader Mumcu, calling these statements “separatist” (Milliyet, 8 November 2005). The situation where the comments of the President of DRA was called “separatist” by a political leader, using the much popular discourse, must have surprised EU with the simplistic rhetoric used while no one seemed to intend reaching a feasible solution.

Furthermore, as Alevis criticized anti-secular practices and institutions DRA was discussed as a major institution which has lost its original identity and function to collaborate with Islamists, using the ‘equal citizenship’ and ‘democracy for all’ discourses. Alevi leader Özel’s analysis about Turkey using the excuse about “going through tough times” is important, reflecting a habit of using a discourse shaped in the form of a vicious circle to silence challenges and criticisms targeted at the status quo. Strong criticisms were voiced in this October 2007 meeting where Alevi leaders discussed Constitutional changes and demands and İzzettin Doğan stated that without Alevis there could only be a Sunni, sharia-based regime in a Muslim country. Doğan added that DRA which was founded to guarantee secularism rather bred fanatical, prominent enemies of the Republic and undermined to destroy secularism, with the transition to pluralist democracy, as it was removed from its original path or became the organization to use religion as means for political ends. Alevi Bektaşî Federation President Selahattin Özel underlined nationalism being on the rise, adding that Turkey “constantly goes through tough times”, an excuse frequently used to justify the

status quo. In the concluding announcement made after the meeting, it was stated that secularism, along with all principles of Atatürkist and secular Republic can not be debated. It was added that the new Constitution should provide equality to all faiths and places of worship, in principle and practice, also in accordance with Article 9 of European Charter of Human Rights. It was also stated that all faiths should be provided with an equal share of the budget as well as the opportunity to provide training for own clerics who should not face any discrimination in any way. Lastly, religious culture and moral knowledge courses, considered useful but not crucial, were demanded to rather be taught as elective courses (Milliyet, 29 October 2007).

A foreign criticism to DRA was voiced by ECtHR, in addition to European politicians and EU officials, calling actions and even existence of DRA as a violation of secularism. ECtHR repeated earlier criticisms to remind DRA that pluralism and neutralism are not in such a disconnect or can be connected only in rhetoric as a defense to be used in cases of criticisms by DRA, being unaware of own, special ties with Sunnism over others as providing DRA with its *raison d'être*. ECtHR, in a 2010 decision regarding removal of religion section in Turkish ID cards, Sinan Işık case, criticized DRA specifically for commenting on Alevism regarding its status as a sect or a separate religion, stating “secular state should be neutral so as to act as the guarantor of pluralism and any such comments by DRA, being a state institution, is a violation of the state neutrality towards all faiths and religions (Milliyet, 3 February 2010).

A similar criticism, though drawing attention to other violations, was stated in early 2010 when DSP MP Yağız criticized DRA for commenting about cemevis' status and DRA's attempts to define Alevism as violation of secularism. Yağız added that Article 24 of the Constitution, guaranteeing freedom of religion and faith was also violated with such rhetoric and acts. Finally, Yağız also stated that DRA President Bardakoğlu's insistence about commenting about Alevism was not in accordance with Alevi Opening and Workshops that claimed to promote dialogue, respect and changes (Milliyet, 29 January 2010).

Following the domestic and international debates regarding the role of DRA in Turkey, a comment by a minister aimed to defend DRA. The minister provided the inaccurate analysis of a serious problem which should not have arisen in a secular state, arguing that DRA has been involved in the headscarf debate only. It was in late October 2010, in a TV show, when İzzettin Doğan of Cem Foundation stated that DRA should not be asked for views about Alevism or cemevis to present the usual answer known by everyone that “cemevis are not places of worship and only mosques are” and instead only the judiciary

should present views if the matter is about liberties and rights. In response, State Minister Çelik said that DRA was only asked to present views regarding headscarf and not anything else (Milliyet, 29 October 2010). The minister's analysis could not be taken seriously by any party as it has not been possible to dismiss the fact that DRA got involved in all debates about Alevi and Alevism in domestic and even international context. In addition DRA's views were considered "essential and binding" by secular courts, again regarding Alevi debates and not only the headscarf issue.

Another defense of DRA was voiced by a minister, using the explanation that mosques are not built by the state, as he tried to not only justify the gigantic DRA budget but also resist demands about financing of construction of cemevis by the state. The lack of records about mosques built in Alevi villages has also been used by the minister to reject the claims about these mosques though their existence has been confirmed by different sources for decades (Milliyet, 15 September 2013). In late 2012 State Minister Bozdağ defending size of the DRA budget, stated that mosques were built by the donations of citizens, foundations and associations. So, Bozdağ claimed, the gigantic budget was spent on Diyanet TV and staff which included imams and preachers along with recently-created position of mosque guides to work at historical mosques. Bozdağ stated that it wasn't the duty of the state to build cemevis or mosques, adding that there was no record about number of mosques built in Alevi villages (Milliyet, 30 January 2012).

Another international criticism appeared in a September 2011 New York Times article, telling Turkey to be more critical of itself and its own problems before acting as the "big brother" to other countries in the region. The article is important as it focused on DRA, its position and function to control and shape religion, deemed paradoxical in terms of secularism as DRA served and promoted one faith over the others, the article argued. The article analyzed Turkey's claims to be the model country for democratizing countries in the region during the Arab Spring. It was stated that secularism which Prime Minister Erdoğan advised other countries to adopt and defined as "all religions being equal" was yet to be achieved in his own country. According to the article DRA, called "elephant in the room", has been the biggest obstacle to achieving true secularism in Turkey through which the state controlled the dominant faith of Sunnism. In the article Alevi leader İzzettin Doğan was quoted as saying "Turkish state is secular only on paper", a claim supported with the sociologist Gunter Seufert's analysis that state controlled religion in Turkey through DRA which also united the nation as aimed by the nation-state (Milliyet, 29 September 2011).

DRA President Bardakoğlu left his post in November 2010 and Professor Mehmet Görmez, the then Deputy President, was appointed as the new President of DRA. New President Görmez then seemed to aim adopting a new, more peaceful approach, referring to differences as “richness”, using a rare kind of comment to describe pluralism. In May 2011, when new President Görmez visited the Zeytinburnu cemevi he expressed his disturbance and surprise that this ordinary visit drew so much attention as if something extraordinary and if this was a delayed visit then he would personally apologize about this delay, before saying that differences only meant richness (Milliyet, 28 May 2011).

But soon Görmez resorted to using usual approaches and discourses of DRA towards Alevis, by judging, categorizing and blaming dissenters. When DRA President Görmez, claimed that Alevism has been part of Islam and Alevi demands only meant politicization, provoked by others with “secret agendas”, again and as usual, was criticized and protested by Alevis regarding judgment and categorization of Alevism, an act also criticized as an “act of ignorance” in addition to violating secularism. In 2012, the DRA fatwah rejecting status of cemevis as place of worship and depending on historical precedent, provided the basis for the TBMM decision to reject building of a cemevi in TBMM. Regarding the matter DRA President Görmez stated that DRA could not grant status to cemevis and cemevis could not claim having a status as a place of worship as if it is a faith other than Islam. Görmez added that if the institution of dedes were stronger today the situation would have been different and not this politicized, repeating his earlier claims about dedes (Milliyet, 1 August 2012). The fatwah along the comments of Görmez were widely criticized by Alevi leaders who asked DRA to be abolished. Alevi leaders said that DRA’s presence was an act of injustice and it was not for DRA to judge or categorize Alevism, as stated many times before and after this incident. Researcher Cafer Solgun criticized DRA fatwah a “scandal”, especially coming from a Sunni institution which did not know anything about Alevism, ignoring and insulting Alevism as “heretical” (Milliyet, 12 December 2012). Despite these exchanges DRA President Görmez, in March 2012, has admitted that though it was not the duty of DRA to describe and categorize Alevism, it was also the product of 1400-years of Islamic history to identify mosque as the *only place of worship* (Milliyet, 18 March 2012).

Regarding another matter of dispute, DRA President Görmez used ‘national unity discourse’ to justify improving the content of religious culture and moral knowledge courses, repeating “umbrella” function of DRA as serving all citizens and faiths. But Görmez seemed to forget the identity, background and job of DRA staff but rather preferring to appear as an institution representing equi-distance and equality towards all faiths. In early 2013 DRA

President Görmez insistently rejected claims about DRA, repeated that DRA provided service to all citizens, regardless of faith and sect and that he hasnt witnessed any discrimination against Alevis. Görmez added that content of religious culture and moral knowledge courses could be improved to include knowledge about all faiths as such a course could only serve to bring Turkish people together. Görmez also argued that statements made by DRA did not have any political character and were prepared following a diligent research process, taking other beliefs in Islam into account as well, using a rather rare non-monist interpretation (Milliyet, 21 January 2013).

In defense of a recent, controversial matter, sending Alevi *dedes* abroad, Tourism Minister Ömer Çelik used the ‘unity discourse’ to bring Alevism under the umbrella of Islam, used instead of ‘national unity discourse’ widened to cover Islamic world, representing cooperation and embracing all Muslims (Milliyet, 30 January 2014). The peace messages of state officials appealed to Sunnis who may have felt offended when Alevis rejected ‘Islamic unity and brotherhood discourse’ as also lacking gratitude to the government paying for this trip. Though the state’s visible financial support of this trip formed another violation of secularism if the religion-related expenses of clergy of other faiths were not paid for by the state too. It was first in 2013 when the issue of the DRA paying for the expenses of 65 Alevi *dedes* to travel to Europe was met with criticism, called “teaching Alevism to Alevis” by Alevi leader Ercan Geçmez (Milliyet, 23 October 2013). A similar debate arose in early 2014 when Alevi *dedes* were sent to Najaf, where Imam Ali’s tomb is, and Kerbela, where Imam Hussein’s tomb is, as well as Mecca and Madina with the cooperation of TÜRSAB and Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Critics calling it "assimilation" reached such a level that a correction was made later to announce that *dedes* would visit Mecca and Madina, only if they chose to (Milliyet, 10 February 2014). Tourism Minister Çelik stated that such visits to embrace Islamic world in its entirety and give messages of unity, cooperation and sacred embracing should continue with the support of NGOs. Other Alevi reactions towards this umre tour was that there was no such demand and no Alevi would get involved in such a project especially during a period of allegations about government corruption and this tour could serve as window-dressing, having nothing with Alevis’ profound demands which have been voiced many times (Milliyet, 30 January 2014).

DRA justified the uniform approach of AKP and state to manage and control religion which is deemed dangerous with the potential to target unity. For this purpose DRA used the ‘umbrella organization working for unity discourse’ while re-visiting sectarianism, to address alternative religious identity claims, as a threat likely to arise in case of uncontrolled religious

pluralism. Likewise, the then President of DRA Bardakoğlu stated in 2005 that acknowledging sectarian differences and re-structuring DRA accordingly would undermine unity of the state under which DRA is a supra-religious, unique organization with some Muslim flavor, though invisible, as the continuance of Ottoman tradition (Milliyet, 9 July 2005). Likewise, Alevism and Alevi demands were constantly blamed to have a political nature, to divide the nation and country, to be silenced and rejected at all costs. Ideological connections and power struggles within Alevism have been provided to explain Alevi demands, considered “radical” by DRA. Alevi demands are also presented as the outcome of politicization rather than those arising out of real problems, signaling at “secret agenda” of ideological organizations and those in power in these organizations as exploiting good-will of Alevis who are also “good Muslims” in fact. One such example was when DRA President Görmez reported, in 2012, the loss of power by dedes as the culprit for politicization and increasing demands of Alevis (Milliyet, 1 August 2012). Similarly back in 2001 columnist Taha Akyol mentioned Reha Çamuroğlu as an important researcher who saved Alevism from the hegemony of political ideologies by defining urban Alevi identity without the left-oriented ideologies as well as presenting Alevism as a spiritual interpretation of Islam (Milliyet, 16 August 2001).

The idea of abolishing DRA and so not having an organization to oversee, control and finance the dominant faith may not be feasible as Republican traditions and continued Sunni and Ottoman traditions require a central organization. Lack of such a control is perceived with fear and suspicion, as if serving “secret agenda” of domestic and foreign enemies, as done by the state and society. But the ‘separatism discourse’ used against any claims of identity and diversity, ethnic or religious, has proven to be more problematic for a state and society which aim to become fully secular and democratic, to enjoy benefits of liberties, security, order and welfare, all to be enjoyed through pluralism. But despite all criticisms, in early 2005, a TESEV Report presented at Bilgi University suggested that there was no feasible alternative to DRA to organize state-society relations due to lack of a consensus on an alternative though DRA could not delay accepting Alevi demands anymore. It was added that reforms about religion to include non-Muslims and Alevis could not be avoided anymore while the demands of these groups should no longer be perceived and treated as “separatist” by the Turkish state and officials (Milliyet, 22 February 2005).

CHAPTER 4

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

4.1.The State of Alevi Demands

First of all, if we look at the current state of Alevi demands, especially regarding education, DRA and cemevis as presented above, which have been repeated for decades we can conclude that there have not been much progress. None of the major demands has been granted so far as the demands are deemed excessive or separatist, interpreted and presented as promoting Alevi identity which is not too compatible with the formal and uniform Turkish-Sunni identity. One such demand is about banishing of the DRA, a much-debated institution, which seemed to grow its weight, influence and power during AKP era. Accordingly, the Director of DRA has become a party in debates about Alevism, such as the legal status of cemevis, presenting a monist and rather hostile approach towards Alevis and Alevism. Cemevis and their legal status have been a long-debated issue, about which the state and DRA have again become sides, rejecting cemevis and calling them “cultural centers” or rather insulting them as “cümbüş evi” as also done by even the Prime Minister himself. The DRA and the state perceive the issue as losing ultimate control over Islam as other religions have their own organizations. In this regard Alevism is most problematic since it seems to create a sense of hostility, with its heterodox approach interpreted as a challenge to orthodox Sunnism. So cemevis continue their illegal existence in the current environment and common ground is not in the horizon yet. The last major Alevi demand is about the sphere of education where content of compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses, a legacy of 1980 coup and a major tool of Turkish-Islamic synthesis, which have been re-designed every year to ignore Alevism or include inadequate or inaccurate information about Alevism or from which Alevism in textbooks at times. The much-debated and rejected compulsory nature of these courses remained while extra courses about religion were added to the curriculum as elective courses. But these new, elective courses became compulsory *de facto*, with the support of

various indirect practices to reach this aim, such as administrative pressures or simply lack of teachers to teach other elective courses, complicating the situation even further. The other Alevi demands were either not met, as was the case for prevention of discrimination and insulting Alevism or accepting and apologizing for past violence against Alevis, or converted into an acceptable form, as was the case for the demand about transforming Madımak fire site into Madımak museum which became a science and culture center instead (Milliyet, 30 June 2011).

The 2013 Democratization Package and the preceding Alevi workshops and Opening of 2009 bore no concrete results for Alevis as none of their demands were answered and instead they were “given” some concessions, not demanded by Alevis. But these events became public ones, functioning as public relations tools for the ruling party, inside and outside Turkey, to demonstrate how Turkey is transformed into a fully democratic country to support the *New Turkey* rhetoric. In addition, at different times, AKP tried to use the clientelistic model, used and succeeded to draw the Kurdish votes before, to incorporate Alevis but failed to do so this time. It would not be too inaccurate to say that much has not changed during the AKP era for Alevi rights and liberties except for more visibility and some dialogue with the state though Alevis consider this rather a monologue.

4.2.Discourses:

If we look at the discourses used during this era, towards Alevis and Alevism as well as Alevi demands, an interesting picture emerges that there is not much change or progress in that sphere either as decades-old rhetoric has been repeated in every possible situation by the state as well as most parties involved.

The unity principle and rhetoric is used against Alevi claims, accompanied with blaming Alevis as “separatist”, and when Alevis are granted rights individually in courts these court decisions are not enforced, even those of the ECtHR. Along these lines, the problem has been translated into a rather religious one, by involving DRA in relation with a rather wide range of issues, or ignoring Alevism as a separate order altogether with reference to Islam and Imam Ali as common heritage. The government used the “unity” discourse intensively and extensively to challenge Alevis, referring to unity as a nation or being all Muslims. The ‘unity discourse’ is also transformed to reject Alevi demands in a different way, referring to “lack of unity” on Alevis’ side as the culprit for the government not proposing a solution during the

Alevi Opening or 2013 Democratization Package. The ‘unity discourse’ becomes ‘us versus them’ to be used by the government when facing Sunnis to refer to the idiosyncrasy of Alevis, facing and questioning Muslim identity of Alevis. Those challenging unity, such as Alevis, need to be questioned in relation with their faith as Islam, interpreted as Sunni Islam as the *true path*, requires ‘unity in Islam’, the monism of faith and its principles, and ‘unity around Islam’, unity of the Muslims, the *umma*.

Alevis, on the other hand, refrained from using the term, or being called, “minority” as they not only found it derogatory, owing to the Ottoman legacy, but it sounded separatist to the staunchly nationalists as well as Alevis themselves. The ‘separatism discourse’, based on old fears and suspicions towards “others”, has been much used by previous governments and the AKP when claims and demands about identity are made. Historically Alevis embraced the role of guardianship of the nation-state with its Kemalist secularism which was deemed preferable by Alevis to the AKP’s version of secularism with the increasing weight of Sunnism. So the ‘diversity and identity discourse’ used by Alevis during the 1990s has been replaced with the ‘equal citizenship and democracy for all discourse’ which also served the purpose of forming an umbrella alliance with others asking for more rights and democracy. It is important to note that, using this same strategy, an umbrella alliance was formed by AKP when approaching the Turkish liberals until the 2010 referendum. During the referendum campaign “yes but not enough” slogan was used by AKP to draw liberals when voting for changes into the 1982 Constitution as the “yes-sayers” proposed liberalism, freedom and democracy to replace the *Old Turkey* with the *New Turkey*. The last, related with ‘equal citizenship and democracy for all’, discourse used by Alevis is about “protection of secularism against sharia, the ‘secret agenda of AKP’, to appeal to and so form another alliance with seculars who also depend on ‘secret agenda of AKP and Islamists discourse’, a discourse used a lot by CHP.

The other, though much rarely used, discourses of AKP include pluralism and multiculturalism, inclusiveness and tolerance, referring to the Ottoman past, which are rather used when facing the West or criticisms arise about using the ‘us versus them discourse’ which is used when facing Sunnis. Another discourse related with the past is the one used, by AKP and BDP at times, to blame CHP regarding its authoritarian past, ‘its “dark legacy’’. In this regard ‘brotherhood discourse’, also rarely used by AKP, refers to similarities with Alevis with a vague tone, without specifying whether it is ethnicity or faith that is shared. CHP’s discourse also oscillates between brotherhood and socialist, humanist values when facing Alevis while the generalist, all-embracing ‘national unity discourse’ is used when facing the

general or Sunni majority population. MHP, being a party of nationalism shaped around ethno-religiosity, depends much on unity of nation, flag and religion, its holy trilogy, as the most common discourse. But Turkish Alevis are also included in MHP's discourse as representatives of "Anatolian Islam" at times, especially when AKP takes concrete steps such as Alevi Opening. BDP, being rather versatile, uses 'brotherhood discourse', referring to unity and similarity, to connect with Alevis as Kurds, along with 'fight to end suffering and discrimination discourse', as those suffering and discriminated against as "others". BDP, claiming identity recognition, does not use 'equal citizenship and fighting for the rights of all discourse', including the Sunni Turks, much. Alevis prefer the 'equality and equal citizenship discourse' along with 'democracy for all discourse', without making identity claims, being closer to the state discourse of 'national unity' as well as the fact that Turkish elements in Alevi population and faith being distanced from the Kurdish unity discourse may be playing a part. Last but not least, DRA, being a representative of the state, also uses the general, well-known discourse of 'national unity'. DRA's use is shaped around religion of course, in addition to the 'separatism discourse' which is used when faced with challenges or criticism, like other state institutions have done historically. Though it should be remembered that with the 1982 Constitution, article 136, DRA is given the duty of providing "cooperation and unity" so the 'national unity discourse', also used by the DRA, may have some legitimate basis when used by the DRA, unlike other parties which seem to be using such a discourse rather with pragmatism.

It can be concluded that with the exception of AKP and BDP other parties have a rather narrow set of discourses used regarding Alevis and the practice of Alevi faith, focusing mostly on 'national unity'. This narrow set of discourses could be signaling consistency of identity and agenda with the usage of universal discourses, such as the 'democracy and equal citizenship' discourse used by Alevis, as well as meeting the convergent expectations of target groups, such as Alevis aiming support of Turkish citizens and foreign authorities which converge on 'democracy and equal citizenship' or MHP which targets nationalists with its trilogy. The state of the other actor using a narrow set of discourses, CHP, seems more problematic as it tries to be "everything to everyone" but also forgetting that expectations of different groups diverge and rather conflict, such as Alevis and conservative Sunnis.

On the other hand, the use of wide set of discourses could be caused by seeking recognition of diversity or union of those different, such as done by the BDP, or promoting conflicting discourses to appeal to target groups with conflicting expectations, such as the AKP seeking Sunni votes but also having to appeal to foreign authorities with reforms. AKP

discourses shift between ‘unity discourse’ and its by-products, such as ‘brotherhood discourse’ in addition to the less popular discourses of ‘us versus them’ and ‘democracy for all’, used when faced with criticism or the right audience. But here it should also be noted that AKP increasingly resorted to adversariality, leaving ‘democracy discourse’ aside, after 2010 Referendum. After this date AKP seems to have lost hope of receiving Alevi votes and instead focused on conservative Sunnis and polarization as a strategy, especially accelerated during and after the Gezi riots. BDP also has a wide repertoire of discourses, including ‘diversity and identity discourse’, ‘unity of Kurds’ and ‘unity of “others” discourse’ and lastly ‘democracy and equal citizenship discourse’, though much rarely used.

In addition, many negative discourses are used to either attack the rivals, referring to the problematic aspects of the past such as the ‘dark legacy of CHP’, or protect the popular ‘unity discourse’, such as ‘separatism discourse’ or ‘conspiracy by enemies discourse’, both employed to attack the identity claims which are perceived as threatening ‘unity’. AKP seems to be the party depending most on the negative discourses, used when faced with dissent or criticism, when compared with other parties with the exception of CHP and sometimes Alevis which depend on the ‘secret agenda of Islamists discourse’ more than any other party.

Regarding the transformation of discourses, Alevis shifted the discourses they used to defend their demands from ‘diversity and identity discourse’ towards ‘democracy and equal citizenship discourse’. The ruling party AKP has depended on both versions of unity, ‘national unity’ and ‘unity around religion’ though the securitized version of national unity based on Islam has gained more prominence during the AKP era. Though the ‘national unity’ and ‘unity around religion’ discourses both promote unity, this union is not a union of peoples around an ideal or goal but rather ‘sameness’ or homogenization of the citizens. But ethnicity is more underlined in ‘national unity discourse’ while ‘unity around religion discourse’ questions faith of citizens, promoting Islam and Sunnism as the core of Turkish identity. The dissenters, or the “others” claiming a different identity, are marginalized along with their demands and identity. Lastly, it is also important to note that in the preceding sections the discourses follow a highly repetitive and circular path, demonstrating not only the popularity of some discourses, unity discourse and its variations, but also the logic of those opposing Alevi demands: a loop to reproduce and establish the status quo around monism, rejecting change or progress as threats either owing to fears or pragmatism to exploit such fears.

In the following section, an analysis of the context, the *zeitgeist* in relation with the past, will be provided to offer a more accurate picture about the discourses used during the era. The context and the discourses have a relationship where events, attitudes and

perceptions reproduce each other and the status quo in a manner which becomes more problematic in time. Societal issues such as the refusal to take responsibility for the past and increasing conservatism in the form of considering other lifestyles illegitimate work together to conceal the injustice and justify the status quo in the eyes of the members of the majority group. The state and political parties, as an attempt to draw public support and votes, also refrain from questioning the inequality between citizens and so the ambivalence of the state of democracy and secularism. As a result, the state and demands of the “others” become intertwined, long-term issues to be treated with “tolerance”, or attacked back as traitors or pawns, both arguments based on the remnants of the past, while the system reproduces and justifies injustice and inequality without ever giving up claims about full democracy and secularism.

4.3.Discussion:

If we look at the society, we can conclude that before the state taking action to make legal and structural changes, the society needs a transformation to face the past and mistakes done, in the form of violence and discrimination against “the others”, be them religious or ethnic minorities. The past needs to be faced to make amends to those who suffered and continue suffering for no reason other than being “different” and demanding to have their identity deemed equal with that of the majority and others, without any conditions. Accordingly, in December 2013, in Abant Platform the French efforts to reconcile during the post-Protestant massacres period in France were given as an example to investigate the past as a way to address the violence against Alevis (Milliyet, 9 December 2013). But the past has not even been accepted by the majority which does not seem to be disturbed by the events of the past though these events have become public many times with all the gruelling details such as the level of violence during Maraş killings or Madımak fire. Yılmaz Ensaroğlu from SETA, a psychologist, reports that the situation traumatizes the majority, Sunnis, as well. Ensaroğlu claims that it is necessary for perpetrators to accept the responsibility and trauma for their actions to compensate and build a lasting peace. The general attitude seems to mirror that taken regarding other violent events which blame Turks or Sunnis as the perpetrators, as in the case of Armenian “Issue” (Milliyet, 14 January 2013).

With conservatism on the rise, there are pressures in education, work life and everyday life to not look “different” and be accepted for “others”, functioning as the cause for assimilation while minorities increasingly adopt the traditions and practices of the majority

due to the pressure. A well-known source, Toprak et al. report (2008) suggests that the situation is dire for “others” in cities of Anatolia with increasing conservatism that is manifested as intolerance towards those different. So many “others” have begun to act like the majority such as fasting in Ramadan or just hiding their differences without changing them (Milliyet, 21 December 2008). Professor Didem Aydın of Hacettepe University Law School considers fear of ‘differences’ dangerous especially, saying “democracy is about managing to live with not only challenges but also the richness offered by this diversity, taking it as an advantage”. Professor Ahmet Insel of Sorbonne University is more critical as he thinks that Turkish society has not become a society yet as being a society means creating the concept of “us” which includes diversity without presenting “others” as enemies within. Insel adds that the fight over identities represents the transition from authoritarianism to democracy as each group fears and rejects the other (Milliyet, 2 March 2014). In addition to surveys that confirm conservatism, a concrete action about increasing conservatism supported and endorsed by the government, the law about alcohol consumption restrictions legalized in late May 2013 also disturbed Alevis as alcohol is not banned in Alevism and they perceive such restrictions as pressure put on them and their lifestyle which is different from the conservative Sunni lifestyle. The direction of change in the society as well as survey results demonstrating that conservatism takes the form of seeing ways and lifestyles other than own as “illegitimate”, such as Kalaycıoğlu and Çarkoğlu’s 2010 survey, have grown concerns about future of democracy in Turkey or if there is any such future for democracy in Turkey (Milliyet, 31 May 2010).

Alevis are perceived as a monolithical entity by the majority, in line with the much popular unity of state and need for uniformity in Turkey, both directed towards and requiring monism in state, nation and faith. The unity and uniformity perceptions are shared by both the conservative religious which have become even a bigger force with the rise of conservatism and the seculars due to the inheritance of Republican culture which also promoted uniformity. As a result, Alevis are expected to act as a monolithical entity where differences are to be minimized, using the Sunni-Turkish perceptions about faith and groups. Here the reference points are strong collectivism, state tradition to emphasize unity against “diversity acting to destroy unity” and the one and true faith system supported with strict structure and rules. The impossibility of acting as a monolithical entity for a group between five and fifteen million people is missed in this argument while the diversity regarding the people and their faith is probably missed as well. The possible culprit may be the general Turkish perception and understanding of faith and group identity so that ‘lack of unity among Alevis discourse’ is

poularly used as a criticism regarding Alevi demands. In addition, the 'lack of unity discourse' is used as an excuse to reject Alevi demands by AKP. Dr. Aykan Erdemir of METU, regarding 'lack of unity among Alevi discourse' used to reject Alevi demands, stated that Premier Erdoğan should refrain from expecting a solo voice from Alevi, just like in Sunnism. Dr. Erdemir stated that as Alevism is not a monolithical entity any group Erdoğan is in touch with will express their own views and not that of all Alevi. Dr. Erdemir also drew attention to Sunnis' lack of understanding of diversity, assuming monism and criticizing when its lacking, and approaching Alevi with a sentimental and patronizing approach, especially done by AKP and Erdoğan, to turn the relationship into an even more adversarial one (Milliyet, 3 December 2007).

During and after Gezi riots, the labeling of dissent with the use of government rhetoric, such as the Prime Minister himself calling protesters "pawns", "atheists" or "those without any thoughts", in addition to that of the riots as "Alevi riots", have all served to polarize the nation around the cleavages of Sunni-Alevi and religious-secular. Polarization and paranoia seem to have reached such an unprecedented level in April 2014 when, following Gezi riots and the December 2013 fight between Gülen movement and AKP, the disappearance of a three-year old boy was announced in newspapers, comments made in the social media were very disturbing. Many comments were underlining the "suspicion" that the boy's family was Alevi and the media frenzy was a "trick", a provocation by and Gülen supporters to begin an "uprising" against the government by the supporters of Gezi riots (Milliyet, 5 April 2014).

After the Alevism and Alevi Workshop was held at Aydın University in January 2014 an announcement was made that no sect should be treated as superior to any other (Milliyet, 9 December 2012). It was also underlined that Alevi issue included elements which are important for the whole society and one such issue is about its connection with another centuries-long, acute problem, Kurdish issue. The Kurdish issue which has been going on for decades also contributed to the Alevi issue where hostility and suspicion has been created towards both sides based on a long history of violence and discrimination towards Alevi. The situation is supported with the antagonism and suspicion of Sunnis towards Alevi which are thought not only different but also not loyal as they are thought to be rather supportive of Iranian Shiite or Alevi in other states in the region, in line with 'pawns of those targeting the national unity discourse'. Interesting enough, such suspicions or accusations have never been made towards the Sunnis even when governments have made their "brotherhood" with other

Sunni states or peoples clear and obvious. One such case was after Arab Spring when AKP began assuming the leadership role of Sunnis in the region, supported with references to soft power and Ottomanism. Another more interesting fact is that Alevis claim their faith to be as distant from Shiism as it is from Sunnism given that displays of faith are commonplace in both faiths while Alevism is more spiritual. A similar comment was made in August 2013 by Kemal Derviş, former State Minister, as he wrote an article that the three sources of polarization in Turkey are about Islamism-secularism, Kurdish-Turkish and sectarian, Sunni-Alevi. Derviş stated that these issues intersect each other as they are not independent so any solution has to address all three or otherwise any solution addressing only one or two is doomed to fail (Milliyet, 18 August 2013). In the current environment, Kurdish issue seems more likely to be addressed and maybe solved at some point, due to power dynamics that make Kurds a rising power in the region as well as use of violence that meant a high cost, in many forms, of the fighting which has been going on for decades. It is yet to be seen if Alevis will also enjoy the benefits of this environment addressing Kurdish demands, with a spillover effect, or not.

One of the biggest fears voiced by Alevis has been about assimilation or Sunnification, known as a general strategy taken by Islamists towards Alevis (Hale and Özbudun, 2011). In this regard, building of mosques in Alevi villages and compulsory religious culture and moral knowledge courses have been among the most debated issues, both products of post-1980 coup environment. But the latter practise has not been used much recently though the compulsory religious education course acquired a new status during AKP years, leading to a long and heated debate with the Alevis. Other than official practices and pressures, as explained above, with increasing conservatism which is expressed as societal pressures and discrimination in various spheres of life, Alevis have begun to act like Sunnis do, to stay employed or continue living in a region dominated by Sunnis and their practices. The product of a civil initiative to begin mutual understanding, the 2013 mosque-cemevi project was also been named as one such project, protested and rejected vehemently by most Alevis.

Accentuating these negative conditions in this context, a foreign event to become part of the domestic agenda, the Syrian civil war, also seems to have played a crucial role in terms of increasing the visibility and depth of the Sunni-Alevi cleavage. In addition, state officials and especially Prime Minister Erdoğan made comments to separate Alevis and Sunnis, referring to the Syrian civil war as one between Alawites and Sunnis in Syria and depicting Sunnis as being discriminated against with the uprising targeting injustice. The high

unemployment in the region, coupled with the continuous influx of immigrants from Syria following the friction now claimed to be provoked and supported by the Turkish government acting as a side, have all contributed to the regional tension which is deemed dangerous by both domestic and foreign analysts.

If we focus on the AKP, Sultan Tepe (2008) states that AKP tends to view Alevi as a marginal or esoteric group and so refutes their claims while discerning Islam as a homogenous practice in need of sheltering against heterodoxy. The pluralism AKP, at times, preaches extends to ethnic diversity, Kurds, and not religious, the Alevi, Tepe suggests. This tendency is stronger especially now with regional developments, such as Kurdish forces fighting against radical Islamists in neighboring countries, coupled with Kurds' control over energy sources and impending Presidential elections in Turkey where Kurds are also likely to play a strategic role, given the size of their population. None of these advantages that lead to Kurds being taken seriously by the state and government are enjoyed by Alevi, except the size of their population. So the outcomes appear as defining and questioning Alevi faith as whether part of Islam, to direct them in the right direction of the mosque, or rather as a cultural entity divorced from Islam, proposed to be governed under the umbrella of Ministry of Culture and Tourism. According to Erdoğan and AKP, the rejection of Alevi's rights as a sect within Islam doesn't mean a paradox regarding AKP's claims about protecting pluralism as Islam is adequately represented and served with the DRA so Alevi would need no other means and organization. AKP leaders and bureaucrats categorize Alevism as within Islam as the resort to justify that there is no need for cemevis as mosque is the only place of worship in Islam, insisting on monism and rejecting all other interpretations in Islam, acting like religious experts. DRA Presidents also got involved in all these matters, as it has become the tradition, making comments and providing judgement as religious scholars who are also top bureaucrats in charge of a public institution claiming to serve all faiths as a supra-religious body, to categorize and judge Alevism each time Alevi challenge existence of an institution like DRA in a secular state or voice their other demands.

In the pre-AKP period, the state has enforced several anti-democratic, anti-secular practices such as keeping a record of people as Alevi, including current CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu in the post-February 28 period, or the courts deciding that threatening Alevi is to be protected under religious freedom. The situation today, though these practices are deemed as those of *Old Turkey* by government supporters (Milliyet, 24 May 2014), does not seem too bright for Alevi in *New Turkey* as violence towards Alevi has not disappeared.

Even as recent as late May 2014 a working-class Alevi neighborhood in Istanbul, Okmeydanı, has witnessed riots and clashes with the police during which two Alevis died, one by a police bullet, and the police investigation could not name the perpetrator after a month. To make matters worse, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that he was surprised how the police forces could control themselves, a comment to lead to more riots and protests in Turkey and abroad (Milliyet, 26 May 2014; Milliyet, 24 May 2014). In the recent case of violence against another Alevi citizen, Berkin Elvan, who was only 15 years old when shot by a teargas cannister in the head and died after being in coma for months, Prime Minister Erdoğan who, rather than telling condolences, continued blaming late Elvan and his family that the boy was not innocent and rather a terrorist, throwing stones at police officers (Milliyet, 15 March 2014).

In Turkey, the project of nation-building around shared ethnicity and faith failed to convert an empire into a modern nation based on civic citizenship, transforming the nation-building and citizenship concepts of the 1920s and 30s into those of the contemporary world where liberal order prevails to replace duties and obligations with rights and liberties. This archaic tendency and definition became rather dangerous as political parties and governments began exploiting cleavages and fault lines. The fear and suspicion towards “others” was made even worse with the rhetoric and even actions, passive or active, of state officials and politicians directed at the minorities since the beginning of electoral competition, multi-party democracy, in 1946. The result was that the nation and state got frozen in the past, 1920s and 30s and even the Ottoman period, with nostalgia to bring back the past into a very different world with different requirements in terms of citizenship, rights and democracy in general. In this environment, archaic and rather vague discourses such as ‘national unity’ bring the masses together against the enemy identified by the politicians and state officials, saving the day but endangering the future in many forms. It should be noted here that the very popular ‘national unity discourse’ works in an efficient manner, appealing to both seculars, for whom nationalism is shaped around unity and sameness, and the religious, for whom monism applies to all spheres of life. Similarly, in the 2009 Religious Freedom Report the culprit for deteriorating secularism has been explained as Turkish national identity, and the state lately, being increasingly infused with Sunni Islam to set and exacerbate the “national unity” discourse used against dissent such as alternative identity claims (Milliyet, 29 October 2009). The conclusion reached in the 2006 Religious Freedom Report was that nationalism and ethnical or religious intolerance were so intertwined that they could not be recognized

separately in many incidents. The Report claimed that as a result non-Sunni Muslims and non-Muslims are perceived with suspicion and hostility while religious pluralism is interpreted and labeled as “a threat against national unity and Islam” (Milliyet, 16 September 2006).

Accordingly, despite the pro status quo claims that Alevi demands suggest separation of the country, Alevis demand practising full democracy and removal of pressures and attacks targeting individual rights and freedoms. In many instances they have voiced this fact and that the society in its entirety, refrained from supporting their demands, not perceiving the current conditions as working against the welfare of all the Turkish people. The demands of Alevis and other ethno-religious minorities about establishing and enforcing full secularism are also related with an important sphere to be addressed urgently to define the future of the country and its direction: full democracy.

In this regard perceptions of democracy and citizenship, held by all Turkish citizens but especially those of the dominant group of Sunni Turks, are pivotal. In Turkey, democracy has not become to be perceived as an ideal and ends to protect everyone but rather means to meet needs and reach goals. While democracy is perceived in a pragmatic way the state is sacralized to prevent the questioning of actions of and discourses used by the state officials. Likewise, Dr. Aykan Erdemir of METU suggests that lack of progress on Alevi issue is caused by the lack of foundations regarding concepts such as equal citizenship and rights of citizens. Dr. Erdemir states that focusing on short-term solutions and AKP’s Alevi Opening fall into this category. In addition, the majority position became to mean putting pressure on others in a so-called democracy, also used to justify simplifying democracy to electoral democracy, using the minimal definition to define a rather *deficient democracy* (Milliyet, 3 December 2007). Regarding this tendency, Professor Baskın Oran draws attention to the majority rule understanding of democracy in Turkey, representing the understanding dominant in the early decades of the 20th century before it evolved into a system of pluralism and diversity. Professor Oran claims that dominance of the majority is much worse than that of the minority, as is the case in Turkey now (Milliyet, 2 March 2014). In this regard, Mardin’s concept of center-periphery (1973) used to describe the situation in Turkey can be deemed to have turned upside-down during the last decade. The periphery, masses of poor peasants, has moved to cities though Alevis, a part of the periphery as rural population and not sharing power, have stayed in the periphery due to Alevi-Sunni distinction. The Alevi-Sunni distinction has grown stronger with the Sunni periphery replacing the defeated center of the

elite while Islamic powerhouses struggled to become the sole source of power. The increasing polarization and the feeling of discrimination among the “losers“ of the new system, the seculars and Alevis, reached a level that a columnist close to the government circles, Nagehan Alçı, suggested that the government was planning to present a new Democratization Package. This Package would offer more liberalization this time, targeting Alevis and seculars. Alçı stated a government official said that, despite being rejected by these two groups, the government was determined to increase and guarantee the rights and freedoms of these two groups. The state official claimed that these groups which became the sociological minorities in Turkey would be integrated with the majority and feel like first-class citizens. This description and attitude is worth attention as it underlines the inequality between these groups, in numbers, and so those with power, representing majority, would grant rights to the “others” (Milliyet, 2 March 2014).

Just like Turkish democracy, *a la* Turkish secularism has taken a similar path and so the form of ambivalence with paradoxes, though presented officially as “staunch secularism” to serve democracy and modernization on paper. In *new Turkey* old secularism’s inconsistencies, such as rejecting public displays of Islam and alternative ethno-religious identities, seem to be replaced by new inconsistencies, such as allowing and even promoting public displays of Islam since the removal of headscarf ban in 2013, while the pressure on alternative religious identities is doubled. Tepe (2008) argues that the relationship between secularism and religion is not a simple, binary one but rather a complicated one where the two change as they interact and become fused in each other, in the form of sacralization and internal secularization. In accordance, the major and most debated elements of secularism, DRA, religious culture and moral knowledge courses and IPSs continue, and their weight and existence as symbols of the ambivalent and rather hybrid Turkish secularism are even accentuated. In the meantime secular institutions such as state and nation adopt rather religious characteristics in the form of sacralization, increasingly centered on faith and monism. In response to criticisms about secularism taking a local characteristic can be given India as an alternative model developed in another non-Western, developing context, without sacrificing the very basic elements of neutrality of state in a developing context. India also employed secularization as a means to modernization but rather used the *principled distance* approach with the state refraining from any interference or involvement with any faith except for when individual freedoms are at stake.

The other major issue is about power as those involved try to protect their status and power as individuals and groups as meeting Alevi demands and solving the issue would mean less power or loss of relative power so solving issues does not seem too attractive for majority. In addition to consolidating power through offering no solution, providing solution by answering demands also means the risk of losing votes among the majority voters: the Sunnis. Cem Foundation President Professor İzzettin Doğan says that granting Alevi rights is a risky issue as it may cost supporting parties Sunni votes (Milliyet, 23 January 2013). Though Doğan added that the matter is one beyond faith and rather of democracy and social peace where neglect can cause social unrest in the future. But the right-wing parties, Islamists and center-right parties, rather use neglect or assimilation, Sunnification, strategy toward Alevis (Hale & Özbudun, 2011) as they depend on Sunni votes as their strong and permanent base. Parties on the left or those depending on identity politics, such as CHP and BDP, try to woo Alevis with different discourses as “brothers” or “secular citizens” to bargain with Alevis as they have a serious vote potential but without granting any rights. As accepting Alevi demands and supporting their cause would mean losing the Sunni votes, with a much bigger vote potential than that of Alevis, no political party can afford to fight for Alevi cause, to realize their demands. As a result these demands and Alevi issue are perceived and presented as about “identity”, bringing up fears about separatism, not to be linked with democracy and equal citizenship.

Despite the negative attitude explained above, regarding this controversial matter some reforms have been made in the last decade. But the best description of the Turkish-style reforms, in general and also of the era, can be summarized as “Mehter March Steps”, two steps forward followed by a step back, as improvements and change have been followed by a setback. Though Alevis have gained more visibility with their group becoming more debated, the majority of this debate has focused on the religious elements of this equation, trying to define Alevism whether it is a part of Islam or not. The only exception is about a gain or threat of losing a gain such as the case of EU membership, weakening international reputation or ties with the US that provokes a reaction and action on the Turkish side. So reforms or at least speeches follow to offer more democratization for all, to bring no real change or meet any Alevi demands ever except for cosmetic ones such as changing the name of a university in 2013. In the meantime, when we look abroad in the form of reports or reactions by foreign states or important politicians or bureaucrats, the era represents acceptance of Alevi faith and identity at state level abroad, unlike the practices in Turkey. Turkish actions, attitude and

rhetoric are criticized abroad in a consistent manner, especially regarding Turkey's attempts at becoming a full member of the European Union and seeking recognition as a democratic and secular state. The recognition-seeking has shaped not only the pre-AKP era but also the AKP era as a status symbol and token of approval regarding the ultimate destination reached: becoming a civilized nation. The recognition as a democratic, secular state, functioning as a pragmatic tool again, is also expected to support and enhance economic success with the approval of major financial centers to signal stability and sustainability of the system in the form of the familiar liberal democracy.

The issues discussed in this section seem to pertain to the Alevi issue but the political discourses about Alevis can not be discussed and analyzed without understanding the debate on the evolution and state of the Alevi issue as such an understanding would provide us with the power structure as well as the factors and determinants of dominance. Monism, a remnant of the past which has determined the zeitgeist for the majority in terms of fears, perceptions and attitudes, seems to have affected the establishment of national identity around sameness and the political scene around unity. Political discourses based on unity used to gain voter support and attack dissent, voiced in terms of seeking recognition for diversity, seem to be as popular as ever in Turkey though the ethnicity basis of these discourses seem to have shifted towards a religious basis. This study concludes that the outcome for the “religiously different”, the Alevis in this study, has been negative in terms of being granted equal rights to practice their faith. But the status quo reproduced and justified in a relational manner, with the past and the perception and presentation of different actors and problems, becomes harder to justify as Turkey aims to become a global powerhouse.

Though the issues are complex and intertwined one important step appears as re-defining secularism to apply basic tenets such as state neutrality towards all faiths and guaranteeing rights and freedoms of all, including non-believers. The other step is about removing legal obstacles, such as making constitutional and legal changes which are incessantly provided by officials and especially politicians as obstacles to meeting Alevi demands. The other important issue here is about denationalizing citizenship (Kadıoğlu, 2007; Düzgıt and Keyman, 2012), to define it with rights and freedoms rather than duties, limitations and exceptions and so bringing it into today's world. For these changes to be established and internalized at societal level, societal deliberations are necessary (Düzgıt and Keyman, 2012) which could also transform the society, given the increasing conservatism, polarization and tradition of ignoring mistakes and past, as explained above. Regarding the

related issue of development and modernization, they should not mean and so be measured only in economic and financial terms but also cover other spheres of life, to make quality of life better in all possible aspects. Contemporary Turkish citizens have become model consumers with the booming retail businesses, especially in the form of shopping malls located inside and outside cities, during AKP era but this consumption boom has not transformed the lifestyle to a more liberal one, respecting and protecting differences.

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