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## CHAPTER 9

### THE ALEVI DIASPORA IN FRANCE: CHANGING RELATIONS WITH THE HOME AND HOST STATE IN THE 2000s

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#### ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes the repercussions of the changing political atmosphere in France and Turkey since the early 2000s for French Alevis. More specifically, it examines how the leadership of the Federation of Alevi Unions in France (*Fédération Union des Alévis en France*, FUAF) has responded to critical political developments, including the Alevi Opening, the outbreak of the Gezi Park protests, the 2017 constitutional referendum, the proliferation of new Alevi organizations, and Turkey's growing influence over its diaspora in France. A careful examination of organizational documents and news sources in English, French, and Turkish, and interviews with Alevi representatives as well as with Turkish and French officials show that, since the early 2000s, FUAF leaders' relations with the Turkish government have deteriorated against the backdrop of the rise of political Islam in Turkey and the development of a biased diaspora engagement policy that favors Sunni Islamic and newly established Alevi organizations over the FUAF. As FUAF leaders have felt increasingly excluded by their origin country, they have established closer relations with French authorities. The FUAF has reinforced its ties with French policy-makers by serving as a key dialogue and project partner and an ally in the French government's fight against religious extremism.

#### KEYWORDS

Alevi diaspora, France, Turkish diaspora policy, AKP, transnationalism

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the Alevi community's changing relations with the Turkish and French governments over the last two decades. It contributes to the Alevi studies literature in two key ways. First, unlike the majority of the existing works that examine Alevis' identity and mobilization either from a home or host state

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perspective, it looks at how the interaction between the two affects Alevis. Second, given that the Alevi diaspora<sup>2</sup> literature has mostly focused on Alevis in Germany, this chapter broadens our understanding of the Alevi émigré community by offering fresh insights into Alevis in France, which remains an understudied group.

France is one of the most popular emigration destinations for Alevis after Germany. Similar to its counterpart in Turkey, the Alevi movement in France is multifaceted due to disagreement among Alevi leaders regarding the historical identity, definition, demands, and practices of Alevism. A significant issue of contention revolves around the question of whether Alevism should be situated inside or outside Islam (Erman and Göker, 2000; Massicard, 2003). Alevis in France form a transnational community whose identity and organizational activities are shaped by the social and political context of their homeland and host state.

Since the early 2000s, a series of political developments in Turkey have affected the Alevi diaspora in France. Following the Justice and Development Party's (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) ascension to power in 2002, Turkey underwent a regime transformation. The reinforcement of Sunni Islamist populism in domestic affairs and the implementation of a sectarian foreign policy reflect this transformation. Turkey's regime change has also led to the crystallization of a new diaspora policy. Turkey's recently-formed diaspora policy hinges upon several institutions. Key among them is the Union of International Democrats (*Uluslararası Demokratlar Birliği*, UID, previously named *Avrupalı Türk Demokratlar Birliği*, UETD), an umbrella organization established in 2004 to streamline Turkish immigrant organizations' political lobbying activities.<sup>3</sup> The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, YTB) is another institution founded by the Turkish government to strengthen ties with the Turkish diaspora. The YTB came into existence in 2010 and is charged with the administration of diaspora affairs. In addition, the Turkish government has consolidated the position of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, Diyanet) in Europe in recent years (Arkilic, 2020a). While these institutions have played an instrumental role in redefining Turkey's role as an emigrant-sending country, they have aggravated the Alevi diaspora's alienation by empowering pro-government organizations and by sidelining Alevi organizations that define Alevism outside the contours of the official nationalist-religious (Turkish Sunni Muslim) identity narrative (Arkilic, 2020b).

The social and political climate in France has also changed dramatically over the last two decades. The rise of Islamic terrorism, as evidenced by the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan terrorist attacks in 2015, the Nice truck attack in 2016, and the beheading of a French school teacher in 2020, has triggered anti-Muslim sentiments in France. While Sunni Muslims have found themselves at the center of debates concerning Islamophobia and terrorism, Alevis have reconstructed their identity and activities and stood out as a secular and progressive interlocutor for French policy-makers. The reproduction of a positive Alevi image by the French media and policy circles and the improvement of

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<sup>2</sup> The term "diaspora" can be defined as temporary or permanent extra-territorial groups that interact with their origin states (Gamlen, 2008, 4).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the history and goals of the UID, please see "*Hakkımızda* [About Us]" at: <https://u-i-d.org/hakkimizda/#>. Last accessed on December 9, 2020.

diplomatic relations between Alevi representatives and French bureaucrats have created new political opportunities for French Alevis.

This chapter focuses on the ramifications of the changing political atmosphere in Turkey and France since the early 2000s for the Alevi diaspora in France. More specifically, I examine how the leaders of the Federation of Alevi Unions in France (*Fédération Union des Alévis en France*, FUAF), the largest and most active Alevi organization in France, have responded to critical political developments that took place in their homeland and host state. These include the Alevi Opening (*Alevi Açılımı*), the Sunnification of Turkish domestic and foreign policy, and the French government's increasing interest in Alevis. Even though Alevis in France have long felt excluded by the Turkish state, their marginalization by the Turkish state has intensified over the last two decades against the backdrop of the development of a Turkish diaspora policy that promotes Sunni-Muslim nationalism in the Alevi transnational space. These developments have led FUAF officials to distance themselves from their homeland more than ever. French Alevis' deepening distrust toward Turkey has triggered many homeland-oriented Alevi political rallies and campaigns launched in France. In the meantime, the rise of Sunni extremism in France have brought Alevis to the forefront as a dialogue partner and an ally for the French government. In other words, while Alevis in France feel discriminated against by their homeland, they have aligned more with their host state in recent years. The FUAF's growing political mobilization, visibility, and recognition in France is seen as a positive development by Alevi leaders. However, the FUAF's political actions are still predominantly driven by homeland-related concerns. This orientation slows down their localization. The analysis presented in this chapter draws from a careful examination of organizational documents and news sources in English, French, and Turkish, and interviews conducted with Alevi representatives as well as with Turkish and French officials between 2013 and 2019. The next section will delve into the history of the Alevi diaspora in France.

## THE HISTORY OF THE ALEVI DIASPORA IN FRANCE

The size of the Turkish population in France is estimated at 650,000.<sup>4</sup> The majority of Alevis emigrated to France between the 1970s and 1980s. There are approximately 150,000 Alevis in France.<sup>5</sup> Alevi expatriates established their first organizations in Strasbourg and Metz in the early 1980s. These organizations were mainly concerned with social, cultural, and religious activities, such as gatherings with socio-religious leaders (*dede*) and spiritual meetings (*cem* or *muhabbet*) (Koşulu, 2013, 266).

The influx of Turkish political dissidents and asylum seekers into Europe in the aftermath of the 1980 Turkish military coup led Alevi organizations in France to shift their focus from cultural and religious services to ideological and political activities. In this period, Alevi organizations tended to merge with secular, left-wing, and Kurdish

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<sup>4</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2020). “*Relations between Turkey and France*.” Retrieved from: [www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-france.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-france.en.mfa). Last accessed on December 7, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> A. Gorzewski. (July 30, 2012). *Alevis in France: Striking a Balance between Old and New*. Qantara. Retrieved from: <https://en.qantara.de/content/alevis-in-france-striking-a-balance-between-old-and-new>. Last accessed on December 7, 2020.

organizations. The leaders of these organizations remained embroiled in domestic Turkish politics and showed little interest in the economic, social, and political life of France (Ögelman, 2003, 178–180).

From the late 1980s onwards, Alevi officials in France have begun to emphasize their distinct religious identity by pointing to significant differences between Alevism and Sunni Islam. Over time, they have also devoted themselves to Alevis' integration into French society and diversified the scope of their organizational activities. Yet the Alevi community's small size, geographical dispersion, and relatively short history in France did not enable the Alevi mobilization to flourish until the 1990s (Akgönül, 2009).

The first Alevi Cultural Center (*Alevi Kültür Merkezi*) was established in Paris in 1992 with 600 members. The second Alevi Cultural Center came into existence in Strasbourg a year later. In 1998, the FUAF was founded in Strasbourg as an umbrella organization.<sup>6</sup> Today the FUAF serves as the largest Alevi organization in France with 41 Alevi Cultural Centers under its roof. The FUAF is a founding member of the Confederation of European Alevi Unions (*Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu*, AABK). According to its website, the FUAF prioritizes the preservation and recognition of Alevi culture and faith while working for the empowerment and integration of the Alevi community in France. In addition, it strives to improve Alevis' and other immigrant groups' living conditions by promoting an "equal rights" rhetoric. It upholds pluralistic, progressive, and multiculturalist values and emphasizes the equality of women and men as a fundamental principle, the website notes.<sup>7</sup> In January 2016, the FUAF moved its headquarters from Strasbourg to Paris.<sup>8</sup> In September 2016, the organization founded the Union of Young Alevis of France (*Union des Jeunes Alévis de France*), the first youth organization established by Alevis in France.<sup>9</sup> The FUAF's women's unit, the Union of Alevi Women in France (*Union des Femmes Alévis de France*), opened its doors in April 2017.<sup>10</sup>

Although the FUAF has gradually become more interested in local problems, Alevis are not immune to tensions emanating from the homeland (Massicard, 2005). As an Alevi official pointed out during an interview, 'it does not matter if we [Alevis] are dual citizens. Our body is here [in France], but our mind is there [in Turkey].'<sup>11</sup> FUAF representatives lobby for a variety of causes aimed at the homeland. As explained by the FUAF's chairperson Erdal Kılıçkaya, French Alevis' main demand is the constitutional

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<sup>6</sup> Personal interview with an official from the FUAF, January 21, 2020, Paris.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the FUAF's charter, please see: "*Qui Sommes-Nous?* [Who Are We?]" at: <https://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/qui-sommes-nous/>. Last accessed on November 30, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> For more information, please see: "*Fransa Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu Genel Merkezi Strasbourg'tan Paris'e Taşdı* [The FUAF Moved Its Headquarter from Strasbourg to Paris]" at: <http://www.fransa24.com/fransa-alevi-birlikleri-federasyonu-genel-merkezini-strasbourtan-parise-tasidi/>. Last accessed on November 29, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, please see: "*Fransa Alevi Gençler Birliği Kuruldu* [The Union of Alevi Youth in France Established]" at: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2016/09/06/fransa-alevi-gencler-birligi-fagb-kuruldu/>. Last accessed on November 30, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, please see: "*Fransa Alevi Kadınlar Birliği Kuruldu* [The Union of Alevi Women in France Established]" at: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2017/04/03/fransa-alevi-kadinlar-birligi-kuruldu/>. Last accessed on November 30, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center, December 9, 2013, Paris.

recognition of Alevis as a distinct religious group in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Some of their other demands emanate from Alevis' quest for official recognition in Turkey, such as equal citizenship, recognition of *cem* houses,<sup>13</sup> elimination of discrimination against Alevis, abolishment of compulsory religious courses taught in Turkish public schools, and safeguarding of Turkish *laïcité*. These requests still remain unmet by the Turkish government. The next section of the chapter will take a closer look at the FUAF's relations with Turkey.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF FRENCH ALEVIS' RELATIONS WITH THEIR HOMELAND

Alevis in Turkey have been subject to suppression and discrimination since Ottoman times due to their unique religious practices (Karpas, 2004). Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, in an attempt to neutralize the resilient cultural elements of the Ottoman era, the new Turkish state prioritized "Turkishness" over the predominantly Sunni Islamic character of the Empire and strived to incorporate Alevis into the republican commonality (Shankland, 2003, 14). Since particularly the 1950s and 1960s, Alevis have embraced the secular values of the Turkish state and sided with left-wing/secular groups (Sökefeld and Schwalgin, 2000). The highly politicized environment of the 1970s and 1980s, which was characterized by a deep hostility between left-wing/secular and right-wing/Islamist groups aggravated the historical antagonism between Sunnis and Alevis (Zırh, 2008, 112). The Sunni-Alevi tension came to a head between 1978 and 1980 when scores of Alevis were killed in Çorum, Sivas, Tokat, Malatya, and Kahramanmaraş (Sinclair-Webb, 2003).

According to Reha Çamuroğlu (1998, 80), the Alevi resurgence of the 1990s and its subsequent growth was a response to the rise of political Islam in Turkey. While Alevis have traditionally perceived themselves as holding a disadvantaged position in Turkey's inter-religious context, the electoral victory of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP), a party rooted in the Millî Görüş (Nationalist Vision) ideology, in the 1994 Turkish municipal elections and the 1995 Turkish national elections evoked further unrest among the Alevi community. Consequently, and following the Sivas and Gazi attacks, many Alevis channeled their anxiety into activism. Alevi activists established more than 200 Alevi associations (Çamuroğlu, 1998) and began to call for constitutional recognition in Turkey in this period (Vorhoff, 2003; Zırh, 2008).

Alevis followed the AKP's—whose cadre arose from the reformist wing of the Millî Görüş movement—rise to power in 2002 with wariness. Initially, the AKP turned a blind eye to the Alevi community's claims. Following Turkey's recognition as a candidate for full European Union membership in 1999, the party introduced a series of political reforms and constitutional amendments to gain ground on its path to Europeanization

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<sup>12</sup> Kılıçkaya, E. (2012, July 30). *Turquie: Les Alévis tirent la sonnette d'alarme*. Le Monde. Retrieved from: [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/07/30/turquie-les-alevis-tirent-la-sonnette-d-alarme\\_1739037\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2012/07/30/turquie-les-alevis-tirent-la-sonnette-d-alarme_1739037_3232.html). Last accessed on December 9, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> While, the number of *cem* houses built in Turkey increased from 106 in 2002 to 937 in 2013, they are still not officially recognized as places of worship. See Akşam (2013, September 18). *Semah Açılımı* [Semah Initiative]. Retrieved from: <http://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/semah-acilimi/haber-245596>. Last accessed on November 28, 2020.

(Müftüler-Bac, 2005). However, party officials were indifferent to ethnic and religious minorities' demands (Soner and Toktaş, 2011, 422–423).

With the inclusion of “pluralism” into the state discourse in the mid-2000s, the AKP government began to take Alevi demands more seriously (Tambar, 2014). In 2007, the Alevi Opening became the first official state policy to address Alevis' requests. This initiative marked the beginning of an optimistic period for Alevis in Turkey and abroad. A more promising development took place between June 2009 and January 2010 when the Turkish government organized seven Alevi workshops (*Alevi Çalıştayları*). These workshops were aimed at building a bridge between the Turkish government and Alevi representatives (Subaşı, 2010, 165). Despite their differences, Alevi representatives attending the workshops reached a consensus on their major demands (Arkilic and Gurcan, 2020).

While the Alevi Opening was a crucial step for the enhancement of communication between Turkish officials and Alevis, the process stalled quickly when the AKP began to present Alevism as a form of Turkish Islam and systematically downplayed the differences among Alevis (Massicard, 2013; Özkul, 2015). Despite the initial euphoria, the chairpeople of the leading Alevi organizations, including the Alevi Bektashi Federation (*Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu*, ABF) interpreted the Alevi Opening as an assimilatory move (Köse 2010). The representatives of the Alevi community in Europe also expressed discontent with the Alevi Opening, criticizing it as a fake initiative. For example, the leaders of the FUAF and the Federation of Alevi Unions in Germany (*Alevitische Gemeinde Deutschland*, AABF) complained that the majority of the participants in the workshops were non-Alevis. Moreover, these workshops restricted the platform mostly to the national arena by not inviting an adequate number of diaspora representatives, therefore ignoring transnational dimensions of Alevism (see Chapter 3 in this volume). According to the representatives of the FUAF and the AABF, the main motivation behind the Alevi Opening was not to meet Alevis' demands but to assimilate them. These officials believe that the Alevi Opening is a redundant platform given that Turkish officials already know what Alevi demands are (Arkilic, 2016). An Alevi organization member even argued that ‘the Alevi Opening should take place only after *cem* houses are recognized.’<sup>14</sup> The AABK's response to the Alevi Opening was even fiercer. The organization's chairperson Hüseyin Mat defined the Alevi Opening as ‘a new political trap’ jeopardizing Alevis. European Alevis' disapproval of the Alevi Opening precipitated the formation of an Alevi Forum and a roadmap for the future of the Alevi mobilization in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

A 2012 announcement by a Turkish court that the Sivas trials had lapsed due to time<sup>16</sup> and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's comment that the timeout is an auspicious development for Turkey<sup>17</sup> antagonized Alevis even further. Four days after the court

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<sup>14</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center, December 9, 2013, Paris.

<sup>15</sup> For more information, please see: “AABF Genel Başkanı Hüseyin Mat'dan Alevi Bektaşî Kamuoyuna [From AABF Chairperson Hüseyin Mat to the Alevi Public]” at: <http://alevi.com/TR/aabf-genel-baskani-huseyin-mat'dan-alevi-bektasi-kamuoyuna/>. Last accessed on November 30, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Sabah (2012, March 13). *Sivas Davası'nda Karar!* [Decision in Sivas Trial!]. Retrieved from: <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/03/13/sivas-icin-karar-gunu>. Last accessed on December 7, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Hürriyet (2012, March 13). *Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Sivas Davası Yorumu* [Sivas Trial Comment from Prime Minister Erdoğan]. Retrieved from: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/basbakan-erdogandan-sivas-davasi-yorumu-20115497>. Last accessed on November 29, 2020.



decision, on March 16, 2012, 50,000 Alevis took to the streets in Bochum to protest the oppression of Alevis by the AKP government.<sup>18</sup> As the editor-in-chief of the Voice of Alevis (*Alevilerin Sesi*) magazine noted, this was an unprecedented Alevi collective political action.<sup>19</sup> The magazine's columnist concluded that, while in the past Alevis in Europe organized rallies to raise generic identity-based demands, for the first time in their history, they came together to protest a specific government and political leader (Ateş, 2012).

The Alevi diaspora's grievances toward Turkish officials have escalated with the AKP's sectarian Syria policy that presents Turkey as a homogenously Sunni state and subdues expressions of Alevi religious identity (Tank, 2015). This policy is a projection of Turkey's broader neo-Ottoman foreign policy agenda that constructs Turkey's involvement in Syria as a revival of its glorious Ottoman legacy. Alevis are not part of this neo-Ottomanist ideal 'because they would have been included within the Muslim Ottoman *millet*, which categorically assimilated their difference to the Sunni-Hanafi norm' (Walton, 2017, 98). More specifically, the AKP government's focus on bringing down the Bashar al-Assad regime by supporting the Islamist opposition groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, and its partnership with Saudi Arabia in an attempt to form regional alliances with Sunni actors in the region have increased the polarization within Turkish society along the Sunni-Alevi cleavage (Tank, 2015). The attempt to connect Alevis to Syrian Alawites, the sect-kin of al-Assad and his regime, has contributed to the demonization of Alevis in Turkey, according to Alevi leaders.<sup>20</sup> On 31 October 2012, the AABK organized a mass protest in Berlin to oppose the AKP's Syria policy.<sup>21</sup>

Even though the rift between Sunnis and Alevis had long existed under the previous Turkish governments, the members of the Alevi diaspora in Europe perceive the AKP government as more aggressive and threatening compared to other Turkish governments (Arkilic, 2016; Arkilic, 2020b). The FUAF's chairperson confirmed that the Sunni-Alevi divide has intensified under the AKP rule:

Alevis feel even more suppressed under the AKP government than they did in the past (...) We are worried about the AKP government's and Erdoğan's assimilation and "othering" policy and their goal of raising a vindictive and pious generation [*kindar ve dindar bir nesil*]."<sup>22</sup>

French Alevis also believe that Turkey's new diaspora institutions discriminate against them because they favor conservative-nationalist organizations, such as the

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<sup>18</sup> For more information, please see: "Alevilerden Başbakana Almanya'da Görkemli Protesto [Grandiose Alevi Demonstration in Germany Against the Prime Minister]" at: <http://www.demokrathaber.org/guncel/alevilerden-basbakana-almanyada-gorkemli-protesto-h7682.html>. Last accessed on November 29, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Alevilerin Sesi (2012). *Avrupalı Alevilerden Strasburg Mitingi* [Strasbourg Demonstration from European Alevis]. No. 165.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview with an official from the FUAF, January 21, 2020, Paris.

<sup>21</sup> For more information, please see: "Alevi örgütlerinden Erdoğan protestosu: 'Ortadoğu diktatörünü Almanya'da istemiyoruz' [Alevi organizations' Erdoğan protest: 'We don't want the Middle Eastern dictator in Germany]" at: <http://haber.sol.org.tr/soldakiler/alevi-orgutlerinden-erdogan-protestosu-ortadogu-diktatorunu-almanyada-istemiyoruz-haberi>. Last accessed on December 2, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with the chairperson of the FUAF. Please see: [http://www.alevifederasyonu.org.tr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1085:klckaya-biz-aleviler-cesur-olmak-zorundayz&catid=1:son-haberler](http://www.alevifederasyonu.org.tr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1085:klckaya-biz-aleviler-cesur-olmak-zorundayz&catid=1:son-haberler). Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

Diyanet-linked Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği*, DİTİB), the Millî Görüş, and the Union of Islamic Cultural Centers. A representative from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center argued that the FUAF does not receive any financial support from the YTB for its projects and activities and that no Alevi representative from France serves in the YTB's advisory board. For this official, the lack of Alevi representation in the committee points to Alevis' general ostracization in Turkey's diaspora policy. Representatives of the Alevi diaspora in France have also refused to participate in meetings and workshops set up by the UID and the YTB because Turkish officials allegedly do not show any effort to include Alevi representatives in these meetings.<sup>23</sup> AABF leaders in Germany shared similar concerns.<sup>24</sup>

The establishment of the Strasbourg Theology Institute in 2011 with full funding from the Diyanet was another development that frustrated Alevis in France. In the past, only religious personnel sent by the Diyanet could serve the Turkish community in Europe. Over time, some European countries, notably Germany, have expressed their discontent with the Diyanet-affiliated religious personnel's symbiotic ties to the Turkish state and requested that religious personnel serving in European mosques learn the language of their host country and receive training in Europe. While Germany has restricted and strictly monitored the Diyanet-linked DİTİB's involvement in the Islamic theology institutes established in various German cities, the DİTİB in France has maintained discretion in the design of the curriculum and the appointment of teachers at the Strasbourg Theology Institute (Arkilic, 2016). Students who complete this program receive a Bachelor's degree from Istanbul University's Faculty of Theology and become eligible to work in DİTİB mosques in France, which number around 253.<sup>25</sup> This project trains clerical staff who can speak French and Turkish and who are familiar with both cultures. Therefore, it allows Turkish religious authorities to reach out to second- and third-generation Muslims more easily.<sup>26</sup> However, since the Strasbourg Theology Institute mostly attracts Sunni Muslim students and provides employment opportunities for them, it is likely to estrange the Alevi youth in France.

According to some Alevi leaders, Turkey's new diaspora policy has also vested more power and legitimacy in Alevi expatriate organizations linked to the Cem Foundation (*Cem Vakfi*) and the World Ahl al Bayt Foundation (*Dünya Ehl-i Beyt Federasyonu*).<sup>27</sup> These organizations do not define Alevism as a religion in its own right and seek integration with the Turkish state. Since the 1990s, Islamist parties in Turkey have tried to establish close ties with these Alevi actors. Before the 1994 local elections, the RP even nominated a few Alevi candidates that had links to these organizations. However, the AKP has formed a closer relationship with these Alevi organizations (Massicard, 2013).

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<sup>23</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center, December 9, 2013, Paris; Personal interview with an official from the FUAF, January 21, 2020, Paris.

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview with an official from the AABF, February 25, 2019, Berlin.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with an official from the DİTİB. Please see: <http://www.dunyabizim.com/soylesi/9283/fransada-muslumanlar-neler-yasiyor>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Personal interview an official from the DİTİB, May 28, 2013, Strasbourg.

<sup>27</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center, December 9, 2013, Paris; Personal interview with an official from the FUAF, January 21, 2020, Paris.



Similar to the process in Turkey, these organizations' overseas branches, such as the Cem Foundation-affiliated organizations in Europe and the Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe (*Avrupa Ehl-i Beyt Alevi Federasyonu*) have forged good relations with the Turkish government in recent years. For example, the Cem Foundation-linked organizations have engaged in a joint project with the Diyanet that sends Alevi *dedes* to Europe to deliver talks on Islam, Alevi faith, and the Prophet Mohammed's life.<sup>28</sup> In a similar vein, an official from the Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe sits on the advisory board of the YTB.<sup>29</sup> This official's take on the Alevi Opening highlights his organization's ideological differences from that of the AABK, the AABF, and the FUAF:

If Alevism means love for Ali, then I am an Alevi. Islam does not differentiate between Alevis and Sunnis. Alevism should not be recognized as a faith outside of Islam. Unfortunately, some Alevis interpret Alevism very differently (...) The AKP government is the only government in the Turkish Republic's history that approaches Alevis with good intentions. This government organized seven Alevi workshops. This means that Turkish officials accept Alevis as a unique group and that they are ready to listen to Alevis' problems. This is a historical development. It would be too naïve to expect [them] to resolve complicated problems overnight. We will support every step our government takes.<sup>30</sup>

The Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe is also supportive of the Turkish government's diaspora outreach policies in Europe. The organization sees Turkey's growing patronage over its émigré community as an outcome of Turkey's expanding economic and political power. According to one of its representatives, the organization has not yet received any financial assistance from the YTB. However, this official is confident that funding will be provided once his organization submits appropriate project proposals to the YTB.<sup>31</sup>

Similar to the Alevi Bektashi Federation supporters in Turkey, Alevis affiliated with the AABK, the AABF, and the FUAF view these Alevi actors as pawns of the AKP government. For them, such pro-government organizations have no legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of the Alevi community due to their limited representation and problematic definition of Alevism. As an Alevi representative in Paris pointed out, Alevis in France see the proliferation of Alevi organizations that are ideologically closer to the incumbent government as a threat to Alevis' unity in France.<sup>32</sup>

The empowerment of the Cem Foundation-affiliated organizations and the Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe is a reverberation of the reframing of Alevism within a

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<sup>28</sup> Hürriyet (2014, February 4). *Diyanet Alevi Dedeleri Almanya'ya Gönderdi* [The Diyanet Sent Alevi Dedes to Germany]. Retrieved from: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/diyanet-alevi-dedeleri-almanyaya-gonderdi-5890952>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Local Alevi associations that are linked to the Cem Foundation are headquartered in Essen (Germany) since 1997. The Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe has been operating in Europe since 2001 with its 63 branches (Personal interview with an official from the Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe, November 29, 2013, Cologne).

<sup>30</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe, November 29, 2013, Cologne.

<sup>31</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Ahlal Bayt Alevi Federation of Europe, November 29, 2013, Cologne.

<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center, December 9, 2013, Paris.

Turkish-Islamic framework under the AKP government (Lord, 2017). As can be seen in Chapter 8 of this volume, a telling example of the incumbent government's intervention in Alevi actors' framing process is President Erdoğan's defamatory remark: 'Alevism in Germany does not include Ali [*Ali'siz Alevilik*]. This is an atheist mentality.'<sup>33</sup> According to Erdoğan, Alevis who agree to go to the mosque are "Alevis with Ali," in other words, "good" Alevis (Taştekin, 2014). Echoing Erdoğan's words, the then Deputy PM asserted: 'We cannot recognize *cem* houses as houses of worship because we consider Alevism inside Islam. Since the majority of Alevis consider themselves to be Muslims, Islam's house of worship is the *masjid*, the mosque.'<sup>34</sup> This statement follows from a definition of Alevism that bolsters the official nationalist-religious identity narrative.

Another groundbreaking development that galvanized Alevi political activism in France was the Turkish government's reaction to the Gezi Park protests. The initial demonstrations that had erupted in Istanbul in May 2013 criticized the AKP's neoliberal project of urban transformation of Gezi Park in Taksim. Environmental and urban agendas took a backseat when a full wave of demonstrations and civil unrest engulfed Turkey in the following months. Thousands of protestors came together to raise their voices against the AKP's increasing authoritarianism and encroachment on Turkey's secularism (Tuğal, 2013). The spiraling clashes between the police and civilians resulted in the deaths of twenty-two people, whom of whom were Alevis. Moreover, 85 percent of the protestors taken under custody were Alevis. Alevis' high rate of involvement in the Gezi Park protests reflected the violent victimization Alevis have faced under the AKP government (Karakaya-Stump, 2014). The increasing number of Alevis who fell victim to state violence fueled resentment among Alevis and led to cascading large-scale anti-government demonstrations in Turkey and abroad. The AABK alone organized several anti-government protests in Germany. The sit-in held in Cologne on May 31, 2013 attracted 10,000 people from all over Europe. A month later, on June 22, 2013, 100,000 gathered in another demonstration in Cologne.<sup>35</sup> Approximately 50,000 people convened in Cologne on May 24, 2014 under the leadership of the AABK (Topçu, 2014).

Alevis in France had engaged in political activism well before 2013 to stand against the Turkish government's pervasive discrimination against Alevis.<sup>36</sup> For example, in 2011, the FUAF introduced the "New Alevi Establishment" (*Yeni Alevi Yapılanması*, YAY) and the "Global Alevi Union" (*Küresel Alevi Birliği*, KALB) projects to homogenize and systematize the Alevi mobilization in France and across the globe.<sup>37</sup> What is more, on October 20, 2012, 10,000 French Alevis gathered in Strasbourg to

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<sup>33</sup> Hürriyet (2014, April 24). *Almanya'daki Alevilerden yanıt: Erdoğan nezdinde terfi ettik* [Response from Alevis in Germany: We have been promoted by Erdoğan]. Retrieved from: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/almanya-daki-alevilerden-yanit-erdogan-nezdinde-terfi-ettik-26318618>. Last accessed on December 2, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Akşam (2014, May 28). *Alevi Açılımı Genişliyor* [The Alevi Initiative is Expanding]. Retrieved from: <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/emrullah-isler-alevi-acilimi-genisliyor/haber-311527>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Personal interview with an official from the AABK, November 26, 2013, Cologne.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example: "20 Ekim'de Onbinlerle Strasbourg Avrupa Parlamentosunda Olacağız [On the 20<sup>th</sup> of October We Will Be at the Strasbourg European Parliament with Tens of Thousands]" at: <http://www.alevi-fuaf.com/index.php?p=medias&action=showdetails&area=2&categ=1&id=99&name=20-ekim-de-onbinlerle-strasbourg-avrupa-parlamentosu-nda-olacagiz>. Last accessed on May 7, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on these projects, please see: [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xkprqj\\_yeni-alevi-yapilanmasi-yay-kuresel-alevi-birligi-kalb\\_people](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xkprqj_yeni-alevi-yapilanmasi-yay-kuresel-alevi-birligi-kalb_people). Last accessed on December 2, 2020.

attend the “Say No to Discrimination, Assimilation, and Militarism in Turkey” demonstration staged by the AABK and the FUAF. This rally denounced the rise of political Islam in Turkey and called for equal citizenship (*Alevilerin Sesi*, November 12, 2012).

However, similar to the situation in Germany, the Gezi Park revolt increased the frequency of Alevi political rallies and campaigns launched in France. A series of demonstrations took place in Paris and Strasbourg throughout June 2013.<sup>38</sup> The Gezi Park protests became a turning point for Alevis in France, reminding them once again, as in 1993 and 1995, that their homeland was “lost.”

Other political events also prompted Alevi rallies in the following years. On February 23, 2014, the FUAF staged a rally to draw attention to the attacks against Alawites in Syria.<sup>39</sup> On October 4, 2015, the FUAF amassed 2,000 people in another rally to protest Erdoğan’s visit to Strasbourg.<sup>40</sup> On June 25, 2016, a third big protest took place. Approximately 10,000 people gathered in front of the European Parliament under the leadership of the AABK and the FUAF to attend an anti-bigotry demonstration condemning the AKP’s sectarian and authoritarian policies.<sup>41</sup> On 3 February 2017, the FUAF organized a press conference in Paris to urge everyone to vote “no” in the Turkish constitutional referendum held on April 16, 2017 that would pave the way for Turkey’s transition from a long-standing parliamentary system into presidentialism (Arkilic, 2018a).<sup>42</sup> The FUAF praised these protests as examples of trailblazing political events that had invigorated the Alevi movement and instilled hope and courage in the members of the Alevi community in Turkey and Europe.<sup>43</sup> The next section of the chapter will discuss the FUAF’s relations with France.

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF FRENCH ALEVIS’ RELATIONS WITH THEIR HOST STATE

The 1905 Law on the Separation between Church and State forms the legal basis of the French *laïcité*. Article II of the Law stipulates that the state should not recognize or

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<sup>38</sup> Habertürk (2013, June 2). *İstanbul Yanındayız: Gezi Parkı Protestolarına Yurt Dışından Destek Yağıyor* [We Are with You, Istanbul: Gezi Park Protests Fuel Support from Abroad]. Last accessed May 11, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/849480-istanbul-yanindayiz>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example: “*Suriye’deki Alevi Katliami Protesto Edildi* [The Alawite Massacre in Syria Protested in Paris]” at: <http://avegkon.org/suriyedeki-alevi-katliamai-pariste-protesto-edildi/>. Last accessed on December 2, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example: “*Fransa’daki Alevilerden Dev Protesto* [Massive Protest from Alevis in France]” at: <http://www.alevikulturdernekleri.com/fransadaki-alevilerden-dev-protestorte-hos-gelmedin/>. Last accessed on November 20, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> For more information on this demonstration, please see: “*Alevilerin Strasbourg’dan Gericiliğe Dur Mesajı* [Alevis’ ‘No to Bigotry’ Message from Strasbourg]” at: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2016/09/06/alevilerin-strasburgdan-gericilige-dur-mesaji-turan-eser/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> For more information on this meeting, please see: “*Basına ve Kamuoyuna* [To the Attention of the Press and Public]” at: <https://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2017/02/03/basina-ve-kamuoyuna/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example: “*AKP Hükümeti İstifa Etmelidir* [The AKP Government Should Resign]” at: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/yazi/1/517/fuaf-akp-hukumeti-istifa-etmelidir/>. Last accessed on May 7, 2020.

support any *culte* (religion). Scholars have noted that the strict separation of church and state in France provides a less accommodating setting for the religious needs of Muslims compared to that of other European countries, such as Britain and Germany (Fetzer and Soper, 2005). A 2004 law on secularism and conspicuous religious symbols in schools that banned the wearing of the headscarf and a 2011 law that banned the wearing of full-face veils (*voile intégral*) entrenched France's position as a *laïc* country and called into question France's tolerance toward Muslims.

Yet recent research found that Turkish Muslims overall have a positive experience in France despite the rigidity of the French regime. Representatives of Turkish Islamic organizations praise France's equal distance from all religious groups as an assurance of their religious freedom (Arkilic, 2015). Other studies have showed that Turks do not believe that they are subject to severe discrimination in France. Their perceived level of discrimination is, in fact, lower than that of other immigrant groups in France, such as Maghrebis and Sub-Saharan Africans (Brouard and Tiberj, 2011). This is a striking finding given that Turks experience discrimination at similar rates with Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan African immigrant groups in reality (Beauchemin et al., 2010).

There are several reasons why Turks feel at ease in France. Mainly before the 2000s, the Turkish community in France enjoyed privileged invisibility in the eyes of French policy-makers. The larger size and turbulent colonial history with France of Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan African communities put these communities under the radar whenever integration-related debates came up. In contrast, Turks drew attention to the lack of colonial legacy in Turkey and promoted themselves as a group superior to Magrebis and Sub-Saharan Africans. According to Turkish Muslim leaders, the immigrant integration issue has never been a Turkish problem in France. Turks' disinterest in the *sans-papiers*, headscarf, and *banlieue* protests of other immigrant groups in the 1990s and 2000s contributed to the French and Turkish perception that Arabs and Africans are the real troublemakers in France (Yalaz, 2014; Arkilic, 2016).

However, as officials from the French Ministry of the Interior (*Ministère de l'Intérieur*) and the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (*Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères*) made clear in an interview, Turks in France may lose their privileges in the future. For example, these officials see the establishment of the Strasbourg Theology Institute with full funding from Turkey as an intervention in France's domestic affairs.<sup>44</sup> Other European policy-makers have also become increasingly cautious about conservative-nationalist Turks' convergence with the Turkish government (Arkilic, 2018b).

Officials from the French High Council for Integration (*Haut Conseil à l'Intégration*, HCI) expressed similar concerns. According to them, Turks in France retain solid financial and emotional ties to their homeland and prioritize the preservation of Turkish and Muslim identity over French identity. These bureaucrats find it alarming that even second- and third-generation Turks born and raised in France identify themselves as Turkish first and French second. These experts also hinted that they do not approach Turks much differently from other Muslim groups anymore: 'Our

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<sup>44</sup> Personal interview with an official from the French Ministry of the Interior, March 11, 2013, Paris; Personal interview with an official from the French Ministry of the Interior, January 14, 2019, Paris; Personal interview with an official from the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, January 10, 2019, Paris.

communication with Muslims has become more complicated in recent years (...) Some Muslim groups want to build a Moroccan mosque. Others want a Turkish mosque. Different Muslim groups have different demands and religious practices, and this complicates our relationship with Muslims.<sup>45</sup> Another HCI expert complained about Turkish Muslims' reluctance to interact with French society. She indicated that, unlike Maghrebi organizations that seek financial support from French municipalities for their organizational activities, Turkish Islamic organizations rely mostly on Turkey's funding or their internal resources. For her, Turkish Islamic organizations hinder French Turks' integration by perpetuating their association with Turkish-Muslim identity, and by championing closed community networks and allegiance to Turkey.<sup>46</sup> These anecdotes reveal that the positive perception of Turks in France is, in fact, changing and Turkish Muslims are now turning into "bad immigrants." French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement of a draft bill in October 2020 that seeks to defend *laïc* values and to halt the export of foreign-trained *imams* also reflects French authorities' growing suspicion of Turks in the country.<sup>47</sup>

The rise of Islamist extremism in France is another factor that endangers Turkish Islamic organizations' advantaged status in France. The findings of a 2013 survey on Islamic fundamentalism<sup>48</sup> conducted in Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, and Sweden found that 45 percent of Sunni Muslims with a Turkish background support Islamic fundamentalism as opposed to 15 percent of Turkish Alevis, 4 percent of Protestants, and 3 percent of Catholics. In other words, while fundamentalist attitudes are widespread among Sunni Muslim communities in Europe, according to scholars, only a small percentage of Alevis have fundamentalist tendencies (Koopmans, 2014, 11). In a similar vein, a 2017 study carried out by the French National Center for Scientific Research (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, CNRS) on the prevalence of radical ideology among high school students found that Sunni Muslim students are much more likely to hold fundamentalist views than other religious groups.<sup>49</sup>

My interviews with officials from the HCI revealed that French bureaucrats believe that there is a gap between Islamic and French values and that the rise of fundamentalism among French Muslims poses a serious challenge to French *laïcité*. These officials emphasized that a new form of "*sentimental aggression*" has been unfolding in France: the native population feels emotionally threatened by the increasing public visibility of Muslim women in veils, *burqas*, and *niqabs*, and men in Salafist garments. French society is also placed in peril due to the mushrooming of various mosques, they suggested.<sup>50</sup> A poll conducted by the French Institute of Public Opinion (*Institut Français*

<sup>45</sup> Personal interview with officials from the French High Council for Integration, May 22, 2013, Paris.

<sup>46</sup> Personal interview with an official from the French High Council for Integration, May 22, 2013, Paris.

<sup>47</sup> Duvar English (October 5, 2020). *Turkey accuses Macron of supporting hate crimes with his new plan against "Islamist separatism."* Retrieved from:

<https://www.duvarenglish.com/diplomacy/2020/10/05/turkey-accuses-macron-of-supporting-hate-crimes-with-his-new-plan-against-islamist-separatism/>. Last accessed on December 9, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> The study's definition of religious fundamentalism captures three elements of a fundamentalist belief system: 1) "Christians [Muslims] should return to the roots of Christianity [Islam]," 2) "There is only one interpretation of the Bible [Qur'an] and every Christian [Muslim] should stick to that," and 3) "The rules of the Bible [Qur'an] are more important to me than the laws of [survey country]" (Koopmans, 2014, 8).

<sup>49</sup> For more information on this study, please see: <https://lejournal.cnrs.fr/nos-blogs/face-au-terrorisme-la-recherche-en-action/une-vaste-enquete-sur-la-radicalite-chez-les>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Personal interview with officials from the French Ministry of the Interior, June 5, 2013, Paris.



*d'Opinion Publique*) in 2016 showed that anti-Muslim sentiments are indeed gaining popularity. According to this study, almost two-thirds of the French respondents argued that Islam has become too “influential and visible” and 47 percent suggested that the Muslim community poses a “threat” to their national identity.<sup>51</sup> According to the same survey conducted back in 2010, 55 percent of the respondents reported that Islam is too visible and 43 percent identified Islam as a threat.<sup>52</sup> In other words, Islam has become an increasing concern in France.

The surge of intolerance toward Sunni Muslims has proclaimed the Alevi community as a more compatible interlocutor for the French government. Alevis in France have generally enjoyed favorable relations with the French government. Since the 1980s, Alevi representatives have been present in immigration forums and councils organized by the French state. Alevi leaders’ position as a key dialogue and project partner vis-à-vis Islamic organization representatives has become even more palpable in recent years. French policy-makers view Alevis positively due to the Alevi community’s stronger commitment to core French values. Also appealing to French policy-makers has been the FUAF’s emphasis on gender equality, as evidenced by the large number of Alevi women serving in French councils and Alevi organizations as well as Alevi politician Mine Günbay’s recent rise to vice presidency in the Strasbourg municipality.<sup>53</sup> Alevi officials welcome the attention they are getting from French policy-makers. As one Alevi representative put it:

[French authorities] know that we are a transparent and legal organization (...) Our organization [the FUAF] meets with French bureaucrats from the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. They are assuring us that Alevism will be taught in public schools in the future (...) We get along very well with the mayor of Boulogne-Billancourt (a suburb of Paris). She offered us funding to support our projects (...) While anti-immigrant acts take place in France from time to time, this can happen in any country. Muslims want to build mosques with minarets. They are loud in the metro. They do not give their seat to women. Every country has its own rules, and citizens must abide by these rules (...) I disagree with the argument that France assimilates its immigrants.<sup>54</sup>

Alevis are regarded as “good immigrants” in France also because 90 percent of French Alevis hold French citizenship. Moreover, the number of Alevi politicians serving in French municipal councils has increased since the mid-2000s.<sup>55</sup> This is a remarkable achievement given that Turks have the lowest naturalization, electoral registration, and voter turnout rates among all immigrant groups in France, including Maghrebis, Sub-

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<sup>51</sup> To access this poll, please see: [http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/3373-1-study\\_file.pdf](http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/3373-1-study_file.pdf). Last accessed on December 3, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> To access this poll, please see: <http://www.france24.com/en/20160429-france-germany-unease-with-islam-rise-new-poll-finds>. Last accessed on December 2, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> BirGün (2014, December 17). *Fransa Alevilerinden Tarihi Buluşma* [Historic Meeting of French Alevis]. Retrieved from: <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/fransa-alevilerinden-tarihi-bulusma-72734.html>. Last accessed on December 1, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Personal interview with an official from the Paris Alevi Cultural Center, December 9, 2013, Paris.

<sup>55</sup> BirGün (2014, December 17). *Fransa Alevilerinden Tarihi Buluşma* [Historic Meeting of French Alevis]. Retrieved from: <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/fransa-alevilerinden-tarihi-bulusma-72734.html>. Last accessed on December 1, 2020.



Saharan Africans, Cambodians, and Vietnamese (Yalaz, 2014; Arkilic, 2016).<sup>56</sup> In addition, Alevi students have a high success rate in public schools.<sup>57</sup> Alevi's academic success stands out particularly in light of a 2013 report published by the HCI illustrating that Turkish students have the worst school attendance and success record after Magrebis in France.<sup>58</sup> The rise of young and educated Alevi in FUAF organizational ranks has facilitated Alevi's communication with French bureaucrats.<sup>59</sup>

A noteworthy example of Alevi's thriving relations with France is FUAF leaders' one-on-one meetings with French officials from the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs since July 2012.<sup>60</sup> More importantly, on November 12, 2014, France's former President François Hollande invited FUAF leaders to the Élysée Palace for a special meeting. The FUAF's chairperson Erdal Kılıçkaya and head of the Diplomacy Council Ali Karababa explained that a recurrent theme in this meeting was the common values shared by France and Alevi, such as *laïcité* and gender equality. FUAF officials also informed Hollande about human rights violations committed against women and minorities in Turkey. Following the meeting, Hollande vowed to include Alevi in other meetings and working groups to be held at the Palace.<sup>61</sup> This was a critical development for the institutionalization and recognition of the FUAF. The inauguration of the first *cem* house in Paris in March 2015 was another indicator of the French government's renewed interest in the Alevi community. Prominent policy-makers, such as the president of the French National Assembly, Claude Bartalone, and various French parliamentarians and mayors attended the inauguration.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the FUAF's relations with the Paris municipality have solidified in the last few years.<sup>63</sup>

The FUAF's rapprochement with French bureaucrats resulted in another historical event: On 16 December 2016, the FUAF organized a first-of-its-kind symposium on Alevism at the French National Assembly following the Socialist parliamentarian Jean-Pierre Blazy's invitation.<sup>64</sup> During the meeting, FUAF representatives delivered a

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<sup>56</sup> The 1999 and 2008 censuses reveal different immigrant groups' naturalization, electoral registration, and voter turnout rates. To access these censuses, please see: <http://www.insee.fr/en/bases-de-donnees/>. Last accessed on December 9, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> BirGün (2014, December 17). *Fransa Alevilerinden Tarihi Buluşma* [Historic Meeting of French Alevi]. Retrieved from: <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/fransa-alevilerinden-tarihi-bulusma-72734.html>. Last accessed on December 9, 2020.

<sup>58</sup> For a full list of HCI reports, please see: <http://archives.hci.gouv.fr/-Rapports-.html>. Last accessed on May 8, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with FUAF chairperson Erdal Kılıçkaya. Please see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diG-o\\_KcikE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diG-o_KcikE). Last accessed on December 9, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> For more information, please see: "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonunu Kabul Etti [French President Welcomed the FUAF]" at: <http://www.alevikulturdernekleri.com/fransa-cumhurbaskani-alevi-birlikleri-federasyonunu-kabul-etti/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> For more information, please see: "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonunu Kabul Etti [French President Welcomed the FUAF]" at: <http://www.alevikulturdernekleri.com/fransa-cumhurbaskani-alevi-birlikleri-federasyonunu-kabul-etti/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> The inauguration ceremony can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyHuD1KG4ME>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> For more information, please see: <http://www.haberler.com/fransa-parlamentosu-nda-alevi-sempozyumu-6785062-haber/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>64</sup> For more information, please see: "Fransa Parlamentosunda Alevi Sempozyumu [The Alevi Symposium at the French Parliament]" at: <http://www.alevinet.com/2014/12/18/fransa-parlamentosunda-alevi-sempozyumu/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

presentation on the Alevi community and Alevism in France. According to the FUAF's chairperson, this meeting has marked the beginning of a new era between Alevis and France:

[A] dialogue process between Alevis and French politicians has begun, and the closed door has finally become wide open (...) [French politicians] accept us with our real (...) identity. They recognize us as Alevis. They do not place us under wrong categories. This is very important for us.<sup>65</sup>

In January 2017, an Alevi Council (*Alevi Meclisi*) gathering coordinated by the FUAF attracted top public officials, such as the Green Party deputy and former minister Cecile Duflot, the European Parliament deputy Marie-Christine Vergiat, and the Arnouville mayor Pascal Doll. In this meeting, French officials criticized the AKP's authoritarian policies and extended their support and solidarity to Alevis.<sup>66</sup> Throughout 2017, the FUAF's Diplomacy Council has also worked closely with Benoît Hamon, a member of the Socialist Party in France. The FUAF's cooperation with Hamon is significant because he became the Socialist Party's candidate for the 2017 French presidential election after defeating Manuel Valls, the Prime Minister of France between 2014 and 2016, in the second round of the party primary.<sup>67</sup>

FUAF officials have boosted their relations with Eurocrats as well. On 19 January 2016, the FUAF handed a dossier to the European Court of Human Rights to inform European policy-makers about crimes committed against Alevis in Turkey. On the same day, FUAF officials held a press conference and demonstration in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. On January 27, 2016, they met with party group presidents at the Council of Europe.<sup>68</sup> Finally, the Union of Alevi Women in France visited the European Parliament on March 8, 2017. In this meeting, Alevi women reiterated the FUAF's demands and discussed potential avenues for collaboration with parliamentarians.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Even though France has attracted a large number of Alevi emigrants since the 1970s and the Alevi diaspora's organizational life is active over the last two decades, Alevi political mobilization in France remains an understudied topic. This chapter examined French Alevis' political activities within the broader context of the political developments taking place in Turkey and France since the early 2000s. More specifically, it shed light on how the FUAF has responded to the rise of political Islam in Turkey and French policy-makers' growing interest in Alevis.

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<sup>65</sup> To watch FUAF chairperson Erdal Kılıçkaya's assessment of the symposium, please see: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diG-o\\_KcikE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diG-o_KcikE). Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> For more information, please see: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2017/02/03/hayirimiz-hayirli-ugurlu-olsun/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> For more information, please see: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2017/01/29/fransa-cumhurbaskanligi-secimleri/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> For more information, please see: "Fransa'daki Alevilerden Barış Çığlığı [Peace Cry from Alevis in France]" at: <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/fransa-daki-alevilerden-baris-cigligi-100795.html>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

<sup>69</sup> For more information, please see: "FAKB Avrupa Parlementosunda ağırlandı [The Union of Alevi Women in France Hosted in the European Parliament]" at: <http://alevi-fuaf.com/tr/2017/03/11/fakb-avrupa-parlementosunda-agirlandi/>. Last accessed on December 3, 2020.

An examination of organizational documents, media sources, and interviews with Alevi representatives as well as with Turkish and French officials demonstrates that French Alevis' discontent with their homeland has increased greatly since the AKP's rise to power in 2002. While Alevi exclusion is not a new phenomenon, the failure of the Alevi Opening, the AKP's sectarian Syria policy, and the repression of the Gezi Park protests that resulted in the deaths of many Alevi citizens have intensified the Sunni-Alevi divide under the AKP rule. The development of a new diaspora agenda that has ignored the FUAF's demands and empowered Turkish immigrant organizations that frame Alevism within the margins of Sunni Islam has aggravated the "us" versus "them" dichotomy between Alevis and Sunnis. While the FUAF had engaged in homeland-oriented political activism before, the organization's politicization has gained momentum in recent years in response to the AKP government's biased diaspora outreach policy that strives to impose a definition of Alevism that is in line with the official nationalist-religious identity narrative.

In the meantime, French policy-makers have formed stronger diplomatic relations with Alevis. For example, FUAF officials were invited to a private meeting at the Élysée Palace in 2014. The inauguration of the first *cem* house in Paris in 2015 and the organization of a first-of-its-kind Alevism symposium at the French National Assembly in 2016 were other key signs of the FUAF's increasing recognition and respect in the eyes of French bureaucrats. French policy-makers' renewed interest in Alevis is linked to the rise of Sunni extremism and anti-Muslim attitudes in France. Even though Turkish Islamic organizations in France enjoyed a privileged invisibility vis-à-vis Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan African organizations in the past, their growing rapprochement with the Turkish state has begun to attract criticism. As French bureaucrats have become increasingly cautious about Turkish Islamic organizations and begun to lump them under the "bad immigrant" category, Alevis have come to the forefront as a secular and progressive immigrant group. While Alevis' projection as a key dialogue and political partner stands as an emblematic manifestation of the beginning of a positive era between Alevis and France, the Alevi diaspora's localization would have been more robust had their politicization been directed more at their host country rather than at their home country.

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