

## TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES: ALEVI IMMIGRANTS IN EUROPE

### Uluslararası Topluluklar: Avrupa Alevi Göçmenler

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*“Why are you here in Europe?” I asked.  
“How many Tamils are there in Europe?” he replied.  
“About 24,000,” I answered.  
“Then there are about 24,000 reasons why I am here.”  
(McDowell, 1997: 19)<sup>1</sup>*

#### Abstract

There is no doubt about the fact that Europe has become home for many different immigrant groups, cultures and religions. Even though, Islam, under the name of Muslim immigrants, has been placed in the contradiction of Europe, the Euro-Islam identity cannot be ignored as a part of European culture. In fact the total Muslim population, including immigrant and native born, in Western Europe is about 20 million of the EU’s 500 million residents. Islam as a world religion does not share the same cultural traits among itself and Muslim people are not identical to their practices in being Muslims. In fact, “heterodox” Islamic groups in the world have different rituals and faiths from “orthodox” Islamic groups and they also define themselves in the framework of Islam. The current paper centers on Alevism as one of the heterodox belief system in Islam. Although the Alevi as a religious and cultural community settled mainly in Turkey, they can be defined as a transnational community due to the result of increasing international migration. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to explore the position of Alevi community as a heterodox Islamic group in recent European culture and the effects of European culture on Alevi identity.

**Keywords:** Transnational Community, Migration, Identity, Alevi Immigrants in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell, Christopher. 1997. *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

## Özet

Avrupa'nin birçok farklı göçmen grupların, kültürlerin ve dinlerin evi haline geldiği gerçeği hakkında hiçbir şüphe yoktur. Bu evin bir sakini olan ve Müslüman göçmenler adı altında yaşanan Avrupadaki İslam, tartismali bir yer teskil etmiş olsa da, Euro-İslam kimliği Avrupa kültürünün bir parçası olarak göz ardı edilemez. Nitekim, Batı Avrupa'da göçmen ve yaşanan yerde doğumlu olan toplam Müslüman nüfus 500 milyonluk Avrupa Birliği içinde yaklaşık 20 milyondur. Bir dünya dini olan İslam kendi içinde ne aynı kültürel özellikleri ne de Müslüman olmak için benzer ritüelleri paylaşmayı gerektirmektedir. Bu durumun nedeni ise, dünyada "heterodoks" İslami grupların varlığı ve onların da "ortodoks" İslami gruplardan farklı ritüeller ve inançları ile kendilerini İslam içinde tanımlamalarıdır. Bu makalede de, İslam'ın heterodoks inanç sistemi içinde yer alan Aleviliğe yer verilmiştir. Aleviler dini ve kültürel bir topluluk olarak daha çok Türkiye'de yerleşmiş olsa da, artık uluslararası artan göç sonucu bir ulusötesi topluluk olarak tanımlanabilir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma ile amaçlanan, Avrupa kültüründe bir heterodoks İslami grup olarak Alevi toplumunun konumu ve Alevi kimliğine Avrupa kültürünün etkilerini araştırmaktır.

Özetle, Aleviler yerel ve ulusal düzeyde dini ve kültürel bir grup olarak tanınmak ve esit vatandaşlık haklarını kazanmak için Türk devletine baskı yapmaya devam ederken, aynı zamanda ulusötesi düzeyde ise Avrupa ülkelerinde hem göçmen olarak hem de dini bir topluluk olarak hakları ve hukuksal statüleri için mücadele etmektedirler. Bu nedenle Alevilerin ulusal ve uluslararası alanlarda kimliklerine sahip çıkmak için oluşturdıkları Alevi örgütlenmesi Alevilerin ulusötesi bir toplum olarak şekillenmesine katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu makalede 2002 yılında kurulan Avrupa Alevi Konfederasyonuna bağlı 250'den fazla Alevi derneğini kapsayan Alevi federasyonları eksenli bir çalışma yapılmıştır. Almanya, Avusturya, Fransa, İsviçre, İngiltere, Danimarka, Hollanda, Norveç, İsveç, Romanya ve İtalya suan Alevi federasyonlarının olduğu ülkelerdir ve bu makalede Alevilerin buldukları ülkelerde yürüttükleri Alevi hareketine ve hukuksal mücadelesine yer verilmiştir.

Literatur taramasına ek olarak, Alevi örgütlerinin federasyon başkanları veya federasyon yöneticileri ile e-mail ve telefon görüşmeleri ile ulaşılan bilgilere göre, Aleviler buldukları ülkenin politik ve yasal düzenlemeleri çerçevesinde Avrupanın pek çok ülkesinde tanınmak için farklı bir strateji yürütse de, ortak bir tutum olarak diğer Müslüman gruplardan özellikle Sunni Müslümanlardan farklı oldukları ve Av-

rupa değerleri ile uyumlu oldukları konusuna vurgu yapmaktadırlar. Bunun en önemli nedeni; Alevilerin kendilerini “seküler ve modern bir Müslüman toplum” olarak tanımlamasıdır. Buna ek olarak, Alevi kimliğinin dini ve kültürel olarak tanınması için Avrupa’daki Alevi örgütlenmesinin izlediği yol haritasını bir kaç alt başlıkta ifade etmek mümkündür: Aleviler Sünni Müslimanlardan farklı kültürel ve dini ritüellere sahip Müslüman bir toplumdur; ibadethaneleri Cemevidir; buldukları ülkelerin tüm yasal düzenlemeleri çerçevesinde Aleviliğin okullarda öğretilmesi ve müfredata girmesi için çalışmalar yapmaktadırlar ve üye sayısı gözönüne alındığında Avrupa Alevi Konfederasyonu Avrupa’da yaşayan Alevi göçmenlerin kurumsal temsilci olarak tanımlanabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ulusötesi Toplum, Göç, Kimlik, Avrupa’daki Alevi göçmenler.

### 1. Introduction

Transnationalism fostered by economic, political, cultural and technological processes offers a option to relinquish aspects of a given identity because transnationalism can be generally formulated as a process that is created by the multiple relationships of the immigrants between their country of sending and their country of receiving. Schiller *et al.* (1992)<sup>2</sup> provides a further detail which clarifies the way of multiples connections. They state that the experience of the new patterns of migrants entails a new conceptualization called transnationalism which is defined as processes to construct social fields across borders. These social fields include multiple relations (familial, economic, social, political and religious and organizational that span borders) and also identities within social networks to connect the immigrants to their homeland, countries of settlement and other diasporic communities. On the one hand, although, as Djelic and Quack (2010:14)<sup>3</sup> argued, communities constructed around the processes of transnational migration tend to be shaped firstly with economic dimensions, the emergent new immigrants set in motion not only economic but also cultural, social and political issues both in the home and the host countries as well

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, Glick ; Linda Basch & Christina Szanton-Blanc. 1992. “Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration.” In Glick Schiller, Linda Basch & Christina Szanton-Blanc (eds). *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism Reconsidered*. New York: The New York Academy of Science.

<sup>3</sup> Djelic, Marie-Laure and Sigrid Quack. 2010. *Transnational Communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

as at the interconnection between them. Indeed, the proliferation of recent migration patterns causes to create new diasporas. The new diasporas raise the attention for recognizing differentiated transnational movements and 'hybrid' forms of identity thanks to getting into the politics, economic and culture dynamics at the global, national and local level (Anthias,1998)<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, religious practices in the life of transnational immigrants settle in the multi-layered social fields where migrants are embedded (Levitt,2004:6)<sup>5</sup>. As a matter of fact, religion as the oldest transnational actor (Rudolph,1997)<sup>6</sup> situates as a important position for the immigrants who rebuild their identity and provides personal and sociocultural transformations in the new settled society. Transnational religious life has created by means of transnational religious migrants`practices, transnational religious organizations and the solving confusions between transnational religion and politics (Levitt, 2004)<sup>7</sup>. In such cases, transnational religious life with practices and organizations has engendered the transnational religious systems such as Islam. Muslims as being an transnational immigrants group and as establishing transnational religious organizations also want to gain the recognition and representation in the new settled countries.

There are many transnational Islamic groups and organizations because Islam is not only experienced individually but it has also a close relationship with politics and social life of the society. Therefore the emergence of Islam as a transnational political force has not only impacted on transnational religious movements but also contributed to shape Muslim transnational communities which arise from the social networks through which migration begins. However, it has been argued that the values of Islam as politics (i.e., the endeavor to erect a theocratic state and an Islamic social order), especially in the West, do not fit into the claims of 'modern and secular life' and Is-

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<sup>4</sup> Anthias, Floya. 1998. "Evaluating'Diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity? ". *Sociology* 32. pp: 557-580.

<sup>5</sup> Levitt, Peggy. 2004. Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life. *Sociology of Religion*.65:1 1-18

<sup>6</sup> Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber (1997) 'Introduction: Religion,States, & Transnational Civil Society' in Susanne Hoeber Rudolph & James Piscatori (eds.) *Transnational Religion & Fading States*. Colarado: Westview Press

<sup>7</sup> Levitt, Peggy. 2004. Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life. *Sociology of Religion*.65:1 1-18

lam is perceived as a threatening religion for the Western society (Esposito, 2002)<sup>8</sup>. More negatively situation for the the perception of Islam is likely to increase after 11. September 2001. Likewise, the public debate in Europe over Turkey's admission showed that Islam or Muslim immigrants in the European Union, whether EU can cope with more Muslim immigrants who come from Turkey is the real issue rather than Turkey can meet the same economic or political conditions like all countries of EU (Casanova, 2004)<sup>9</sup>. In a similar vein, Abadan-Unat (2002)<sup>10</sup> states that religion is one of the most important aspects of ethnicity for Turks in Europe. Besides, it is observed that Turks in Germany have established the first civil organizations which are based on their religious beliefs.

Islam is generally viewed as a world religion that shares the same religious practices but not the same cultural traits. Exclusively supporting the ideas of "orthodox"<sup>11\*</sup> Islamic groups, this statement ignores "heterodox"<sup>12\*\*</sup> Islamic groups, which have distinct rituals and faiths that help define their identity within the greater framework of Islam. The heterodox version of Islam has very different characteristics comparing to its orthodox version and it is experienced differently depending on geographical location because of various regional, ethnic and cultural elements. Alevism as one of such heterodox belief systems within Islam will serve as the focus group of the this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Esposito, John L. 2002. *Islam Tehdidi Efsanesi*, (çev. Ö. Baldık, A. Köse, T. Küçükcan), İstanbul: Ufuk Kitapları.

<sup>9</sup> Casanova, Jose.2004. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-07-29-casanova-en.html#footNote1> <retrived in 10.07.2014>

<sup>10</sup> Abadan-Unat, Nermin.2002. *Bitmeyen Göç: Konuk İşçilikten Ulus Ötesi Yurttaşlığa*, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

<sup>11</sup> \*Orthodox Islam includes mainly Sunni Muslims as the practices of the largest branch of Islam. They emphasize the importance of the traditional portion of Muslim law in terms of Qur'an (Martin & Barzegar, 2010). Martin.R.C. & Bargezar. A. 2010. "Formation of Ortodoxy: Authority, Powerand Networks in Muslim Societies". In C.W.Ernst & R.C.Martin (eds.) *Rethinking Islamic Studies*. South Carolina Press. Pp: 179-203.

<sup>12</sup> \*Heterodox Islamic groups have not in agreement with accepted beliefs, especially Sunni (Orthodoxy) doctrine. For example, Alevi as a heterodox Islamic group don't pray in the mosque, don't fast in Ramadan, don't go to Mecca (Sökefeld, 2008).Sökefeld, Martin. 2008. "Difficult Identifications: The Debate on Alevism and Islam in Germany". In: Thielmann, J.; Al-,Harmaneh, A (eds.): *Islam and Muslims in Germany*. Leiden, Brill. pp: 267-297.

Alevism is a religious and cultural community which lives mainly in Turkey but it can be also defined as a transnational community as a result of increasing Alevi immigrants' mobility. Alevism in Turkey represents the second largest religious belief after the Sunni version of Islam. There is no basic definition of what Alevism means because Alevi have also internally integrated heterogeneity indicated by language, ethnicity, religiosity, political affiliation. Alevism is used to define a large number of different heterodox communities including Nusayris, Bektahsis, Abdals, Tahtacis, Yörük and Kurdish Alevi.

Although Alevism has been discussed as an alternative Islam in Germany as a host country (Massicard, 2010)<sup>13</sup>, Alevi have no official recognition as a heterodox Islamic group in Turkey as a home country. Moreover, Turkey has generally ignored the religious and ethnic distinctness of practically all heterodox minorities since its inception. Although Alevi are not different from other minorities in Turkey in this respect, they have a variety of specific challenges in transnational space in terms of protecting their identity and the recognition of their cultural and religious differences. The prospect of Alevi recognition both as a religious and cultural group in Turkey and an immigrant group in Europe has created a growing social and political movement and a diaspora in transnational space. In that point, it can be argued that Alevism in Europe has quite different conditions, constraints, opportunities and developments from the Turkish homeland in terms of political, judicial, socio-cultural and economical contexts. Yet, it should be emphasized that a comparison between Alevism in Turkey and Europe is beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of the paper is to provide a comprehensive insight into the situation of the Alevi immigrants in Europe and the effects of European culture on the Alevi identity.

## **2. Estimating the Size of Alevi immigrants in Europe**

The Turkish population as a immigrant group in Europe which moved there as a consequence of the labor-recruitment treaties that Turkey signed with different Western European countries because of economic reasons. In fact, Roben Cohen (1997)<sup>14</sup> identifies Turkish migrants as a labor diaspora according to his typology. After signing the Bilateral Recruitment Agreement in 1961, the immigrant population from

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<sup>13</sup> Massicard, Elisa. 2010. *Recasting Islamic Heterodoxy in Different Public Spheres: Alevism in Turkey and Germany*. Paper presented at Conference on "religious norms in the public sphere" Florence, 16-18 December, 2010, RPS Network.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, Robin. 1997. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: UCL Press

Turkey has steadily grown up. In 1980s, the military regime in Turkey led to increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe. Turkey has the largest non-European migrant population in the EU, with 3.5 million people (Massicard, 2013:3)<sup>15</sup>, especially in Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, United Kingdom, France, Austria, Denmark and Sweden. Even, Turkish immigrants in Germany are the third largest migrant groups in the world (King & Kılıç; 2013)<sup>16</sup>, nearly 2.7 million Turkish immigrants live in Germany.

It is estimated how many Turks live outside Turkey, however, it has been difficult to estimate how many Alevis came to Europe because there are no official statistics about them. The statement of Martin Sökefeld (2006: 273)<sup>17</sup> about the numbers of Alevi immigrants in Germany give clues why we could not estimate the numbers of Alevis in Europe "...after the early 1960s Alevis remained for decades undistinguished from the general mass of Turkish laborers in Germany. This did not even change when the Turkish military coup of 1980 created a new wave of politically-motivated leftist Alevis to replace the earlier influx of labor migrants". Although, the estimates about the number of Alevi population in Europe are frequently cause of debate, European Alevi Community Confederation<sup>18</sup> state that approximately a million Alevis are living in Europe. If we look at the dispersion of Alevi community on the countries scale. The Alevi organizations in Europe claim that their numbers is at least 500.000 people in Germany alone (Kosnick, 2008: 6)<sup>19</sup>, roughly 250.000 Alevis in England<sup>20</sup>, almost 200.000 Alevis in France<sup>21</sup>, approximately 80.000 Alevis

<sup>15</sup> Massicard, Elisa. 2013. *The Alevis in Turkey and Europe. Identity and Managing Territorial Diversity*. London: Routledge.

<sup>16</sup> King, Russell & Nilay Kılıç. 2013. <[http://www.mah.se/upload/Forskningscentrum/MIM/2013%20Seminars/130411%20RK%20NK%208\\_%20Euro-Turks.pdf](http://www.mah.se/upload/Forskningscentrum/MIM/2013%20Seminars/130411%20RK%20NK%208_%20Euro-Turks.pdf)>(retrived in 01.07.2014).

<sup>17</sup> Sökefeld, Martin. 2006. "Mobilizing in Transnational Space: A Social Movement Approach to the Formation of Diaspora". *Global Networks* 6, pp: 265-284

<sup>18</sup> <http://alevi.com/de/alevitsche-union-europa-e-v/> <retrived in 12.07.2014>

<sup>19</sup> Kosnick, Kira. 2008. *Exit and Voice Revisited: the Challenge of Migrant Media*. Research Group Transnationalism Working Paper Number 9. (June 2008)

<sup>20</sup> Cetin Ümit. 2010. *Theoretical and Methodological Considerations in Researching Suicide among Kurdish-Alevi Ethnic Community in London*. Phd Dissertation. Unpublished.

<sup>21</sup> Kosulu, Deniz. 2013. "The Alevi Quest in Europe throughout the Redefinition of the Alevi Movement: Recognition and Political Participation, A Case Study of the FUAF in France ,, . Jorgen. S. Nielsen(ed.). *Muslim Political Participation in Europe*.Edinburg University Press.

in Austria<sup>22</sup> , almost roughly 30.000 Alevi in Switzerland<sup>23</sup> and 10.000 Alevi in Denmark<sup>24</sup>.

### 3. *The Arrangements about Alevi immigrants in Europe*

In the most of the European countries, religious freedom is determined comprehensively. According to Art 9. ECHR<sup>25</sup> protects the freedom of thought, religion and consciousness. As it appears from the judgment, religious freedom includes all religious beliefs, neither majority views nor the established religions. Relating to the arrangements of the religious freedom in Europe, Alevi who are regarded as “heterodox” Islamic community have struggled for their religious and cultural rights and demanded to recognize with their differences and diversities. However, the revival of Alevi identity has different provision in each countries in Europe because of the differences of political structures in these countries. Within the context of this article, it can be touched upon these differences and elaborated the arrangements about Alevi immigrants in some European countries. Before proceeding to a discussion on the differences of the arrangements about Alevi in some European countries, it may be good to say a few words about Alevi organizations in Europe.

At the end of 1980s, Alevi assembled Alevism and ‘left’ ideology in Europe thanks to the founder of Alevi organizations in Europe. Most of the Alevi migrant organizations in Germany were established in 1989 in the wake of the political events in Turkey (Sökefeld & Schwalgin, 2000: 16)<sup>26</sup>. Even though the leading Alevi movement in Europe remains completely autonomous from the Alevi activities in Turkey through their economic power (Massicard, 2006: 2)<sup>27</sup>, it can be argued that Alevi organization in Europe have been largely motivated by Turkish politics. In fact, almost all of them partially or completely oppose Turkish government policies about Alev-

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/dunya/70779/Avusturya\\_da\\_Alevilik\\_artik\\_resmi\\_inanc.html?ihvxlxdxufbzahyuf](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/dunya/70779/Avusturya_da_Alevilik_artik_resmi_inanc.html?ihvxlxdxufbzahyuf) <retrived in 06.07.2014>

<sup>23</sup> Suter Reich, Virginia. 2012b. *Zwischen Differenz, Solidarität und Ausgrenzung. Inkorporationspfade der alevitischen Bewegung in der Schweiz und im transnationalen Raum*. Zürich: Chronos

<sup>24</sup> Nielsen, Jorgen & Akgül, Samim & Alibasic, Ahmet & Racijs, Egduanas. 2013. *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*. Leiden: Brill. pp:214.

<sup>25</sup> Renucci, Jean-François. 2005. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion. Council of Europe Publishing. <<http://www.echr.coe.int/LibraryDocs/DG2/HRFILES/DG2-EN-HRFILES-20%282005%29.pdf>> (retrived in 15.07.2014)

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<sup>27</sup> Massicard, Elise, 2006. Alevist mobilization in Germany and the perspective of Turkish integration in the EU. <<http://soc.kuleuven.be/ieeb/ethnicmobilization/docs/proc-Massicard.pdf>> (retrived in 13.07.2014)

ism and keep direct or indirect ties with their counterparts in Turkey. Since 2000s, the organizational progress of Alevism have gained speed. The European Confederation of Alevi Communities (*Avrupa Alevi Birlikleri Konfederasyonu*), has founded in 2002, represents more than 250 Alevi Cultural Centers, which are organized under national federations in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Romania, England, Norway, Sweden, Italy and Switzerland<sup>28</sup>.

### **Germany**

German legal system , through the German Constitution, provides freedom of religion and no one is subjected to discrimination because of their religious. Germany, where many Alevi inhabit, is one of the largest European countries and the most important transnational space for the Alevi community. According to a survey conducted by Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2007: 13)<sup>29</sup>, 13 per cent of Turk immigrants in Germany are Alevi. As a result of multiculturalism policies<sup>30</sup> that may respond to the cultural and religious diversities in Germany, Alevi immigrants have also many political opportunities to remedy their disadvantaged position due to their religious and cultural differences. However, Alevi have abstained from using this opportunity for years. Mainly three reasons can be argued to explain their hesitations. Firstly, they intended to live in Germany only for a limited time. Secondly, they hid their identity in the public domain to protect themselves against discrimination and false accusation that are imputed by some Sunnis in Germany, in other words, *takkiye* was used as a strategy in Germany as in Turkey. Thirdly, they did not have enough information about their rights and opportunities as immigrants. When they have decided to live in Germany permanently after 1980s, they have started to draw upon multiculturalism policies which promote the maintenance of cultural diversity and its institutionalization (Massicard, 2003)<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Sökefeld, Martin.2007. Aleviten und Europa. In: Gabriele Clemens (Hg.), Die Türkei und Europa. Münster: Lit Verlag. S. 172-187. More information please look at: <<http://alevi.com/TR/avrupa-alevi-birlikleri-konfederasyonu-genel-kurulu/>> (retrived in 21.07.2014)

<sup>29</sup> Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. 2007. *Muslim Life in Germany: A study conducted on behalf of the German Conference on Islam*. <<http://www.npdata.be/Data/Godsdiens/Duitsland/fb6-muslimisches-leben-englisch.pdf>> (retrived in 23.06.2014)

<sup>30</sup> More information about Multiculturalism. Please look at:< <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/multiculturalism/#ClaMul> > (retrived in 07.07.2014)

<sup>31</sup> Massicard, Elise. 2003. "Alevist movements at home and abroad: Mobilization spaces and disjunction". *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 28-29 (Spring-Fall). Pp: 163-187

AABF (Federation of Alevi Communities in Germany, *Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*) which is established in 1993, update Alevi immigrants in Germany on the political opportunities and contribute to awareness of their Identity. In fact, the numbers of the members in AABF, the biggest Alevi federation in Europe, is almost 100.000 Alevis. AABF is not only the umbrella organizations of Alevis with 147 local organizations throughout Germany but also is one of the transnational migration organizations in Europe. From 1993 until 2002, the statutes of AABF is expressed as a democratic mass organization but after 2002, AABF is defined as a religious community (Pries & Tuncer-Zengingül, :159)<sup>32</sup> That is why, German authorities have declared that specific type of religious education course can be taken by Islamic religious organization. Therefore, AABF changed their statutes in conformity with the arrangements about religious organizations in Germany and they are registered as religious organization in Germany. At the end of their recognition process, while the recognition and mobilization of Alevis has been increasing, their activities focus on their religious objectives. Via the AABF, Alevis are legally recognized as a religious community. Hamburg, Bremen and Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen) are defined “a liberal Islamic religious community” and recognized their religious holiday and fostered religious tuition in schools. This agreement between these state and Alevis also include provisions for the construction of worship, maintenance of cultural facilities and funeral organization<sup>33</sup>. Besides the aforementioned states eight states in Germany (Berlin, North Rhine Westphalia (NRW), Hessen, Baden Württemberg and Bayern) accepted the procurement of the right to hold religious classes in schools.

### **France**

Unlike AABF or Alevi organizations in Germany, Alevi organizations in France do not have the same political method that is focused on the context of religious diversity in Germany. Due to the *laïcité* principle which means the separation of the Church and the state, Alevi immigrants in France cannot launch as a religious community, even though Alevi community in France have the similar rights like other religious community at the local level. However FUAF (Federation of Alevi Community in France-*Fransa Alevi Federasyonu*) has struggled to be recognized as a cul-

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<sup>32</sup> Pries, Ludger & Tuncer-Zengingül, Tülay . 2013.“ Neither Omnipotent nor a Paper Tiger: The Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany and the Dynamics of its Multidimensional Area of Activities”. In Matthias Kortmann& Kerstin Rosenow-Williams (eds). *Islamic Organizations in Europe and the USA: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publication.

<sup>33</sup> More information please look at: <<http://www.dw.de/hamburg-reaches-out-to-its-muslim-communities/a-16378350> (retrived in 24.07.2014)

tural community because of the possible condition to be recognized Alevi in France. Alevi organizations in France focus firstly immigration issues to help Alevi in order to have acquired citizenship in France. Since they can have all rights as a different cultural and religious community when they are citizens in France.

FUAF (Federation of Alevi Communities in France/*Fransa Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*) with 30 Alevi Culture Centers was established in 1998. According to Kosulu (2013)<sup>34</sup> “ One of the most important motivations of the federation, which has been reiterated on numerous occasions by the president and other members, is to politicize Alevi in France in terms of representative democracy. The Federation facilitates gaining French citizenship for new immigrants...”. Kosulu is also argued that Alevi community engages with local administration system and they try to solve their problems at the local level by recommendation of FUAF.

The important circumstance is that FUAF applied in 2010 to Ministry of National Education in France in order to demand the integration of Alevi immigrants in France into the course books of the French education curriculum. FUAF has highlighted Alevism as a cultural identity rather than religious belief. Yet Alevism is not found any course books in France. But FUAF attempts to make a organizational model to create religious, cultural and social mobilization. In briefly, in addition to the aims of FUAF is to integrate Alevism into education system of France, the another aim of FUAF focuses on the intra-communities activities.

### *Austria*

According to estimates, about 80,000 Alevi live in Austria, of which around 30% have Austrian citizenship. The Alevi umbrella organization in Austria is the Federation of Alevi communities in Austria / Avusturya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu (AABF) with 8 Alevi organizations and nearly 2,000 members. AABF was established in 1998. Alevi are recognized as a religious community and they can even write their beliefs on their identity card as an Alevi. Also cemhouse is accepted as a worship and Alevi's faith days are holidays. Alevi has also their own grave in Austria. In this paper, I try to give information about the the Alevi federations in Europe which belong to European Alevi Confederation. However, this process is not the AABF's accomplishment because AABF is not accepted as an official exponent

<sup>34</sup> Kosulu, Deniz. 2013. “The Alevi Quest in Europe through the Redefinition of the Alevi Movement: Recognition and Political Participation, A Case Study of the FUAF in France”. In Jorgen S. Nielsen (ed). *Muslim Political Participation in Europe*. Edinburg University Press.

organizations by the Austria state because another Alevi organization (Alevi Islam Faith Community in Austria-Avusturya Alevi Islam Inanc Toplumunu- ALEVI)<sup>35</sup> in Austria had first applied to Austria Education Minister to represent Alevi immigrants in Austria and they are accepted in 2013. AABF is also applied after ALEVI but their application is not submitted because it is permitted legally only one representative of a religious community <sup>36</sup>.

### *The Netherlands*

There are no official statistics and registrations of the Alevi and Sunni community in the Netherlands. But Yildiz and Verkuyten (2009) state that Muslim groups who consist of mainly Moroccan and Turkish immigrants are around 6% of the Dutch population. They claim that around 75% of them are Sunni Muslims, approximately 20% are Alevis to the Turkish Muslim groups. 18 Alevi organizations and one Alevi foundation in the Netherland have united under one Federation, so-called HAK-DER (Federation of Alevi Communities in the Netherlands /*Hollanda Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*) which is founded in 1990 and connected with AABK (European Alevi Community Konfederation). HAK-DER institutionalized transnational ties with Alevi organizations in Europe and Turkey (Mügge, 2010: 111)<sup>37</sup>.

Moreover, the survey conducted by Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz showed that (2009<sup>38</sup>) the Sunnis in Netherland have rather negative attitude towards the Alevis and mutually Alevis were rather negative towards the Sunnis in Netherland. They explained this negative attitudes with two main reasons: Firstly, the two groups interpret Islam differently and secondly the Alevi associations in Western Europe has organized better and started to gain their rights as a different religious and cultural community from Sunni groups. Although Alevis in the Netherlands with their beliefs, norms and values differ from those of Sunnite Muslims, they have not

<sup>35</sup> More information, please look at: [http://www.aleviten.at/tr/?page\\_id=4](http://www.aleviten.at/tr/?page_id=4) <retrived in 22.07.2014>

<sup>36</sup> More information, please look at: <http://www.aleviten.or.at/menuleft/newsdetail/article/aabf-genel-baskani-cankayanin-konferansda-konusmasinin-metni.html> <retrived in 22.07.2014>

<sup>37</sup> Mügge, Liza.2010. Beyond Dutch Borders: Transnational Politics Among Colonial Migrants, Guestworkers and the Second Generations: Amsterdam University Press.

<sup>38</sup> Verkuyten,Maykel & Ali Aslan Yildiz. 2009. Muslim immigrants and religious group feelings: self-identification and attitudes among Sunni and Alevi Turkish-Dutch. *Ethnoc and Racial Studies*.32:7. Pp: 1121-1147.

recognized as a separate religious community by the state, such as Germany. Besides, HAK-DER as the unique organization to preserve the interests of Alevi immigrants in Netherland is one of the members of a religious-studies perspective which include twenty-one organizations, ten of which are Muslim, five Christian, three Jewish, one Hindu, one Buddhist, and one Humanist<sup>39</sup>. These organizations are selected mainly five criterias: operating at the national level, authorities contacts with the public, ethnic diversity, religious diversity, balance between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations. The aims of this programmes can be summarized to promote the religious and humanistic communities in the relationships between the Netherlands. Even HAK-DER has not already applied to be recognized as a separate cultural and religious community in the Netherlands but they work for the Alevis to be integrated to the Dutch society and to be place Alevism into the course books of the Dutch education curriculum.

### *Switzerland*

Switzerland is a federal parliamentary republic consisting of 26 cantons. Alevi organizations in Switzerland have operations in 17 cantons. The first Alevi organization, *Basel ve Cevresi Alevi Bektasi Kültür Birliği*, was founded in 1992 in Basel. If we look at the historical background of the Alevi organizations in Switzerland, it can be argued that two important reasons encouraged Alevis to establish their associations: firstly, the positive perception of the successful Alevi organizations in Germany and secondly the Alevi institutionalization in Switzerland are a direct response to violent events in Turkey, such as 1993 Sivas massacre and 1995 Gazi events. After Sivas massacre Alevi associations were founded in four cantons (Fribourg, Winterthur, Zurich and Arbon). In subsequent years, another seven Alevi associations (Basel, Lugano, Solothurn, Langenthal, Biel, Aarau, Lausanne) and in 2010 five Alevi organizations (Lucerne, Bern, Geneva, Dels Berg and Churchill) were established (Suter Reich 2012a)<sup>40</sup>

All of the Alevi associations have the same organizational structures in accordance with Article 60 of the Swiss Civil Law which are arranged associations that

<sup>39</sup> [http://translate.google.de/translate?hl=de&sl=en&u=https://www.wodc.nl/images/summary\\_tcm44-398456.pdf&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dhumaniste%2Blines%2Bnetherlands,%2Balevi%26biw%3D1138%26bih%3D548](http://translate.google.de/translate?hl=de&sl=en&u=https://www.wodc.nl/images/summary_tcm44-398456.pdf&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dhumaniste%2Blines%2Bnetherlands,%2Balevi%26biw%3D1138%26bih%3D548) <retrived in 22.07.2014>

<sup>40</sup> Suter Reich, Virginia. 2012b. Zwischen Differenz, Solidarität und Ausgrenzung. Inkorporationspfade der alevitischen Bewegung in der Schweiz und im transnationalen Raum. Zürich: Chronos

need to acquire a legal incorporation in Switzerland<sup>41</sup>. Alevi organizations who are in 17 cantons have a cooperation and their umbrella organization is Switzerland Alevi Community Federation (İsviçre Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu-IABF) which was founded in 1998. IABF is connected with European Alevi Community Confederation and as Suter Reich denotes (2012a: 12) ,“ IABF corresponded to both a greater normalization of the grown structures in Switzerland, as well as the decentralization of transnational cooperation between Alevi organizations across Europe.”

At least at the beginning of the establishment period, like Alevi organizations in Germany, the majority of Alevi associations, which are members of the IABF, were not a religious orientation. The status of Alevi organization was defined as “democratic masses” or “cultural, progressive and humane thinking” organizations because the aims of these organizations are committed to acquire the rights of Alevis and to separate their traditions and culture (Suter Reich 2012b)<sup>42</sup> However, some Alevi associations in Switzerland designed their status as a religious community and separated from the standpoints of IABF.

In 2012, the Basel Cantonal Parliament has recognized Alevi community as a religious community and it was the first time in the history of Switzerland that Alevi community is both the first non-Christian and non-Jewish community to receive formal state recognition. The most important factor gained from this right in Basel is that Alevi organizations have made efforts to the integration process of Alevis in the Switzerland. Infact Alevi organizations are defined that “stand line with Swiss and Christian values”<sup>43</sup> After Alevism is integrated into education system of Switzerland, the one of the important situations about Alevi immigrants in Switzerland can be stated to be recognized as a religious community in Basel Canton at the end of the twenty years<sup>44</sup>. The another important situations is that Alevi community is represented in inter-religious roundtable in the canton of Zurich<sup>45</sup>. According to Suter

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.admin.ch/ch/e/rs/210/a60.html> <retrived in 19.07.2014>

<sup>42</sup> Suter Reich, Virginia. 2012a. „Bericht zur alevitischen Bevölkerung im Kanton Zürich“.Im Auftrag der Integrationsförderung der Stadt Zürich. Züricher Forum der Religionen.

<sup>43</sup> <<http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/schweiz/erste-nichtchristliche-gemeinschaft-anerkannt-1.17692417>> (retrived in 19.07.2014)

<sup>44</sup> More information, please look at the page of IABF< <http://www.iabf.ch/t/index.php/haberler/isvicre/203-isvicre-baselde-alevilik-resmi-olarak-tannd> > (retrived in 20.07.2014)

<sup>45</sup> Suter Reich, Virginia. 2012a. Bericht zur alevitischen Bevölkerung im Kanton Zürich. Im Auftrag der Integrationsförderung der Stadt Zürich. Züricher Forum der Religionen.

Reich (2012:25), on the one hand, neither the canton of Zurich nor the religious field in Switzerland does not offer the same options as in Germany to be recognized Alevi community as a separate religious group. On the other hand, the efforts of Alevi organizations in the canton Zurich to the religious representation of Alevi are not clear and do not accomplish enough.

Alevism in Switzerland is accepted as a separated religious community from Muslim groups in 2014 and cemevi is defined as a worship like church or mosque as a result of the activities of “Interfaith Dialogue” in Switzerland and there is a cemevi in the House of Religion constructed in Bern <sup>46</sup>.

### ***Denmark and Sweden***

In Denmark, the first Alevi organization, (Federation of Alevi Communities in Denmark/ *Danimarka Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu*) was established in 1990 and includes 9 Alevi organizations which were founded in 1999<sup>47</sup>. One of their main aims is declared to help the integration of Alevi to the Danish society. Thanks to several Alevi academics, DABF wrote the for the first time a report in Danish to explain their beliefs and culture and also to become “a recognized belief system in Denmark” in 2006. After this report, Alevi community in Denmark was accepted as a religious community independent from other religious, especially Muslim groups in 2007. However, after the caricature crisis in Denmark, Jorgensen(2008:205) <sup>48</sup> states that “ in interviews with members of the different Alevi organisations the informants emphasized that they did not want to be taken as Muslims and one person interviewed said that the organization had received threats from anonymous Sunni Muslims who accused the Alevi of deviating from the true Islamic faith”.

When we look at another Nordic country, Sweden, we see that there is also Alevi federation in Sweden. which connects with the European Alevi Confederation. The first Alevi association was founded in 1995 in Stockholm. Alevi organized in Sweden after the Sivas Massacre in 1993, like many other Alevi organizations in Europe. Alevi Cultural Center in Sweden work to represent Alevi in Sweden and to strug-

<sup>46</sup> <<http://t24.com.tr/haber/isvicrede-alevilik-musulmanliktan-ayri-bir-din-sayildi,266041>> (retrived in 30.07.2014)

<sup>47</sup> More information please look at: <[http://tr.alevi.dk/?page\\_id=5](http://tr.alevi.dk/?page_id=5)>(retrived in 20.07.2014)

<sup>48</sup> Jorgensen,Martin Bak. 2008. „National and Transnational Identities: Turkish Organising Processes and Identity Construction in Denmark, Sweden and Germany“. PhD Dissertation. Denmark: Aalborg University.

gle recognised Alevi culture and religion<sup>49</sup>. Federation of Alevi Community in Sweden- İsvec Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu (IABF) was established in 2008 by coming together with five Alevi associations in Sweden. Alevi community in Sweden have accepted only in a different category but not as recognized religious community, as in Denmark. Jorgensen (2008) defines this situation in Sweden to be placed in the periphery and to have a limited autonomy as an organization.

### **Great Britain**

Britantian Alevi Cultural Center and Cemevi (*İngiltere Alevi Kltr Merkezi ve Cemevi – IAKMC*) with more than three thousand members is the biggest Turkish migration organization in England. Like many Alevi organizations in Europe, IAKCM was founded in 1993, in London. Britantian Alevi Federation which belongs to AABK (European Alevi Confederation) include 12 Alevi Cultural Centers (on 27 June 2014 is opened a new Cemevi in Edinburg)<sup>50</sup> Due to the successful efforts of IAKMC, Alevi course in the school is a part of Religious Educational Curriculum, in other words, both Alevi pupils and all other students in the school the first in the world take Alevism course together because of Alevism as part of the core religious education (RE) curriculum'. This project is used one primary and one secondary schools as a pilot project since 2011. The aim of this project is to help the better integration of Alevi pupils in the school with a positive impact on their self-confidence, achievement and attitudes . At the end of this pilot project, Alevism is now officially integrated into the RE curriculum in London. In 2014, Academics at the Westminster University, some schools and London Alevi Community Centre design a new project which is called Alevi Hidden Culture Project has been awarded by British Education Research Association Prize. By this project, they claim that this project contributes to the recognition of Alevi community in London and Turkey<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Akis, Yasemin& Kalaylioglu, Mahir. 2010. Turkish Associations in Metropolitan Stockholm: Organizational Differentiation and Socio-Political Participation of Turkish Immigrants“. The Stockholm University Linnaeus Center for Integration Studies (SULCIS). Working Paper 2010:5 ISSN 1654-1189. <[http://www.su.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.55370.1321514455!/SULCISWP2010\\_5.pdf](http://www.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.55370.1321514455!/SULCISWP2010_5.pdf)>. (retrived in 12.07.2014)

<sup>50</sup> More informaion, please look at this link: <http://adalife.co.uk/edinburghta-pir-sultan-abdal-kultur-merkezi-cemevi-acildi.html> <retrived in 21.07.2014>

<sup>51</sup> More information, please look at: <http://www.westminster.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/humanities/2014/sociology-academics-win-british-education-research-association-prize-for-the-alevi-religion-and-identity-project>, <retrived in 25.07.2014>

In addition to the different implementation of Alevi courses in London as a result of the coordination works between London Alevi Community Centre and Westminster University, it is important to emphasize the IAKCM is also different from other Alevi organizations in Europe, because IAKCM interests in not only the problems of Alevi immigrants but also all immigrants who come from Turkey in order to create solidarity each other and to help their integration by educational, cultural and social activities and to provide services that are in accordance with their beliefs.

### ***Romania***

Like Britanian Alevi Cultural Center and Cemevi, the similar situation can be seen the Alevi organization in Romania. Romania Alevi Cultural Center which has founded in 2007 in Bukres keep their doors open to not only Alevi immigrants in Romania but also all immigrants from Turkey.

### ***Belgium***

The first Alevi organization was established in 1994 and more than 10 Alevi associations came together under the Federation of Alevi Associations in Belgium (BABF) in 2008<sup>52</sup>. BABF is defined itself as a laic and democratic organisation. It defends a life together with all nations on the base of equality of rights. BABF also has the principal aim of defend and develop the cultural personality of the Alevi and the value of their creed and philosophy. In order it organises activities and realizes projects to satisfy the Alevi's needs relating to their socio-culture and creeds. It favors the integration of Alevi to their host country besides guarding their essential identities. In order to realize its activities and aims, BABF might open "cem" houses, library, establish a radio and tv station, print brochures, journals and periodicals and also distribute them, organize evening parties, panels, seminars and conferences, realize theatral art, organize some courses.

### ***Italy***

There is only two Alevi associations. The first one is that Alevi Bektasi Cultural Union in Italy- *Italya Alevi Bektasi Kültür Birliđi* (IABKB) was established in Lecco in 2007<sup>53</sup>. The second one was established in 2012. These associations are now organized mainly intra-community activities such as semah course or Cem rituals.

<sup>52</sup> <[http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/tsv\\_pdf/2008/02/28/08033120.pdf](http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/tsv_pdf/2008/02/28/08033120.pdf)> (retrived in 02.08.2014)

<sup>53</sup> More information please look at <<http://www.aleviten.or.at/menuleft/newsdetail/article/italyada-aleviler-mi-varmis.html>> (retrived in 04.08.2014)

Alevi in Italy has not special status which is recognised by the state, but they have connection with European Alevi Confederation and they contribute to struggle of Alevi's recognition with their culture and religious rituals in Europe.

#### ***4. "European Integration" of Alevi Immigrants***

Religion is one of the strongest bonds to establish and to protect a sense of belonging to a community. That's why religion for the immigrants settled in a new country is one of the areas which is necessary to allow for self-expression. Conversely, the regulations in the incorporation process between immigrants and natives of the new settled society is required to give the place with the religious beliefs and practices of the immigrants not only for the context of equal citizenship and human rights but also for social cohesion and belonging at the highest level to the host countries. As Kastoryano (2004: 1237) states, "Religion provided the most important components of moral and social order, ethnic pride and 'self-enhancement'".

Religion and incorporation can be discussed as an intermingled issue if it will be debated Turkish immigrants in Europe because Turkish immigrants define themselves in Europe with not only the Turkish but also Muslim identity. However, Muslim identity is more dominant than Turkish identity in the organization structures of Turkish immigrants in Europe because religion is a strategically used against discrimination and exclusion for the immigrants in order to acquire their rights in the host countries (Kaya & Kentel, 2005: 131)<sup>54</sup>. In a similar situation for Alevi immigrants in Europe can be mentioned. For example, although Alevi are defined as cultural and religious immigrants in Germany, they are legally recognized as only a religious community in some states of Germany.

At the same time, Alevi immigrants in Europe highlight their differences of Sunni-Turkish immigrants in order to gain their political and cultural rights and not to be perceived as „non-integrated Muslim“ to Western lifestyle and culture (Kaya, 2011:3)<sup>55</sup> Kosnick (2004: 985)<sup>56</sup> claims that "Alevism thus presents a culture, phi-

<sup>54</sup> Kaya, Ayhan & Kentel, F. 2005. Euro-Türkler Türkiye ile Avrupa Birliği arasında Köprü mü Engel mi?: Almanya- Türkleri ve Fransa Türkleri Üzerine Karşılatırmalı Bir Çalışma, İstanbul : İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi.

<sup>55</sup> Kaya, Asiye. 2011. Migration, Migrant Policies and Changing Cultures of Belongings: Alevi from Turkey in Germany and the United States [http://www.aicgs.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/kaya\\_daad0608.pdf](http://www.aicgs.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/kaya_daad0608.pdf), <retrieved by 07.07.2014>

<sup>56</sup> Kosnick, Kira. 2004. "Speaking in One's Own Voice: Representational Strategies of Alevi Turkish

losophy and version of Islam that is perfectly compatible with, and in some respects even exemplary of, the ideals of Western democratic societies. One function of Alevi media in the migration context is thus to promote this understanding among German and European audiences“. Suter Reich (2012a)<sup>57</sup> also argues that the Alevi organizations in Switzerland contribute to “successful integration” of the Alevis to the Swiss society by promoting information events on the Swiss health system or education system and organized inter-religious dialogue. Furthermore, with the words of the Bill Park (2012:182)<sup>58</sup> “The absence of headscarves and of frequent prayer rituals. The greater equality of Alevi women and the Alevi inclination towards secularism have all helped render Europe’s Alevi community more palatable to their host populations, and their integration has been smoother than that of Turkey’s Sunni Muslims”. It can be argued that Euro-Islam project is also merged and build on these arguments. Admittedly, Euro-Islam project is mainly shaped to accomplish an incorporation between the values of European and Islam, but Sunni community put a distance to the project of Euro-Islam since Alevi community is given as an example to implement the project of Euro-Islam (Nebile ,2011:404)<sup>59</sup>.

It would be possible to argue that Alevi community in Turkey has supported secularism and republicanism which would lead to distinguish them from the repressive Sunni-Islam belief in Turkey. Yet the Republic of Turkey has not changed tremendously since its founding concerning repression of Alevi religious and cultural identity in society. This is the line of argument that we shall pursue here. We could claim that the religious and cultural practices of the Alevi immigrants in Europe can coordinate with the values and the lifestyle of Western society which has been characterized as pluralist, democratic, egalitarian and libertarian outlook.

Briefly, Alevis don’t go to a mosque and don’t perform *namaz* or *salat* at five

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Migrants on Open-Access Television in Berlin,” Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies Vol. 30, No. 5.September 2004.pp:979-994.

<sup>57</sup> Suter Reich, Virginia. 2012a. „Bericht zur alevitischen Bevölkerung im Kanton Zürich“.Im Auftrag der Integrationsförderung der Stadt Zürich. Züricher Forum der Religionen.

<sup>58</sup> Park, Bill. 2012. *Modern Turkey: People, State and Foreign Policy in a Globalised World*. Routledge.

<sup>59</sup> Nebile, Özmen.2011. Göçün 50.yilinda Entegrasyon ve Din Iliskisinin Dönüsen Parametreleri: Almanya’da Türkler.*Uluslararası Sosyal Arastirmalar Dergisi*. Sayi: 19. Güz 2011. sf: 398-412. [www.sosyalarastirmalar.com](http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com)

times per day but they meet and pray in a *Cemevi* or cemhouse<sup>60\*\*\*</sup>, the people who gather for the cem ritual<sup>61\*\*\*\*</sup> sits in a circle on the floor facing each other during the cem. The Alevi men and women participate in all religious and cultural rituals together. Alevi women do not wear headscarf like Sunni women but some Alevi women, especially old women cover their heads as a traditional habit. Children are also allowed to participate in the ceremony. Alevism is influenced by the Christianity in their own historical development (Kocak, 2010:119)<sup>62</sup>. Also they have supported left parties. Therefore, it is argued that the incorporation process for Alevi community with the European societies is different and might be easier than Sunni- Muslims.

In these process, while Alevis have attempted to “rebuilt and rediscovered” their own collective identities, they define themselves both as European and also as citizens of specific countries. For example, Alevis have significantly higher rate of naturalization than other Turkish-born people in Germany (Sökefeld, 2008b)<sup>63</sup>. AABF have a big effects to “integrate” Alevis in Germany by means of its naturalization project for the integration of disadvantaged youth and the efforts for Alevi religious classes in Germany (Sökefeld. : 273).<sup>64</sup> Even though, according to German interior ministry (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2009)<sup>65</sup>, 75 percentages of Alevis living in Germany were not born in there, the 67 percentage of Alevis in Germany are German citizen. Also in France, 80% of Alevis who are almost 200.000 have French citizenship<sup>66</sup>. The naturalization rate shows us that Alevis give more effort to integrate socially and organizationally to Germany and France. Therefore,

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<sup>60</sup> \* Cemhouse is the worship of Alevis. Cemhouse is not only as place for praying and practicing religion but also as cultural center for Alevis.

<sup>61</sup> \*\* Alevism is a face-to face belief system and cem (gathering ceremony), which is the main ritual of Alevism, fulfills this condition

<sup>62</sup> Kocak, Hüseyin. 2010. *Project Euro-Islam Voraussetzung für eine Erfolgreiche Integration*. Frankfurt: August von Goethe Akademie Verlag.

<sup>63</sup> Sökefeld, Martin. 2008b. “Einleitung: Aleviten in Deutschland- von takiye zur alevitische Bewegung”. In Martin Sökefeld (ed.), *Aleviten in Deutschland- Identitätsprozesse einer Religionsgemeinschaft in der Diaspora*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

<sup>64</sup> Sökefeld, Martin. “Difficult Identifications: The Debate on Alevism and Islam in Germany”. In Ala Al-Hamaneh and Jörn Thielmann (eds), *Islam and Muslims in Germany*. Leiden: Brill Verlag. Pp: 267-297.

<sup>65</sup> Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. 2009. *Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland*. Nürnberg: Bundesministerium des Innern.

<sup>66</sup> Kosulu, Deniz. 2013. “The Alevi Quest in Europe through the Redefinition of the Alevi Movement: Recognition and Political Participation, A Case Study of the FUAF in France”. In Jorgen S. Nielsen (ed). *Muslim Political Participation in Europe*. Edinburg University Press.

we can argue that Alevi immigrants in Europe do not define themselves as sojourners in the country from which they migrated because naturalization hold rights politically and legally and a whole lot of reaching equal opportunity in the social life. Nonetheless, it can be possible to argue that Denmark, Sweden and Norway has similar welfare state arrangements, their main differences can be summarized about their integration policies for immigrants. There are many analyses at least on macro level but as I mentioned before, Jorgensen (2011)<sup>67</sup> claims that the acquisition of citizenship is an significant indicator because naturalization is used as a mean to get strong integration to the settled country. However, the effect of direct or institutional discrimination on naturalisation and participation to all social, cultural and political process are important parameters to analyze the integration level. Also we need to more information on the Alevi organizations and their status, rights and struggle in the settled countries.

### ***5. The Effect of EU on the Question of Alevi Identity***

Alevi community is one of the debatable questions for the integration of Turkey with EU. All in all, Alevi immigrants in Europe have been encouraged by a European Parliament decision since 1986 to support groups engaged in the promotion of immigrant cultures and identities (Park, 2012)<sup>68</sup>. In the process of integration of Turkey with the European Union, European Alevis make also demands based on the recognition of the differences and their rights in Turkey. After Turkey was accepted as an EU candidate in 1999, the first Regular Report from the Commission on Turkey's Progress towards accession stated that "Alevis complaint notably concern compulsory religious instruction in schools and school books, which would not reflect the Alevi identity, as well as the fact that financial support is only available for the building of Sunni mosques and religious foundations" (European Commission 2000: 18)<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, EU recognizes and declares Alevis as a separate group from Sunni Muslims because the 2003 report defines Alevis as a 'non Sunni religious community',

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<sup>67</sup> Jorgensen, Martin Bak. 2008. *National and Transnational Identities: Turkish Organising Processes and Identity Construction in Denmark, Sweden and Germany*. SPIRIT, Aalborg University AMID, Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark. Unpublished PhD Dissertation.

<sup>68</sup> Park, Bill. 2012. *Modern Turkey: People, State and Foreign Policy in a Globalised World*. Routledge.

<sup>69</sup> European Union Commission, (2000), 2000 Regular Report from the Commission on the Progress Turkey's Progress towards accession, Brussels, URL: [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/enlargement/report\\_11\\_00/pdf/en/tu\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/enlargement/report_11_00/pdf/en/tu_en.pdf)

and the 2004 report defines them as a ‘non-Sunni Muslim minority’ (Commission of the European Communities 2004: 44)<sup>70</sup>. Thus, there is a minority debate to start after Alevis were defined as a ‘non-Sunni Muslim minority in the EU Regular Report on Turkey’s Progress towards Accession (2004), which raised the question of whether Alevism is inside or outside Islam. The process of the integration of EU causes the discussion of “differences” within the nation state because EU proclaims the lack of representation of Alevis in the state (EU, 2004: 166). According to Turkey 2008 Progress Report (European Commission, 2008), the Alevi issue has become one of the factors the relationship between Turkey and EU in accession process because the report refers to “Alevi Opening” with the statement of “as regards the Alevis, the government announced an initiative aimed at improving dialogue with this community and addressing its concerns”(European Commission, 2008: 18)<sup>71</sup>

Alevi community leaders in Europe, especially in Germany, have reached out to European political leaders, host government and the European Union in order to rise to notice the Alevi plight in Turkey. In addition to this, Alevis have attempted to put transnational linkages into the recognition practices because many Alevis in Turkey believe that Europe is the only space where things may change. However, these ideas have not been realized as of yet. Until the present, Turkey’s European agenda has contributed to the Alevi movement in terms of transnational links. Interestingly, the differences of Alevi identity is also described not only from the Sunni-Muslims but also other types of Turkish identity by taking into account to their using of the transnational opportunities structures and factors (Jorgensen. 2008:299).<sup>72</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Muslims constitute a large minority of Europe because the total Muslim population, including immigrant and native born, in Western Europe is about 20 million of the EU’s 500 million residents. It is possible to claim that the Euro-Islam identity can not be ignored as a part of European culture and so Euro-Islam project play a import-

<sup>70</sup> European Commission. (2004), 2004 Regular Report on Turkey’s progress towards accession, Brussels, [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/enlargement/report\\_2004/pdf/rr\\_tr\\_2004\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/enlargement/report_2004/pdf/rr_tr_2004_en.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> European Commission. 2008. Turkey Progress Report. [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press\\_corner/key-documents/reports\\_nov\\_2008/turkey\\_progress\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/press_corner/key-documents/reports_nov_2008/turkey_progress_report_en.pdf), <retrived in 09.07.2014>

<sup>72</sup> Jorgensen, Martin Bak. 2008. „National and Transnational Identities: Turkish Organising Processes and Identity Construction in Denmark, Sweden and Germany“. PhD Dissertation. Denmark: Aalborg University.

ant role for the European future. All in all, political approaches in Europe deny the argument that Islam is “incompatible” with the Western societies because they discuss the issue with the context of citizenship in the plural democratic society (Kastoryano, 2004: 1236)<sup>73</sup>. Although Islam is claimed not to fit European society, there is also a debate whether a transnational European Muslim identity can be constituted as a result of Muslim immigrants in Europe<sup>74</sup>. In fact, Muslim groups are not homogeneous and this detail is also important to analyse and to arrange legally for the immigrant Muslim groups. The monolithic views about the Muslims give rise to prejudices and prevent different standpoints to find solutions for the problems of Muslim minorities in different countries. For example, Alevi immigrants in Europe has totally different Muslim profil, rituals and attitudes, so they struggle for their rights and identity and they always emphasize their differences from the another Muslim groups, especially Sunni immigrants in Europe.

“Why is the important to be recognized for Alevis as a different cultural and religious community?”, this question is crucial to understand their struggles in all European countries. This question can be answered with mainly two reasons: Firstly, the recognition as a religious group is important to make easily their religious rituals and to transmit their culture and beliefs for the next generations. For example, Jorgengen (2008:287) claims that “the public knowledge of Alevism in Denmark is limited but in Sweden is more or less non-existent” because Alevi community is not recognized an independent community in Sweden, like Denmark. Secondly, the decision to be recognised as an independent belief system means also being recognized as an independent minority in Europe (Jorgensen, 2008). Therefore Alevi immigrants want to take advantages as an another immigrant group who different from all Turkish and Muslim groups in Europe in order to protect their identity and to gain their rights.

In addition to their struggle as a independent religious and cultural community, Alevis as an immigrant group attempt to incorporate with foreign countries that are new settled. Incorporation or integration with foreign cultures or society is required long times both immigrants and native people. Since immigrant groups are not granted citizenships rights as a result of the ethnic origin and they have been seen as

<sup>73</sup> Kastoryano, Riva. 2004. “Religion and Incorporation: Islam in France and Germany „, *International Migration Review* . Volume 38.Issue 3. pp: 1234–1255, September 2004

<sup>74</sup> Ozyürek, Esra 2009. „The Light of the Alevi Fire Was Lit in Germany and then Spread to Turkey”: A Transnational Debate on the Boundaries of Islam”. *Turkish Studies*. Vol.10, No:2,pp:233-253.(June 2009)

“outsiders” in the society, this situation caused to create many different problems in terms of integration. Naturally, social integration does not succeed with only the endeavour of immigrants; this is a two-way process of accommodation involving both immigrant groups and groups of “majority” society. In fact, Tambiah states that integration achieve “*positive two-way processes of mutual accommodation between migrants and their host society*” (2000:168)<sup>75</sup>. Turks in Germany are given as an example of integration by Fücks(2008)<sup>76</sup>. With his words: “Actually, German cultural conservatism, which refuses to see potential German citizens in Turkish immigrants, and Turkish nationalism play right into each other’s hands. They intersect in the slogan “Once a Turk, always a Turk!” For all the problems associated with integration, one thing is clear: the economical and demographic reasons bring about the necessity of immigrants in Europe.

As I mention above, Alevi community in Europe attempt to integrate into the secularism of liberal European societies. Some scholar argue that the integration of Alevis to the European values has been easier than that of the Sunni Muslims, who come from Turkey despite their religious and cultural diversities. Therefore, Alevi immigrants in Europe are discussed as a good example to be embodied the Euro-Islam project, which aims to mix a democratic, secular and modern Islamic form with the ‘modern’ European values or norms.

Moreover, Alevi organizations play a salient role in both integrate the new settled countries and setting up the networks of solidarity, connectedness and association among Alevi communities in transnational social space. Another important point to remember about integration debates is that it is difficult to distinguish from Alevism in Europe to Alevism in Turkey. Because Alevi organizations in Europe have been largely motivated by Turkish politics and almost all of them partially or completely oppose Turkish governmental policies about Alevism and keep direct or indirect ties with their counterparts in Turkey. In spite of the social, cultural, and political ties between Alevi organizations in Europe and Turkey, many developments in Turkey do not constitute the main aim of the analysis in the current paper. However, the Alevi movement is not discussed and understand with only local and national level, this

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<sup>75</sup> Tambiah, S. J. (2000), “Transnational Movements, Diaspora and Multiple Modernities”, *Deadalus* Vol. 129, Nr. 1: 163-194.

<sup>76</sup> Fücks, Ralf. 2008. „Walling Yourself Off is No Alternative: Problems of Transnational Migration in Europe“. <http://www.boell.de/de/navigation/struktur-2367.html> <retrived at 11.07.2014>

movement is a transnational movement and Alevi community can be analyzed as a transnational community.

In brief, at local and national level, Alevi immigrants in Europe put pressure on the Turkish state to gain recognition and their rights as an equal citizenship in Turkey. Also at the transnational level, they struggle for their status and rights in European countries, therefore it can be argued that Alevis call into being their identity at the all level, but by different channels. In this paper, it will be difficult to elaborate descriptions of chosen countries who have Alevi federation, so I have attempted to reflect an overall perspective in order to explore their struggle as an immigrant transnational community in European countries.

As a summary, there are vertical and horizontal cooperation between Alevi organizations. All Alevi organizations has connection horizontally each other in the settled countries and united under one national federation. There are 12 national Alevi federations in Europe and all these national federations has both horizontally connected each other and vertically tied with European Alevi Community Confederation. The tasks of Alevi organizations in Europe firstly can be summarized to arrange and to support the local Alevi organizations with their social, cultural or religious activities and them to contribute in the national and transnational recognition policies about the Alevi organizations

Concisely, even though Alevis in every European country execute a separate strategy to recognize officially, they highlight especially both their differences from the other Muslims and the compatible with the values of Europe. In fact, they represent themselves as a “secular and modern” Muslim community. Also, it can be possible to claim that the Alevi organizations in European countries have more clear definition about Alevism: as their claims, Alevis are a Muslim community with having different cultural and religious rituals from Sunni-Muslims, their worship is Cem house; they want to teach Alevism in the school and they try to include Alevism course to the curriculums and AABK (Confederation of Alevi Communities in Europe) can be taken as an institutionalized interlocutor for most of the Alevi immigrants in Europe<sup>77\*\*\*\*</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> \*\*\*\*Except for AABK (European Alevi Community Confederation), CEM Vakfi offers also a powerful organization structure and support the Turkish state policies about Alevism. There is also some small organizations or associations who deny the approaches of AABK or CEM Vakfi but AABK is the biggest Alevi organizations and the members of AABK are cited that AABK is the representative institution of Alevism in Europe.

The main transnational activities in Alevi organizations can be categorized four points: Firstly, Alevi in Europe struggle not only for their condition, but also for their legal recognition in Turkey. Secondly, spiritual and social activities are organized transnationally for example *dedes* who is the religious leader and one of the basic institution of Alevism can come another city or country, even from Turkey to conduct the *Cem* ritual or panel discussions about Alevi and Alevism are promoted and also the Sivas, Corum. Maras massacre in Turkey and at the same time in different European countries are commemorated. Thirdly, remittances and home visits that can arouse the economy of homeland. Alevi immigrants in Europe collect and transfer remittances to Alevi community in Turkey in order to increase the awareness of Alevi identity and to determine the strategies of Alevi movement during the recognition process. AABF, for example, has occasionally transferred remittances in the last 10–15 years to the Alevi Bektasi Federation (ABF) in Turkey in order to support the construction of the Cemevis in Turkey. Fourthly, they have had lobbies for the institutionalization of Alevism in Europe although they have not had the strong lobbyist tradition as for instance the Armenians. The leader of Alevi organizations, federations and Confederation contact with members of Parliament or different institutions and foundations in order to pressure on the Turkish state. For example Joachim Gauck who is the President of Germany visited the Alevi Confederation on 21.03.2014<sup>78</sup>. This visiting is important for Alevi immigrants in Germany because it has been the first time recognized by the President of Germany after their struggle have completed 25 years. After the visit of J. Gauck, many people and newspaper discussed the situation of Alevi immigrants in Germany and Europe, so this visit contributes to the awareness of Alevi community and the debates of their status in Turkey.

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<sup>78</sup> More information, please look at: <<http://alevi.com/de/bundesprasident-joachim-gauck-%E2%80%9Eich-mochte-ihnen-danke-sagen/>> retrieved in 24.07.2014

## İtransnationale Gemeinschaften: Alevitischen Immigrants in Europa

Deniz Coşan EKE

### Fazit

Es besteht kein Zweifel über die Tatsache, dass Europa das Zuhause für viele verschiedene Einwanderergruppen, Kulturen und Religionen geworden ist. Trotz der Tatsache, dass der Islam, unter dem Namen der muslimischen Immigrants in Europa, sich in einer kontroversen Position befindet, kann die Euro-Islam-Identität als Teil der europäischen Kultur nicht ignoriert werden. In der Tat beläuft sich die Zahl der gesamten muslimische Bevölkerung in Westeuropa, einschließlich der Einwanderer und der in Deutschland geborenen Ausländer, auf über 20 Millionen Muslime (Gesamtbevölkerung Europas: 500 Millionen). Der Islam als Weltreligion weist keine einheitlichen kulturellen Merkmale auf. Auch bestehen innerhalb des Islams keine einheitliche Praktiken. Der Grund dafür besteht darin, dass die weltweiten "heterodoxen" islamischen Gruppen unterschiedliche Rituale aufweisen und diese sich trotzdem als Teil des Islams definieren. In dieser Arbeit wird das Alevitentum als eine der heterodoxen Glaubenssysteme im Islam thematisiert. Unbeachtet der Tatsache, dass die Aleviten als religiöse und kulturelle Gemeinschaft vor allem in der Türkei angesiedelt sind, können sie aufgrund der zunehmenden internationalen Migration als eine transnationale Glaubensgemeinschaft aufgefasst werden. Folglich ist das Ziel dieser Arbeit, die Position der alevitischen Gemeinschaft als heterodoxe islamische Gruppe in der europäischen Kultur und die Auswirkungen der europäischen Kultur auf die alevitische Identität zu erforschen.

Zusammengefasst lässt sich sagen: Während die Aleviten kontinuierlich auf lokaler und nationaler Ebene Druck auf den türkischen Staat ausüben, um damit als religiöse und kulturelle Gemeinschaft anerkannt zu werden und ihre Rechte als gleichberechtigte Bürger zu erlangen, auf transnationaler Ebene, kämpfen sie in den europäischen Ländern als Migranten und auch als Religionsgemeinschaft um ihren rechtlichen Status. Aus diesem Grund tragen die alevitischen Organisationen, die gegründet wurden, um die eigene Identität zu bewahren, dazu bei, dass die Aleviten sich zu einer transnationalen Gemeinschaft entwickeln. In diesem Artikel wurden die zur 2002 gegründeten Europäischen Union der Alevitischen Gemeinden gehörigen Landesföderationen mit mehr als 250 alevitischen Kulturzentren behandelt. Themati-

siert wurden die alevitische Bewegung und die rechtlichen Bemühungen in Ländern, in denen alevitische Föderationen vorhanden sind. Es handelt sich dabei um Deutschland, Österreich, Frankreich, die Schweiz, England, Dänemark, die Niederlande, Norwegen, Schweden, Rumänien und Italien.

Zusätzlich zur Literatur fanden Informationen Verwendung, die in Gesprächen per E-Mail und Telefon mit den Vorsitzenden der Föderationen der alevitischen Organisationen gesammelt worden waren. Wenn auch die Aleviten im Rahmen der Politik und der Gesetze des Landes, in dem sie sich befinden, unterschiedliche Strategien anwenden, um in vielen europäischen Ländern anerkannt zu werden, betonen sie alle, dass sie anders als die anderen Muslime, vor allem als die sunnitischen Muslime sind und mit den europäischen Werten übereinstimmen. Der wichtigste Grund dafür ist, dass die Aleviten sich als „eine säkulare und moderne muslimische“ Gemeinschaft darstellen. Des Weiteren sind einige Stichpunkte zur Vorgehensweise der alevitischen Organisationen in Europa für die religiöse und kulturelle Anerkennung der alevitischen Identität erwähnenswert: Die Aleviten sind eine muslimische Gemeinschaft mit anderen kulturellen und religiösen Ritualen als die sunnitischen Muslime. Ihr Gotteshaus ist das Cem-Haus. Sie bemühen sich, im Rahmen der Gesetze der Länder, in denen sie sich befinden, darum, dass das Alevitentum in den Lehrplan eingeht und in den Schulen gelehrt wird. Wenn man die Anzahl der Mitglieder betrachtet, kann man die Europäische Föderation der Alevitischen Gemeinden als institutionellen Vertreter der in Europa lebenden alevitischen Migranten betrachten.

**Stichworte:** Transnationale Gemeinschaft, Migration, Identität, alevitische Immigrants in Europa