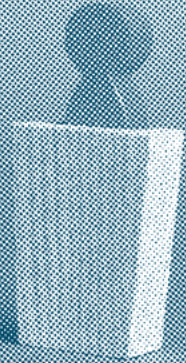
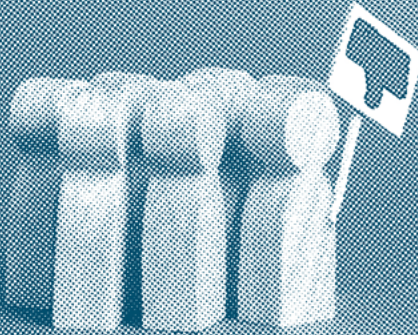




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**TÜRKİYE'S 2023 ELECTIONS:**

**HOW DO POLITICAL PARTIES**

**ADDRESS FREEDOM OF THOUGHT,**

**CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION?**



# Türkiye's 2023 Elections: How Do Political Parties Address Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion?

## Türkiye's 2023 Elections: How Do Political Parties Address Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion?

*Norwegian Helsinki Committee's Freedom of Belief Initiative*

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**Norwegian Helsinki Committee** (NHC) is an Oslo based human rights organisation established in 1977 and works internationally to strengthen the protection of human rights in practice. To this end the NHC's activities include monitoring, reporting, human rights training and supporting civil society and democratic structures. NHC's work is based on the human rights instruments adopted in the context of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

**Freedom of Belief Initiative**, has promoted freedom of thought, conscience and religion as a human right since 2011. The Initiative's activities include monitoring, documentation, reporting, making policy recommendations and advocacy.

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## Abbreviations

ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
AKP	Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)
UN	United Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination Against Women
CHP	Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
DEVA	Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi)
DİB	Presidency of Religious Affairs
DP	Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti)
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi)
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Committee
İP	Good Party (İyi Parti)
MIOMM	Nation Alliance' Joint Consensus Document (Millet İttifakı Ortak Mutabakat Metni)
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)
MP	Homeland Party (Memleket Partisi)
SP	Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi)
TBMM	Turkish Grand National Assembly
TİP	Workers' Party of Türkiye (Türkiye İşçi Partisi)
YSP	Party of the Greens and the Left Future (Yeşiller ve Sol Gelecek Partisi)

## 1. Introduction

The commitments of political parties in the field of human rights or freedom of religion or belief did not play a prominent role in the 2023 Türkiye elections. However, the political parties that have seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) and participated in the 2023 elections have distinct positions and divergences on Türkiye's human rights obligations arising from international human rights conventions, secularism, freedom of religion and conscience, minority rights, public religious services and hate crimes. These varying positions need to be recognized and discussed in the public sphere. To raise awareness on this issue and create a discussion platform, we have prepared an analysis on the commitments of political parties on six critical areas. This study will also be a resource for monitoring the changes in the commitments of political parties and whether they have implemented their commitments in the future.

*Türkiye's 2023 Elections: How Do Political Parties Address Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion?* publication offers a comparative analysis of political party commitments and highlights the main issues on:

- human rights,
- secularism,
- freedom of religion and conscience,
- public religious services,
- minorities,
- hate crimes.

This study includes political parties which had at least two seats in the TBMM before the 2023 parliamentary election: the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People's Party (CHP), Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), Good Party (IP), Workers' Party of Türkiye (TIP), Democrat Party (DP), the Homeland Party (MP), Felicity Party (SP), and Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) due to their different positions on the Table of Six (an alliance of six opposition parties); and Party of the Greens and the Left Future (YSP).<sup>1</sup> In this context, the programs of the parties in question were examined. Additionally, to support the analysis, relevant documents, published by the parties until the date of this document, such as election manifestos, action plans and Nation Alliance's Joint Consensus Document were analyzed.

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<sup>1</sup> HDP participated the 2023 General Elections under the umbrella of YSP due to the closure case in the Constitutional Court. However, HDP and YSP were evaluated separately, as it was not possible to predict their path after the elections.

## 2. Political party commitments

### 2.1 Human rights

Considering that Türkiye has had major human rights issues for a long time, the commitments of political parties on the protection of human rights are a significant indicator for the post-election period. Human rights feature in party programs in distinctive ways. **The fact that all parties do not make a clear reference to the international human rights conventions, to which Türkiye is a party, and do not give commitments to comply with them is an indication that human rights do not appear to be of critical importance in the political arena.** This can also be interpreted as an indicator that the demands of the voters are weak in this regard.

AKP, CHP, DEVA and YSP make clear reference to the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights or human rights conventions to which Türkiye is a party and has taken obligations to uphold.<sup>2</sup> AKP's Election Declaration also includes many promises such as training on human rights, raising awareness, and improving cooperation with international human rights protection mechanisms.<sup>3</sup>

MP makes explicit reference to several international human rights treaties, including CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. The IP and SP include the term human rights but do not refer to a legal framework regarding them. The DP, on the other hand, explicitly refers only to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>4</sup> The IP Election Manifesto includes the goal for the courts to implement the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).<sup>5</sup>

The Nation Alliance Joint Consensus Document (MIOMM) refers to human rights and the ECHR in the context of assemblies and demonstrations, freedom of expression and press, education, and relations with people of Turkish origin living abroad, rather than a general commitment to human rights.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.2 Secularism

The principle of secularism, its definition and interpretation are of great importance for human rights, state-religion relations, and freedom of religion or belief. All parties, with the exception of SP and HDP, use the term "secular republic". On the other hand, **most political parties do not explain in their party program the definition of secularism or how to interpret and apply this principle.**

CHP is the party that addresses secularism most extensively in its party program and highlights it as one of its indispensable principles.<sup>7</sup> Their program includes descriptive

<sup>2</sup> AKP program, 2015; CHP program; DEVA program, 2020; YSP programatic, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> AKP Election Manifesto, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> DP program, undated, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> IP Election Manifesto, 2023, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> The Nation Alliance Joint Consensus Document, 2023, p. 50, 108, 180, 214, 230.

<sup>7</sup> CHP program, *supra*. 2, p. 15, 16.

components such as the separation of religion and state affairs, state observance of equal distance to religions or beliefs, the prohibition of exploitation of religion, and the prevention of religion becoming an element of oppression and politicisation. Furthermore, it considers the principle of secularism as the basis of equality between men and women, inner peace, freedom of religion and conscience, and coexistence.<sup>8</sup>

The DP includes the understanding of the principle of secularism as follows:

[Secularism] The rule of the state in line with the will of the people, not by the rules of religion, as a result of which the state maintains an equal distance from all faiths and therefore fulfils its public responsibilities towards its citizens regardless of religion and sect.<sup>9</sup>

The HDP declares that it will fight for “a secularism that encapsulates equality and freedom”.<sup>10</sup> The YSP, on the other hand, uses the term “liberal secularism” and sees it as the basis of freedom of religion or belief.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the principle of secularism is absent in the MIO MM.<sup>12</sup>

CHP, HDP, TIP, DP, MP, DEVA, YSP are parties that refer to state observing equal distance to religions or beliefs.

### 2.3 Freedom of religion or belief

Fundamental changes are needed to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief. The standards of the international human rights conventions, to which Türkiye is a party, provide comprehensive protection for freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the rights to manifest religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and religious rituals or ceremonies.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, freedom of religion or belief has critical intersections with other rights, such as freedom of association, education, non-discrimination and gender equality. However, legislation and implementation in Türkiye lags behind the commitments made as a party to the treaties. *An Appeal to Move Forward from Aspirations to Actions – Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey* points out many problems that need improvement and offers solutions.<sup>14</sup>

#### Critical problems in the field of freedom of religion or belief in Türkiye:

- Atheists, deists and agnostics face frequent violations of their freedom of thought and belief at work, in the family, and in the education system.
- The right of conscientious objection against military service is not recognized.
- No religious or belief community in Türkiye has legal personality.
- Acquiring place of worship status remains an unresolved issue for many religious communities, particularly Alevis, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Protestants.
- In the protection of places of worship, deficiencies continue in terms of both the protection of religious and cultural heritage and the provision of security.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> DP program, *supra* 4, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> HDP program, undated.

<sup>11</sup> YSP programatic, *supra* 2.

<sup>12</sup> The Nation Alliance Joint Consensus Document, *supra* 6.

<sup>13</sup> UN ICCPR, Article 18; ECHR, Article 9.

<sup>14</sup> Yıldırım, M. (2022), *An Appeal to Move Forward from Aspirations to Actions – Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey*, Freedom of Belief Initiative, Norwegian Helsinki Committee.



- There are unjustified interferences with the appointment of religious officials.
- Legal restrictions on the training of religious officials other than Sunni Muslim clergy stand out.
- In public religious services, only the Sunni Muslim community is allocated funds from the public budget. This situation is contrary to the prohibition of discrimination and also contradicts the obligation of the state to observe the principle of equality.
- Children's freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to participate, and the right of parents to raise their children in line with their philosophical or religious views are subject to systematic interference within the education system in Türkiye.

While such widespread and deep-rooted issues are on the agenda, **it is striking that there is no party that includes the right to freedom of religion or belief in any of their party programs, as stated in the provisions of international human rights treaties: "everyone's right to manifest their religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice or observance"**.

CHP especially emphasizes the negative obligations regarding freedom of religion or belief: "No one can be condemned or be pressured for their religious beliefs and thoughts; or be forced to change or reveal their thoughts and beliefs". In terms of the positive obligations of the state, it states that "Everyone has the right to freely practice, learn, and develop his/her religion or belief".

Although DEVA has more limited coverage in its party program, it is the party that includes the most comprehensive commitments to freedom of religion or belief in its Fundamental Rights Action Plan.<sup>15</sup>

YSP makes the following statement in its program:

All kinds of freedom of belief, conscience, and disbelief should be guaranteed unconditionally, within the framework of a liberal understanding of secularism and in a manner that is not contrary to universal human rights; people should have freedom in their worship, belief, clothing, and lifestyles; no one should be discriminated against or subjected to degrading treatment on the basis of their distinct features.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, YSP adds that public service providers should not be forced to hide their religious identities in any way, including the wearing of headscarves.<sup>17</sup>

AKP, TIP, and SP are the parties that narrowly consider freedom of religion or belief in their party programs. While the SP sets forth its goal of "a Türkiye where no one is subject to oppression and domination due to their ethnic, religious, and sectarian identity, worldview, and political preferences, and where all segments of society can live freely together in peace and tranquility",<sup>18</sup> its program does not disclose their commitments to freedom of religion or belief, equality, and non-discrimination to achieve this goal.

<sup>15</sup> DEVA, *Fundamental Rights Action Plan*, undated. The program includes the aim to reorganize Article 24 of the Constitution in line with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 of the United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and to strengthen the freedom of religion and conscience.

<sup>16</sup> YSP programmatic, *supra*. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> SP program, 2019, p. 6.

IP, on the other hand, deals with issues that can be considered related to this subject under the title of religious services, without giving any mention to freedom of religion or belief.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it is stated that “the application of censorship will be prevented except for the criteria of the immunity and sanctity of the family, **the sanctity of religion** and the immutable rules of the constitution”.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, SP aims to ensure that necessary care is taken in “print and visual media and internet media to broadcast in a way that respects the rules and principles of our Constitution, the universal values of humanity, the traditions of our society, different cultural, **religious, and ethnic sensitivities**, and individual rights and freedoms”.<sup>21</sup>

YSP is the only party that explicitly includes the freedom not to believe in its program.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the election manifesto sets forth the goal of “ensur[ing] that places of worship for all faiths are treated equally, and that all problems related to identity will be addressed on the basis of equal rights”.<sup>23</sup>

Notably, the MIOMM does not include any reference to freedom of religion or belief.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, MIOMM envisages that freedom of thought, opinion, and expression will be strengthened.<sup>25</sup>

Almost all programs do not include an evaluation or roadmap regarding religious orders, or the *tarikats*. TIP is the only party with clear goals related to *tarikats*. In its Red Lines document, it includes the goal of liberating the education curriculum from desecularization and *tarikats*.<sup>26</sup> By enacting the Enes Kara Law it also includes the goal of ending the activities of *tarikats* and religious communities in education, housing and health services, and the expropriation of all private student dormitories determined to be in the hands of religious organizations.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.3.1 Recognition of places of worship

Since the authorities systematically refuse to grant worship status to places used by Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, and the Alevi community, these places are at risk. Therefore, these communities are not able to take advantage of the status of places of worship and are left at the mercy of state authorities. As a matter of fact, the ECtHR stated in its 2016 decision that “depending on the goodwill of their administration is not the solution to the problem”.<sup>28</sup>

**Political parties generally do not have clear goals for places of worship, other than their commitment to freedom of religion or belief, *cemevis* or public religious services.**

In its programmatic, YSP promises equal status to all places of worship, and in its election manifesto, it commits to “recognizing places of worship of Christians, Jews, and all faiths, especially *cemevis*, as 'places of worship' and putting them under public guarantee”.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>19</sup> IP program, undated, p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> SP program, *supra* 18, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> YSP Programmatic, *supra* 2, Section on freedom of belief and conscience.

<sup>23</sup> YSP, Election Manifesto, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> MIOMM, *supra* 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.

<sup>26</sup> TIP, People's Red Lines document, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>28</sup> ECtHR, *Association for Solidarity with Jehovah's Witnesses and Others v. Turkey*, No. 36915/10 and 8606/13, para. 107, 24 May 2016.

<sup>29</sup> YSP programmatic, *supra* 2 and 2023 Manifesto, *supra* 23.

TIP's Declaration of Perseverance and Hope includes a limited approach in terms of places of worship, which includes only immediately granting *cemevis* the status of places of worship.<sup>30</sup>

MP and DEVA aim to address issues related to places of worship within the framework of equality.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.3.2 Compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics lesson

In Türkiye's education system, the child's freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, the right to participation, and the right of parents to raise their children in line with their own philosophical or religious views are subject to systematic interference.<sup>32</sup> Compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics lessons, its discriminatory exemption mechanism and practices related to the religion of Islam constitute obstacles to the freedom of religion or belief of children. **How political parties deal with religion and religious differences in the education system and how they protect the right to freedom of religion or belief is critical.** Moreover, the judgments of the ECtHR are yet to be implemented.<sup>33</sup>

AKP emphasizes the need for "optional" religious education in its program and commits to meeting this need "fully".<sup>34</sup> CHP in its program aims to ensure that religious cultural education develops the individual's inner belief, encourages openness to development, and enriches spiritual and moral values.<sup>35</sup> MIOMM, on the other hand, remains silent about religion classes and the compulsory DKAB course.

YSP, TIP, and HDP argue that religion courses should be abolished, while MP commits that religious education will be given in accordance with the principle of secularism.<sup>36</sup> In their election program, YSP also aims to protect the right of every student to receive or not receive optional courses and education in line with their own belief and culture.<sup>37</sup> DEVA's Fundamental Rights Action Plan includes the goal of harmonizing it with the ECtHR jurisprudence.

### 2.3.3 Conscientious objection to military service

The non-recognition of the right to conscientious objection to military service in Türkiye constitutes a direct violation of international human rights law. Administrative and penal measures and sanctions are imposed on conscientious objectors who miss out on attendance or who are deemed deserters. Failure to recognize this right constitutes a significant violation of freedom of religion or belief. In addition, many other human rights of conscientious objectors are violated. These include the right to vote and be elected, the freedom of movement, the right to education and the freedom to seek employment. Although these violations have been identified in many ECtHR decisions and the view of the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), the necessary legislative changes have not been made in domestic law yet.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>30</sup> TIP Declaration of Perseverance and Hope, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> MP Program, p. 153, DEVA Fundamental Rights Action Plan, *supra* 15.

<sup>32</sup> Yıldırım, M. (2022), *supra* 14.

<sup>33</sup> ECtHR, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, No. 1448/04, 9 October 2007 and *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*, No. 21163/11, 16 September 2014.

<sup>34</sup> AKP program, *supra* 2.

<sup>35</sup> CHP program, *supra* 2, p. 297.

<sup>36</sup> YSP programmatic, *supra* 2, MP program, *supra* 31, TIP program.

<sup>37</sup> YSP programmatic, *supra* 2.

<sup>38</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *Atasoy and Sarkut v. Turkey*, UN Doc CCPR/C/104/D/1853-1854/2008, 19 June 2012; ECtHR, *Osman Murat Ülke v. Turkey*, No. 39437/98, 24 April 2006; ECtHR, *Feti Demirtaş v. Turkey*, No. 5260/07, 17 January 2012; ECtHR, *Erçep v. Turkey*, No. 5260/07, 22 February 2012; ECtHR, *Halil Savda v. Turkey*, No. 42730/05, 12 June 2012; ECtHR, *Mehmet Tarhan v. Turkey*, No. 9078/06, 12 July 2012.



While YSP and HDP openly aim to recognize the right to conscientious objection in their party programs, other parties remain silent on this issue in their programs. In its Fundamental Rights Action Plan, DEVA commits to transitioning to the professional army and recognizing the right to conscientious objection.<sup>39</sup> TIP also commits to recognizing the right to conscientious objection to military service.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.4 Minorities and non-Muslim community foundations

The rights of minorities are not protected in compliance with the Treaty of Lausanne, and there is no attempt to address these rights in line with contemporary standards. Necessary steps were not taken for minorities to have freedom of education, religion or belief, legal personality, and association, and more specifically, for non-Muslim community foundations to function effectively.<sup>41</sup>

Many problems of minorities at the intersection of freedom of association, protection of property, right to education and freedom of religion or belief still remain unresolved. However, apart from CHP, HDP, and YSP, most political parties do not explicitly include commitments or goals related to minorities in their programs. Although the CHP does not give details in its program, it makes an important commitment in general:

The existence of different ethnic structures, different cultures and identities in our country and their survival is our national wealth. It is a goal of CHP that our citizens who are defined as minorities by the Treaty of Lausanne fully benefit from the religious and cultural minority rights granted to them. It is against the creation of new minorities.<sup>42</sup>

HDP states that it is “fighting to stop the oppression of all oppressed and excluded belief and cultural groups, such as Alevis, Christians, Jews, and Yazidis”.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, YSP states that “There is no conflict of interest against religious, belief, and cultural groups that are in a minority in any field. It aims to obtain public assurances against suppression, intimidation, and exclusion”.<sup>44</sup>

Although DEVA does not explicitly mention minorities, it promises to eradicate “all legal and administrative obstacles to the preservation, protection, life and association, and public visibility of different religions and belief groups”.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Fundamental Rights Action Plan includes targets to strengthen community foundations in their internal affair.<sup>46</sup>

In the AKP Election Declaration, it is stated that “guaranteeing the fundamental rights and freedoms of our non-Muslim citizens without any discrimination and ensuring that they live their faith freely” will continue to be under the guarantee of the rule of law.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.5 Public religious services

Only the Sunni Muslim community receives funds from the public budget for religious services. This is incompatible with the prohibition of discrimination and the obligation

39 DEVA Fundamental Rights Action Plan, *supra* 15.

40 TIP, Declaration of Perseverance and Hope, *supra* 30, p. 74.

41 Yildirim, M. (2022), *supra* 14.

42 CHP program, *supra* 2, p. 46.

43 HDP program, *supra* 10.

44 YSP programmatic, *supra* 2.

45 DEVA program, *supra* 2.

46 DEVA Fundamental Rights Action Plan, *supra* 15.

47 AKP Election Manifesto, *supra* 3.

of the state to observe the principle of equality. The decision of the ECtHR (Grand Chamber) in the case of *Izzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey* contains important findings for the Alevi community as well as for wider society. Since the public religious services demanded by Alevi applicants are not provided and the Alevi faith is not recognized by the state, Alevis cannot fully enjoy their freedom of religion or belief. The implementation of this decision is of great importance to ensure that all religious or belief communities enjoy equal freedom of religion or belief.<sup>48</sup>

### 2.5.1 Presidency of Religious Affairs

AKP does not include commitments related to the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DIB) in either its program or its Election Declaration. However, they do promise to “contribute to the unity, solidarity, peace and tranquility of society with quality religious services and to deliver widespread religious culture education to all segments of society”.<sup>49</sup>

**Public religious services have a prominent place among the commitments of many political parties**, as CHP, İP, DP, and YSP aim to restructure DIB. CHP and İP have similar goals in restructuring the DIB, so that:

- DIB does not approach the various sects of Islam differently,
- a new structure is created open to all sects that want to join DIB’s organization,
- Islamic sects that do not want to be included in the organization will not be deprived of equal financial support from the state.<sup>50</sup>

Among the parties that envisage the restructuring of the DIB, the DP commits to “the fulfillment of the public responsibilities of the state towards different faith groups among its citizens, as a requirement of the principle of secularism”.<sup>51</sup>

The MP aims to clear the DIB from “all kinds of political and ideological movements”.<sup>52</sup>

TİP, HDP, and YSP envisage the abolition of the DIB.<sup>53</sup> TİP aims to “reorganize religious affairs in an institution that is equidistant from all religions and denominations”.<sup>54</sup> It includes the goal of establishing the “Presidency for Faith Services”, which provides the opportunity to all religious or belief groups to acquire legal personality.

### 2.5.2 Alevis and cemevis

The Alevi community's equal use of public religious services, recognition of *cemevis*, training of religious officials, violation of rights due to the compulsory Religious Culture and Ethics course, and being the target of hate crimes are among Türkiye's critical human rights issues. As a matter of fact, in at least four important judgments, the ECtHR has found that Türkiye violated Article 9 of the ECHR, which protects freedom of religion or belief, Article 14, which prohibits discrimination, and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, which protects the right to education.

These violations came about from the Turkish state's failure to recognize Alevi places of worship, to protect the right of parents to raise their children in accordance with their religious or philosophical convictions in the education system, and to recognize Alevis

48 ECtHR, *Izzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, No 62649/10, 26 April 2016.

49 AKP Election Manifesto, *supra* 3.

50 CHP program, *supra* 2, p. 51; İP program, *supra* 19, p. 55.

51 DP program, *supra* 4, s. 25.

52 MP program, *supra* 31, p. 153.

53 HDP program, *supra* 10; TİP program, *supra* 36; YSP programmatic, *supra* 2.

54 *Ibid.*

and provide public religious services.<sup>55</sup> These judgments have still not been implemented.

**It is important to note that many political parties have addressed the issues of Alevis in their programs.** CHP, HDP, MP, and DEVA are among the parties that aim to recognize *cemevis* or to offer public religious services in a way that includes Alevis. On the other hand, AKP, MHP, and SP do not explicitly include commitments on Alevis or their issues in their programs. In its Election Declaration, the AKP aims to increase and continue the “policies that meet the expectations and demands” of Alevis.<sup>56</sup>

IP envisages the establishment of an independent “Research Center” that will work on the beliefs and practices of Alevi culture, based on oral and written sources, create an inventory of Alevi cultural heritage and restoration of destroyed artifacts.<sup>57</sup> It promises to organize in-service trainings for Alevi faith leaders. It also aims to allocate space for *cemevis* in the zoning plans in the Election Declaration.<sup>58</sup>

MP promises to recognize the “religious status” of the *cemevis* and to make Madımak a museum of shame.<sup>59</sup> The CHP also aims to turn the Madımak Hotel into a center of tolerance.<sup>60</sup> It is an important demand for Alevis that the Madımak Hotel, the site of the 1993 Sivas massacre, be converted into a museum. The Madımak Hotel was expropriated in 2010.<sup>61</sup>

TIP includes many goals regarding Alevis in its Declaration of Persistence and Hope; prominent among them is the immediate granting of *cemevis* place of worship status, the return of the holy places and lodges of Alevis, the conversion of the Madımak Hotel to a museum of shame, and the implementation of ECtHR decisions.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.6 Hate crimes

Hate speech and crimes negatively affect religious or belief groups as well as other groups.<sup>63</sup> However, processes that result in impunity are a serious obstacle to social equality, since there is no effective legal process that examines the dimensions of hate crimes. To prevent and combat all hate crimes, including those based on religion or belief, specific legislation needs to be enacted, separate records on hate crimes need to be kept, and effective investigations, prosecutions, and sanctions should be implemented.<sup>64</sup>

**However, political parties have not included concrete proposals to solve problems related to hate crime in their programs. Exceptions to this are HDP, MP, and YSP.** HDP includes the fight against hate crime and speech in its solution goals regarding LGBTI+s.<sup>65</sup> There is zero tolerance for hate crimes in the MP program,<sup>66</sup> and YSP advocates the need

55 ECtHR, *Izzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey*, No. 62649/10, 26 April 2016; ECtHR, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*, No. 1448/04; 9 October 2007 and *Mansur Yalçın and Others v. Turkey*, No. 21163/11, 16 September 2014; ECtHR, *Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı v. Turkey*, No. 32093/10, 2 December 2014

56 AKP Election Manifesto, *supra* 3, p. 345.

57 IP program, *supra* 19, p. 55

58 IP Election Manifesto, *supra* 5.

59 MP program, *supra* 31, p. 153.

60 CHP program, *supra* 2, p. 51.

61 Milliyet, *Madımak Oteli Kamulaştırıldı*, 24 November 2010.

62 TIP Declaration of Perseverance and Hope, *supra* 30, p. 83.

63 KAOS GL, *Homophobia and Transphobia Based Hate Crimes in Turkey 2019 Review, 2020; Association of Protestant Churches (Protestan Kiliseler Derneği) Rights Violations Reports; Freedom of Belief Initiative, Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief or Non-Belief in Turkey 2021.*

64 Freedom of Belief Initiative (2022), *Hate Crimes Motivated by Bias against Religion, Belief or Non-Belief in Turkey 2021*, p. 17.

65 HDP program, *supra* 10.

66 MP program, *supra* 31, p. 153.



for an egalitarian hate crime law.<sup>67</sup> DEVA also sets a goal to combat hate speech.<sup>68</sup> In addition, its Fundamental Rights Action Plan envisages amendments to the Turkish Penal Code on hate crimes.<sup>69</sup> AKP promises a special regulation on hate crimes in its Election Declaration.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, AKP and IP election declarations aim to combat Islamophobia in the context of Turkish-origin communities living abroad.<sup>71</sup> In its Declaration of Perseverance and Hope, TIP promises to “include attacks on places considered sacred by citizens of all religions and beliefs within the scope of hate crimes and to monitor the implementation of these penalties”.<sup>72</sup>

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67 YSP programatic, *supra* 2.

68 DEVA Party program, *supra* 2, p. 8.

69 DEVA Fundamental Rights Action Plan, *supra* 15.

70 AKP Election Manifesto, 2023, *supra* 3, p. 359.

71 *Ibid*; IP Election Manifesto *supra* 5.

72 TIP Declaration of Perseverance and Hope, *supra* 30, p. 83.

### 3. Concluding remarks

- Commitment to the human rights conventions that Türkiye is party to needs to be expressed more directly in all party programs;
- commitment to implement UN and Council of Europe resolutions, opinions and recommendations to improve human rights in Türkiye needs to be strengthened;
- there seems to be a continuing need for a human rights-focused framework that thoroughly analyzes how to find solutions to secularism, freedom of religion or belief, minorities, religious orders, or *tarikats*, and Türkiye's other problems in this area;
- none of the programs offer solutions regarding the strengthening of the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief in the field of education;
- the right to conscientious objection to military service is not included as part of freedom of religion or belief in most party programs;
- many party programs include the goal of changing the status quo for the better in regards to the general demands of Alevis;
- solution proposals for hate crimes need to be addressed in more detail in all party programs;
- apart from AKP and MHP, all other parties show a desire to transform the DIB into a more neutral and inclusive institution.

## 4. What commitments should political parties make?

TO ENSURE EQUAL PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF  
FOR ALL POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD WORK TO

- fulfil human rights obligations by giving explicit commitment to international human rights conventions to which Türkiye is a party;
- protect the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion based on international human rights standards (including the right to conscientious objection to military service, freedom to establish and maintain places of worship, use of religious symbols, and the collective dimension of freedom of religion and belief);
- remove reservations to human rights treaties;
- comply with the decisions, opinions and recommendations of international human rights compliance control mechanisms, especially the decisions of the ECtHR;
- be neutral and unbiased towards all religion, belief and non-belief;
- observe the principles of equality and impartiality in the provision of public religious services;
- recognize places of worship based on impartiality and human rights standards;
- take necessary steps without delay to fully protect freedom of thought, conscience, and religion of children in the education system and the right of parents to raise their children in line with their own religious or philosophical views;
- fully fulfil the rights of minorities arising from the Treaty of Lausanne, other human rights treaties, and the Constitution;
- enact hate crime legislation and adopt policies to prevent hate crimes.



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HOW DO POLITICAL PARTIES  
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