'BENEFITS' OF ANTI-ALEVI POLICIES

Posted on May 25, 2014 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

By Emre Uslu, Today's Zaman, 25 May 2014

> ***Alevi-Sunni tension is one of the more deep rooted, never-ending tensions in this society***

This tension rarely comes to the surface and is thus not easy to monitor. When it rises to the surface, however, it can be deadly and violent. The Sivas massacre for instance was one of those times when tensions rose to the surface. The last burst of tension was during the Gezi protests. No matter how do we define them, the majority of the Gezi protesters were Alevis.

By Emre Uslu, Today's Zaman, 25 May 2014

> ***Alevi-Sunni tension is one of the more deep rooted, never-ending tensions in this society***

This tension rarely comes to the surface and is thus not easy to monitor. When it rises to the surface, however, it can be deadly and violent. The Sivas massacre for instance was one of those times when tensions rose to the surface. The last burst of tension was during the Gezi protests. No matter how do we define them, the majority of the Gezi protesters were Alevis.

The tension is so deep that people in Anatolia still don't want their children to marry those from the other sect. Sunnis do not want their children to marry Alevis nor do Alevis want their children to marry Sunnis.

It is so deep that Sunnis do not buy meat from Alevi butchers. More importantly, they associate this with their beliefs.

Compared to the Kurdish-Turkish tension, the Alevi-Sunni tension is much deeper. While intermarriages between Kurds and Turks are much more common, it is rare with Alevis and Sunnis. Turks and Kurds don't hesitate to shop at each other's establishments while shopping at openly declared Alevi shops is not that common.

Because of the social and political pressure on Alevis, many Alevi still prefer to hide their identities. While Kurds only choose to hide their identities in state bureaucracies and wealthy business clubs and only share their Kurdish identity with their immediate friends, Alevis don't share their identity with anywhere except their best friends.

There are many more examples that can be given to illustrate Alevi-Sunni tensions. Yet the two examples that I gave are powerful enough to demonstrate how useful it is to manipulate this tension.

Thus, manipulating Alevi-Sunni tensions is “beneficial” for Sunni politicians. It seems that Recep

Tayyip Erdoğan has calculated these benefits and has not hesitated to manipulate it recently.

It seems that there are various benefits that Erdoğan hopes to gain from stoking Alevi-Sunni tensions.

First, Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) elites have realized that the nature of the opposition has been shifting from party politics to street politics. In fact, Erdoğan has admitted several times that the main problem of this country is the lack of effective opposition parties, which is true.

When the opposition parties are not effective or do not demonstrate any signs of removing the Erdoğan regime from power, people lose hope in the opposition parties and search for an alternative. The alternative way of opposing Erdoğan is street politics. The Gezi incident showed the potential effectiveness of street politics. In fact, it was the first time Erdoğan and his supporters panicked when they saw hundreds of thousands of people joining the protesters against the Erdoğan regime.

The easiest way for the Erdoğan regime to marginalize the growing opposition in street politics is through labeling the street protesters as Alevis who are exploited by marginal leftist terrorist organizations.

Given the deep Sunni-Alevi tension, the Erdoğan regime hoped that the Sunni bloc would stop supporting the street protesters once they realize that the engine of the protesters is Alevi. In fact many uneducated Sunnis who had no sympathy for the Erdoğan regime became hesitant when they realized that Alevis were the forerunner supporters of the Gezi protests.

Thus, using anti-Alevi rhetoric was beneficial to Erdoğan in curbing the growing opposition.

Moreover, it has also been beneficial for Erdoğan to question the legitimacy of street politics in the eyes of the Sunni majority. The regime hopes that once it successfully explains that those who go out onto the streets to protest on every occasion are Alevis and are only targeting the Erdoğan regime because it is a Sunni regime, this will not only curb street politics but also gain it some votes from coastal districts such as İzmir, Antalya, Muğla, etc.

It is dangerous to add fuel to the never-ending tensions between Alevi and Sunnis but it is beneficial for the Erdoğan regime in the short run.