

THE LOST OPPORTUNITY WINDOW OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

Lucie TUNGUL¹

Abstract

The Gülen movement is one of the most controversial political and economic forces in Turkey, whose impact on the failed Turkish democratization in the 2000s and the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to power is yet to be fully evaluated. The paper argues that the decision to stay out of active politics caused by the history of the Gülen movement as a grassroots movement, which wanted to protect its strategic interests mixing Islam with Turkish nationalism in Turkey and abroad led to the decision to support the AKP instead to establish a political party. This brought the movement substantial power and influence on the political system of the country but the failed democratisation of Turkey that remains a hybrid regime made the movement very vulnerable to the changes in the political power structure, which led to its demise. The attempt to counter the hegemony of the new political elite in the hybrid environment of Turkey failed because the movement could not claim the democratic accountability through elections as the AKP did. The movement represents an example of a new social movements, which missed the opportunity window of a favourable political moment, which will require its significant retransformation in the future.

KEY WORDS: Gülen movement, AKP, Turkey, social movement, opportunity window

INTRODUCTION

The Gülen movement and its role in Turkish politics in the last two decades have spurred a lot of controversy and quite opposing views from those who believed the Gulenists were an interfaith society interested in the democratization of Turkey and moderate Islam and those who perceived them as a dangerous sect using educational activities to increase their influence on the Turkish state and administration with the purpose of taking control over all power centres. To understand the Gülen movement, the most powerful Islamic movement in Turkey, and its impact on Turkish democratization, we need to analyse the history and background of the movement, its alliance with the ruling party of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, AKP, and the circumstances of their falling out.

Social movements aggregate interests and voices not represented in the institutional setting of a country, they are sources of “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites,

¹ Mgr. Lucie Tungul, Ph.D., MA. Faculty of Law, Palacký University in Olomouc, e-mail: lucie.tungul@upol.cz

opponents and authorities” (Tarrow, 1998). While representing civil society, one of the building blocks of a democratic society, not all social movements are democratic and help develop democratic values. Given that most literature on social movements focused on their role in liberal democracies, it becomes complicated to apply social movement theories on movements such as the Islamic ones that operate in an undemocratic or semi-democratic environment, which affects their goals and means of operation. The Turkish political system during the 2000s could be defined as semi-democratic (hybrid).² The nature of the system’s hybridity lied in the alliance of liberal values (mostly via democratic institutions) and authoritarian practices. Turkish hybrid competitive authoritarianism rests on three pillars; the state, the party, and the conservative Anatolian middle class (Stelgias 2015), which also had a strong representation in the Gülen movement, which can be understood as a “new social movement;” it had a loose organisation of followers, represented a counter-cultural response to modernity, was in constant motion, and challenged the existing ruling classes (Kirdis, 2016).

As Tilly argued, social movements provide a unique way for people to engage in public affairs, but they appear at a particular time, during an opportunity window, which is a favourable political moment, and then they disappear, redefine or transform themselves. The aim of the paper is to investigate the notion of an opportunity window as related to the Gülen movement and the rise of the AKP in the 2000s. The paper asks how the decision to stay out of active politics affected the movement’s political fate in a semi-democratic (hybrid) environment. The decision was caused by the history of the Gülen movement as a grassroot movement with an empire of education services, media outlets, and strong economic interests, where the political autonomy was believed to protect its strategic interests mixing Islam with Turkish nationalism in Turkey and abroad. The decision not to directly enter politics but support the AKP allowed it to gain substantial power and influence on the political system of the country and to challenge the existing elites. Yet, the failed democratisation of Turkey and the rising authoritarianism of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the hybrid regime the movement helped to establish, made it very vulnerable to changes in the political power structure. The inability of the movement to compete in elections

² Hybrid regimes are characterised by limited access to power, where the opposition voices are suppressed but not silenced and there is pluralism of non-governmental actors in public policy. The dominant power tries to take control of all major institutions but legitimises its power control through democratic elements such as support for direct democracy (especially referenda), elections, engagement of (some) non-state actors, and presentation of “expert inputs”. Its legitimacy also often comes from economic liberalization and economic growth praised by international institutions and Western governments (Desrués, 2013).

because it opted out from establishing its own political force contributed to its rapid decline.

The paper first investigates the ideological origins of the movement, the circumstances of its rise and expansion, their political engagement and finally its foreign activities. We will show why the movement represented an example of a new social movement and how the specifics of the semi-democratic regime first helped and then constrained its goals. The methodology used corresponds with the aim of the paper. As a combination of descriptive and analytical approach, it analyses the history of the movement in Turkey, its roots and development until recent years to provide context of the latest events. It works with primary documents, media reports and existing secondary research but it also applies findings from personalised interviews with people, who belonged to the movement, worked or studied in their establishments (members or not) both in Turkey and abroad. These interviews were conducted in Turkey between 2006 and 2012 and the speakers' identity will be kept anonymous due to possible political repercussions in the country.

1 HISTORY OF GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN TURKEY

The roots of the movement go back to Said Nursi, a Turkish religious scholar of Kurdish origin. Fetullah Gülen belonged to his followers and used Nursi's ideas about combining individual piety with rationalism, science and modernity in his teachings when he decided to establish his own movement known in Turkey as "Cemaat" (community) and abroad as "Hizmet" (service, referring to its alleged dedication to public service). Nursi was critical of Kemalism and its early Republican efforts to create a new definition of Turkishness based on Turkic history and traditions, referring to Central Asian origins of Turks and trying to eliminate the Ottoman-Islamic cultural references from national memory (Atasoy, 2009). The aim was to create a new Turkish identity; anti-imperial, nationalist and secular but also anti-Orientalist (Nereid, 1997). Islam was defined as the religion of ethnic Arabs (Lewis, qtd. in Atasoy, 2009, 68) and the Islamic traditions were to be eliminated from Turkish culture so that it could follow its natural path of western modernity (Atasoy, 2009).³

The efforts of Kemalism to "westernize" and "modernize" Turkey took place in an environment that continued to be quite religious and Muslim (90% of the Turkish population were practicing Muslims) and their reforms did not resonate well there. Nursi saw Islam as part of Turkish identity, as the "source of loyalty of all Muslims to the national state of Turkey" (Atasoy, 2009, 65) and was critical

³ For more on early Kemalism, see for instance Kucera 2010.

of Kemalism. He advocated the adoption of Western science and technology but did not want to accept the Western cultural values. The point was to accept Western civilization “as a suitable foundation for material life” and the Muslim civilization as “suitable for spiritual life” (Aras and Caha, 2000). The Nursi movement supported individual spirituality first, on which it built the collective spirituality of the society and for this they advocated the importance of education. Their support for modernity had two meanings – one for modern technology to spread the ideas and second for science, that is support of mathematics, logic and physics in the curriculum. This was to show that “Islam belonged to the present and the future just as much as science and modernity did” (Balci, 2003, 152).

In 1950 the first free election took place in Turkey and the main contesters were the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Democrat party (DP) of Adnan Menderes. The victory of the DP was seen by many as a blow to Kemalism, a victory of the “common man”. The DP seemed to tolerate if not support the Islamic trait in the society. Various Sufi orders, suppressed after the Sheikh Said revolt in 1925, started to reappear and gain in strength between 1950 and 1960. The number of private organizations set up by religious orders increased from 251 in 1951 to 5,104 in 1960 (almost 30% of all private organizations; Atasoy, 2009). Nursi supported DP in the 1954 and 1957 elections even though he was arrested in 1952 for alleged threat to secularism as he represented the most known and visible resistance to Kemalism. Released but exiled and his publications censored, he died in 1960, the same year of the first Turkish military coup that led to the execution of Menderes. Nursi movement broke down into many subgroups based on different political, religious, ethnic and generational interests (Balci, 2003).

Fethullah Gülen was originally a follower of Nursi and many of his ideas were linked to Nursi’s teachings. The ideology behind the Gülen movement can be defined by two features – Islamisation of Turkish nationalism and Turkification of Islam, where Gülen claimed that the Arabic experience of Islam was different from the Turks and in this respect he made continuous references to the Ottoman tradition, to which he urged to return and thus strengthen the Turkish state. Not only he claimed that the Turkish version of Islam was different from the Arabic one, he also stated that it was better in terms of more tolerance and freedom and less fanaticism (Aras and Caha, 2000). Yet, he also stated that the Ottoman Empire was multicultural, and he wanted to revive its tradition - the republic would benefit from cooperation with all groups of people including the secularists and non-Muslims.

The Turkish “members” of the movement have tried to present the movement internationally as “religious-political movement favouring modernism, Turkish

nationalism, tolerance, and democracy without sacrificing religious precepts... a model for the future of Islamic political and social activism.” (Aras and Caha, 2000). They juxtaposed it with fundamentalist Islam and described it as open to different lifestyles, which they claimed was based on the Turkish tradition of different religious groups living in harmony.⁴ They presented Nursi as man supporting democratic elements such as parliamentary political system (Aras and Caha, 2000). Gülen has made statements on a great variety of other topics such as supporting inclusion of women into the labour force, Turkish EU membership bid, or the Turkish-Kurdish appeasement.

The Gülen movement gradually evolved into a community with a clear structure. Gülen stood at the top followed by a hierarchical order of “abiler” (older brothers) further divided into ranks. Women were also recruited, initiated and educated in the teachings of Gülen by “ablalar” (older sisters). According to Kahraman Sakul (qtd. in Gurcan, 2016), the Gülenist network was based on much more complex relations, “The Gülen movement [had] transparent, overt networks of trade, finance, education, media, health and social media and secret, covert networks of military and intelligence bureaucracy.” As interview with R.B. (2013), a university professor, also revealed, an official hierarchy existed in the movement’s institutions along with the movement’s own hierarchy, which followed its own rules and the people at the top of this internal hierarchical structure were making all key decisions.

An important source of revenue were the so-called “aid meetings” (hizmet toplantisi), where sympathetic businessmen would come together to listen to private religious sermons and were asked to contribute large sums to the movement in the presence of others. The Gülen movement gave power to the so-called Anatolian tigers, defined as “dynamic, export-oriented, small and medium-size businesses” (Aras and Caha, 2000), which challenged clientelism and nepotism of the Turkish state since the liberalization of the Turkish economy began in 1983. They also increased the influence of “green capital”, funds from practicing Muslims, who applied Islamic rules in business.

Another main source of revenue but also instrument of power became the system of educational activities spanning from child day-care to universities. The movement’s foundations established private school networks, where they emphasised Gülen’s teachings, which caused a lot of criticism and in some cases

⁴ That of course would be a somewhat correct but also rather simplified view of a very complicated relationship the Muslim Turks had with religious minorities during the Ottoman era and even more so in the period of the modern Turkish Republic, whose policies have gradually eliminated almost all non-Muslim minorities from the country. They indeed have repeatedly made references to the somewhat correct and somewhat imagined Ottoman tradition of Islam under the Ottomans as a tolerant belief system (cf. Aras and Caha 2000).

led to suspension of their activities. As the power of the movement rose thanks to the good quality of education provided, which they were able to deliver even in areas, where traditional system had failed such as the Kurdish regions (interview with M.S., former movement follower, 2007) and thanks to its connection to AKP's rise to power, the number of enrolled students steadily increased. According to some estimates, they controlled 75% of the 2 million preparatory schools in Turkey (Sharon-Krespin, 2009). The movement gradually opened a large number of facilities directly and indirectly associated with education ranging from schools to student dormitories, summer camps,⁵ high schools, universities, educational and cultural centres, which were expected to spread the ideas and teaching of Gülen among the young, thus, ensuring their moral development in line with the Turkish tradition of Islam. The schools they opened were funded by the followers and the tuition fees, most of the students and Turkish teachers were members or associated with the movement. The schools themselves became part of fund-raising campaigns (Aras and Caha, 2000). Over time, its schools spread across the world: in 2015, the movement had more than 2,000 schools in 160 different countries (Koru and Yilmaz, 2016).

A lot of criticism focused on the education system claiming that while paying lip service to democracy and its values, the actual structure of the movement had all but democratic features. These voices claimed that the so-called “ışık evler” (lighthouses) indoctrinated young people with Gülen's teachings (interview with H.S., graduate of Gülen's high school, 2008) while their schools followed the usual curriculum. Some claimed that even their schools tuned the mandatory religious education to Gülen's teachings. The critics claimed that their schools used education to bring the young people to the “ışık evler” and sent them out to dominate the public and private sectors in the countries, where they operated.

As the movement grew stronger, it became more and more visible in the society. They established a wide range of organisations to promote their views such as a business chamber Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists (TUSKON), Turkish Teachers' Foundation, expanded into the media sector to spread the message of the community - journals such as *Sizinti* (Disclosures), academic journals such as *Yeni Umit* (New Hope) and the *Fountain* (in English), they opened media channels which televised Gülen's speeches, interviews and sermons, ran their own newspaper in Turkish and English versions (*Zaman* and *Daily Zaman*), radio stations, distributed books, videos, DVDs, tapes and CDs.

Thus, the movement controlled big parts of social, economic, and cultural life in the country through multiple outlets – education system, media, financial

⁵ Summer camps were one of his first activities. Already in the 1970s, as a preacher in Izmir, he organised them through private foundations of his followers and hundreds of students received religious education there (Balci 2003).

sector, non-profit organizations, trade organisations, all these in Turkey and abroad. They accumulated a large wealth; some estimates put the value of the community at 25 billion dollars (Sharon-Krespin, 2009), 30 billion (Williams, 2010) or even 50 billion dollars (Gurcan, 2016). The number of followers is also unknown, Aras and Caha (2000) claimed the number was between 200 thousand and 4 million, later some quoted 10 million (Mizell 2007), others put them between 1-8 million (Beauchamp, 2014). The social base has also been very broad from urban professionals and young men to the Kurdish population.

Much of the growth was associated with the AKP's rise to power and its alliance with them. The AKP government actively supported the economic structure of the movement. For instance, during the alliance between AKP and the Gülenists, the main Gülenist financial house in Turkey Bank Asya, received accounts of big state owned companies such as Turkish Airlines. The AKP and Gülenists slowly dominated the state structures but the cooperation with AKP exposed the movement to the political will of the governing party. The assistance they received during the alliance and the growing authoritarian powers of Erdoğan made the Gülenists easy targets when they fell out of favour. The government shut down all establishments associated with the movement immediately after the July 2015 coup.

2 POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT

Gülen had repeatedly claimed that he did not have any political ambitions despite his goal to reconnect the Turkish state and religion and to bring more Islam to Turkish nationalism. He stated that he did not want to create a political party or gain political power. That made his movement different from the National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi, NOM), the “mother-movement” of AKP, which has been challenging the Kemalist regime since the 1960s like by directly engaging with politics⁶.

Gülen though kept close relations with Turkish politicians on the right and on the left of the party spectrum during his years in Turkey. He received protection

⁶ Milli Görüş's (National Vision/Outlook) ideological background rests in the ideas of Necmettin Erbakan, one of the most influential Turkish politicians of the second half of the 20th century. He rejected jihadism and believed in gradual bottom-up political reform of the state that would respect the Islamic tradition of the Turkish society. His 1969 manifesto envisioned an overthrow of Kemalism and establishment of a state based on Islamism; it rejected Western political, economic, and social ideas. Erbakan led 5 political parties, four of which were banned in Turkey for working against its constitutional principles. Anti-western and anti-Jewish, the movement started missionary activities in Turkish diaspora communities in Europe. In many European countries, it belongs among the biggest Islamic organizations. Its connection with AKP gave the movement a substantial impact over Turkish public policy.

from Turgut Özal, Turkish PM (1983-1989), and since 1994 regularly met with Prime Ministers, Presidents, party leaders, and prominent businessmen. Aras and Caha (2000) argued that he aimed “to integrate [his] followers into the existing political system” while avoiding any controversial political topics not to create – or rather increase – hostility towards the movement. The developments in the 2000s though showed that the movement followers actively sought many influential political positions. The followers known as “şakird” were put in strategic places and it was believed that they would immediately start naming other “şakirtler” to positions around them.

The suspicion was based on a recording of Gülen from 1999, which stated that “Our friends who have positions in legislative and administrative bodies should learn its details and be vigilant all the time so that they can transform it and be more fruitful on behalf of Islam in order to carry out a nationwide restoration [of the religious-based imperial Ottoman state]. However, they should wait until the conditions become more favourable. In other words, they should not come out too early” [...] you must move in the arteries of the system without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centers...” You must wait until such time as you have gotten all the state power, until you have brought to your side all the constitutional institutions in Turkey” (qtd in Zuesse, 2016). After this controversial TV appearance, then Turkish president Süleyman Demirel warned him against involvement in Turkish politics. Many other authorities remained suspicious as well. The Board of Higher Education (YOK) rejected the acceptance of degree equivalents from foreign universities run by the movement (Aras and Caha, 2000) and in 2001 tried to shut down the movement’s then only tertiary education institution in Turkey, Fatih University, due to “breaches of dress code”, i.e. students wearing headscarf, which it labelled “evidence of unacceptable religious influence at the university” (HRW, n.d.).⁷ The interview also spurred a controversy with Uzbekistan, which decided to close down some of the schools.

Given the religious motives of the movement, we would expect Gülen to be close to the conservative/Islamic parties in Turkey. Yet, prior to the establishment and rise of AKP, Gülen did not have a good relationship with its predecessors, Refah and Fazilet parties. Refah party even claimed that secularists were using Gülen to “obstruct their path” (Aras and Caha, 2000). Gülen held the party responsible for alienating the Turkish military and for the 1997 “post-modern” coup and supported the closure of the party in 1998. His time came with the victory of the AKP in the 2002 election. He supported AKP and its leader Erdoğan and provided AKP with educated personnel. Many AKP elite members

⁷ The University appealed to Ankara court in 2001, which overruled the decision, and the university was allowed to admit students for the 2001-2002 academic year.

were considered members of the Gülen movement including former Turkish president Abdullah Gül and the former head of the Higher Board of Education (YOK) Yusuf Ziya Özcan (2007-2011), former mayor of Istanbul Kadir Topbaş, and former governor of Istanbul Huseyin Avni Mutlu.

When the AKP came to power, they had few supporters in the Turkish bureaucracy and so the Gülen movement supplied elites that would replace the Kemalists, suspicious and not favouring AKP, in key power positions. The main threat for AKP was the Turkish military and the Gülen's rising presence in the Turkish police became for Erdoğan a counterforce against the Kemalist army circles.⁸ The army was very suspicious of Gülen and the community's activities home and abroad fearing he would send his followers to the military academies and try to subvert the army from within (Aras and Caha, 2000). Between 2008-2012 the Gülen forces in the police and the judicial system staged high-profile trials against military officers but also journalists and members of the opposition using fake evidence, which led to suspensions and arrests of military officers, who were replaced with officers loyal to the movement and supporters of AKP. Despite the AKP's support for the trials, the movement's strong presence in the police force and the judicial branch became the battleground for the falling out between Erdoğan's AKP and Gülen in December 2013, when the Gülenists in the police and in the judicial system released secret recordings that implicated Erdoğan, his family members, and close cooperatives in bribery and corruption cases⁹.

Since the split between AKP and Gülen in late 2013, the government's attack on the Gülenist network of education and business network intensified in 2015 and 2016¹⁰, which culminated with the 15 July failed coup. Leaving aside the role

⁸ See the statement by Adil Serdar Sacan in http://www.meforum.org/2045/fethullah-gulens-grand-ambition#_ftn4

⁹ These "leaks" were not a new strategy, the Gülen-controlled police force has used them for several years when the 2007 law allowed the monitoring of all communications in Turkey. Pro-AKP and Gülenist media gained access to recordings of the military, opposition politicians, private medical files, etc.

¹⁰ After the 2013 Gezi park protests in Turkey, when Gülen criticized the use of force against the demonstrators, the government announced that preparatory schools would close down. The proposal was directly made to hurt Gülen movement because the preparatory schools served as a major source of income for them. "Fehmi Koru ... met with then-Prime Minister Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul and was dispatched to Pennsylvania — where Gulen lives in exile — to talk peace ... Gulen gave him a letter to deliver back to Ankara imploring the government to ease its grip on the schools" (Koru and Yilmaz, 2016). When the appeals for peace failed, Gülen used the recordings to discredit Erdogan in a corruption scandal, to which he reacted by declaring the Gülenists a terrorist organization and putting heavy pressure on their institutions. The preparatory schools were closed down, arrest warrants were issued claiming the rector of the movement's biggest university stole civil servant exam questions. In October 2015, the Higher

of the movement in preparing the coup, which cannot be fully assessed at this point, the Gülen movement, that by then became known as FETÖ (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü or Fethullah Terror Organisation), became the main target of the purges following the coup. During days after the coup, the government shutdown 14 television and radio stations associated with the movement. The educational facilities were another major target. During the first 10 days of the declared state of emergency, 42 700 of those suspended were employees of the Ministry of Education (over the total 67 000). A decree closed down and expropriated 1 043 private schools, 15 universities and 109 dormitories. All 1 577 deans had to resign, the schools were given a date by which to report the teachers they deemed members of the FETÖ network. Since, many more thousands of teachers had been suspended or fired¹¹. The military has greatly suffered as well. By the end of July, about 40% of generals and admirals had been removed from their positions.

3 FOREIGN ACTIVITIES

During this entire period, Gülen aware of the domestic opposition, continuously worked on building a very positive image abroad, especially in the West. Gülenists contacted foreign diplomats, intellectuals, businessmen, journalists and politicians and invited them to their domestic and foreign events, often as part of interfaith dialogue activities. Gülen supported interfaith dialogue with the other two Abrahamic religions and condemned the 9/11 attacks, which was put in sharp contrast with the violent imagery of Islam after 9/11. In 2001, he organised Iftar, the dinner that breaks fasting during the Holy month of Ramadan, in the USA and invited many prominent guests including Hollywood stars. In Turkey Gülen met with the Pope John Paul II, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, and Israeli Sephardic Head Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron.

His calls for interfaith dialogue attracted many, who longed for the idea of the world as peaceful cosmopolitan community build on democracy and respect

Board of Education passed a resolution that only 2% of university staff could be foreign, which aimed at Gülen universities, who employed many foreigners. In June 2015, all foreign staff, which composed almost 20% of all the staff at Fatih University, were stripped off work permits. In May 2015 the government took over Bank Asya after forcing state companies to cancel the accounts there. Many journalists, policemen, judges thought to be associated with the movement were reposted, fired or arrested during this period.

¹¹ For the extensive list of organizations including schools and hospitals associated with the movement that were closed down in the aftermath of the coup, see <http://www.star.com.tr/foto-galeri/iste-kapatilan-dernek-sendika-universite-okul-ve-yurtlar-galeri-703942-sayfa-35>. The total number came down to 1125.

for human rights. Many Western liberals looked up to him with hope and the democratisation of Turkey under AKP contributed to their hope for a democratic and prosperous Muslim country that would serve as an example to other countries in the region. In 2008, magazines *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect* declared Gülen the world's top living intellectual. Several renowned academicians and politicians spoke on behalf of Gülen at many events organized in Europe and the USA¹². Some scholars praised the movement and denied claims that it was a force of Islamism in the Turkish society (cf. Greg Barton, 2009). Others questioned the sincerity of the interfaith events actions and claimed that in Turkey the movement displayed anti-Christian and anti-Jewish attitudes (Mizell, 2007) including the Gülen controlled newspaper Zaman.

While in the West the movement focused on interfaith dialogue and building a positive image of Islam, its activities in the Central Asian republics, the Balkan countries and some African countries were more directly to increase the influence of Turkish nationalism and Islam. The interest in Central Asia, where they tried to compete with the Russian (and Irani) influence, was rooted in the Gülenist belief in Turkish nationalist supremacy (which they shared with Kemalism) and emphasized the Turkic-Islamic tradition, identity and heritage. The expansion to the Central Asian region started with the fall of the Soviet Union after Gülen allegedly ordered the migration of the movement there and referred to his followers as the “sahaba” perceiving the foundation of the Muslim community a step to establishing an Islamic state based on the example of Mohammed (Mizell, 2007).

Gülen was trying to link business and education and indeed gained a strong base of supporters in the region. The schools were promoting Turkish nationalism and Islam. The staff of the schools often came from Turkey, so did the so-called tutors, who were present at the “ışık evler”, a practice that also spread to the Central Asian environment. While the official school curriculum followed the national guidelines and often remained quite secular, the training in the “ışık evler” taught Islam and Gülen. Muzalevsky (2009) claimed that the movement provided “the students with free housing and food, [taught] them to read the Quran, and to pray. It is through these houses that many young men and women are turned into Gülen’s followers, known in Turkish as *Fethullahçı*. Outside the classrooms anti-Semitic, anti-Western and anti-American rhetoric is not uncommon ... [the aim was to] train future generations of leaders that are susceptible to display loyalty to Gülen.” The schools were heavily subsidised and provided a large number of scholarships, many of the students were offered

¹² For instance, In 2007, the British House of Lords, London School of Economics and London School of Oriental and African Studies hosted a conference in the honour of Gülen titled “The Transition of the Islamic World: The Contributions of the Gülen Movement”.

positions at the movement's universities in Turkey. They have done best in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgystan (Muzalevsky, 2009)¹³.

CONCLUSION

The close alliance between AKP and Gülen based on their shared struggle against the Kemalists, gained the members of the community wide access to the state bureaucracy, police, and armed forces between 2002 and 2013. The engagement with AKP opened an opportunity window for the movement because it provided access to resources. At the moment when the access to the power centre was first marginalised, then restricted and finally cut, the loss of political power resulted in the loss of all economic and social power. Abroad, we follow a similar trait. Where the movement has tried to become more involved with the political power structures in semi-democratic or non-democratic regimes in Central Asia, they faced repercussions. Its influence remained stronger in the Balkan countries, where they focus on the economic and educational activities.

In hybrid regimes like Turkey, activities out of politics might mobilise high numbers of people as it happened during the Gezi Park protests in June 2013 but their impact remains limited. Turkish political parties display high degrees of paternalism and clientelism and political participation is key in providing access to resources. The alliance with AKP brought many advantages to the movement because the AKP used its democratic power for politically motivated appointments that favoured Gülen's followers. Yet, the too close links between the two but with only one political representation resulted in a missed opportunity for the movement. The attempt to counter the hegemony of the new political elite in the semi-democratic environment of Turkey failed because unlike AKP, the movement could not claim democratic accountability because it was not able to legitimise its demands by referring to the people's will expressed in the elections. The AKP as a result lacked an adequate competitor that would defend the interests of the practicing Muslims in the country and thus, despite the persecution of the movement members, it kept most votes of the Gülen supporters as evidenced by the small change in the share of votes among the individual Turkish parliamentary parties since 2015. More work is needed to assess the influence of the movement on the failed democratisation of Turkey in the early 21st century and its contribution to the rise of Erdoğan as an authoritarian ruler.

¹³ The practice of Gülen's influence abroad was strong also in the Balkans, especially in Bosnia and Albania but also Macedonia, Kosovo, Moldova. Turkey has political, economic and strategic interest there, for instance energy security (cf. Onsoy and Udum, 2015).

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