

GULEN COMMUNITY'S SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GULEN COMMUNITY'S SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine the activity of the Gulen community in the Central Asian republics through different perspectives with a focus on the activities in the educational realm. My main concern in this thesis is to find out what role Islam and Turkishness plays in the educational activities of the Gulen community in the region. Throughout the thesis first I focus on Fethullah Gulen as the leader of the community followed by an analysis of the community in general – its origin, framework, goals and educational activity in various parts of the world. Then I examine the educational activity of the community in each of the Central Asian republics. And finally I explore various approaches regarding the community's goals in Central Asia with a focus on the role that Islam and Turkishness play in such activities.

Keywords: Central Asia, Fethullah Gulen community, Islam, Turkishness, education.

## ÖZ

### ORTA ASYA'DA GÜLEN OKULLARI

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Bu tezin amacı, Gülen Hareketi'nin Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri'ndeki özellikle eğitim alanındaki faaliyetlerini farklı bakış açılarını yansıtarak incelemektir. Bu tezin ana amacı, İslâm'ın ve Türklüğün bölgedeki Gülen Hareketi'nin eğitim aktivitelerinde oynadığı rolü incelemektir. Tezde sırasıyla, hareketin lideri olarak Fethullah Gülen'e, hareketin gelişimi, düşünsel çerçevesi ve amaçlarına ayrıca hareketin dünyanın farklı bölgelerindeki eğitim aktivitelerine odaklanacağım. Sonrasında hareketin Orta Asya Cumhuriyetlerindeki eğitim faaliyetlerini inceleyeceğim. Son olarak Gulen Hareketi faaliyetlerinde İslâm ve Türklüğün oynadığı rolü inceleyerek, hareketin Orta Asya'daki hedeflerine dair çeşitli yaklaşımları irdeleyeceğim.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orta Asya, Fethullah Gülen Hareketi, İslâm, Türklük, Eğitim.

To My Mother, Elena Chursinova, and My Father, Yury Chursinov

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ÖZ.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND of the GULEN COMMUNITY: from SAID NURSI to FETHULLAH GULEN.....	9
2.1 Said Nursi.....	9
2.1.1 The Life of Said Nursi.....	9
2.1.2 Said Nursi’s Ideas and Risale-i Nur.....	13
2.2 Fethullah Gulen.....	18
2.2.1 The Life of Fethullah Gulen.....	18
2.2.2 The Thought and Works of Fethullah Gulen.....	20
2.2.2.1 Islam and Nationalism.....	20
2.2.2.2 The Significance of Education.....	25
2.2.3 Tolerance and Dialogue.....	28
2.3 Nur Community and Fethullah Gulen.....	31
3. GULEN COMMUNITY AND ITS EDUCATIONAL NETWORK.....	36
3.1 Gulen Community’s Background.....	36



3.2 Gulen Community’s Educational Network.....	38
3.3 Global localization of the Gulen Schools.....	43
4. THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE GULEN SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES.....	53
4.1 The Activity of the Fethullah Gulen Community in the Central Asian Countries after the Collapse of the Soviet Union.....	54
4.2 Community’s Activity in Kazakhstan.....	56
4.2.1 Schools of the Community.....	56
4.2.2 Kazakh –Turk Education Foundation (KATEV).....	60
4.2.3 Position of the Government on the Community’s Schools.....	62
4.3 Community’s Activity in Turkmenistan.....	64
4.3.1 Schools of the Community.....	64
4.3.2 <i>Baskent</i> Educational Firm.....	67
4.3.3 Position of the Government on the Community’s Schools.....	68
4.4 Community’s Activity in Uzbekistan.....	69
4.4.1 Schools of the Community.....	69
4.4.2. Position of the Government on the Community’s Activity.....	71
4.5 Community’s Activity in Kyrgyzstan.....	73
4.5.1 Schools of the Community.....	73
4.5.2 Sebat International Educational Institute (SEBAT).....	76
4.5.3 Position of the Government on the Community’s Activity.....	77
4.6 Community’s activity in Tajikistan.....	77
5. UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE GULEN	

COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL ASIA.....	82
5.1 The Goals and Intensions of the Gulen Community’s Educational Activity in Central Asia.....	82
5.2 Turkishness in Practice.....	91
6. CONCLUSION.....	101
REFERENCES.....	107

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of new republics in Central Asia which had to conduct domestic and foreign policy independently for the first time in their history. During this period Turkey increased its activity in the region initially attempting to play the role of “the Big Brother,” a role which was played by Russians during the Soviet era.

Undoubtedly the aspiration of Turkish Republic had a geopolitical and ideological background. While Turkish government increased its influence in the post-Soviet space through making various intergovernmental agreements and initiating different projects of possible integration, non-governmental organizations also increased their activity in the region by penetrating into the social and cultural life of these countries. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, one of the most popular and active one of such organizations has been Fethullah Gulen community.

The Gulen community is an Islamic social community. In the community’s activities education takes a central place mostly, hence, community acts mainly establishing educational institutions. Gulen community is a relatively young community. Nevertheless it became a very widespread one not only in Central Asia but also in the world, and along with it gained a very controversial reputation and now attracts increasing attention and its activities are met with suspicion in Turkey and beyond its boundaries.

The presence of the community in Central Asia dates back to the collapse of the Soviet Union, meaning that the community has been active in the region for some 20 years, which is relatively a short period. However, the influence of the community in Central Asia spread visibly after the republics of Central Asia gained their independence and since then this community has been a very significant religious-foreign political power in the region. The community's activity in the region is not an exception in terms of the controversial assessments on its character and aims. The main topic of discussions about the community's presence in Central Asia is the place of Islam and Turkic identity on its agenda.

Hence, my main aim is to research and to analyze the educational activities of the community in Central Asia. Through analyzing this my main concern in this thesis is to make an attempt to find out what the community's real intentions are and to figure out what role Islam and Turkic identity play in its educational activities in the region. My argument is that Islam and Turkic identity play an important role in the activity of the community in the region which can be based on two reasons. The first reason is that people of Turkey and people of Central Asia, except for Tajiks, share the same ethnic background. The second one is that Central Asian states were the members of the Soviet Union, the "empire" where God did not exist, and faith was tried to be substituted with the Soviet ideology. Thereby Islam was erased from the people's social life and its revival appeared only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Thus, in my thesis along with analyzing the educational activity of the Gulen community in Central Asia I am going to focus particularly on the role that Islam and Turkic identity plays in the community's activity in the region.

### ***Key elements of research and structure of the thesis***

The thesis consists of four main chapters. Each chapter of the thesis focuses on the key elements that will be all necessary for a thorough examination of the research topic.

After the introduction chapter, the second chapter focuses on Fethullah Gulen. This chapter will include an analysis of his life, career and formation of his views. At this juncture it is necessary to analyze the ideological aims he follows in order to find out the nature, orientation, intensions, aims and methods of the community. On the grounds of that fact that Fethullah Gulen was the follower of Said Nursi, a person of Kurdish origin who lived in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and became a witness of the great transformations in Ottoman Empire, Nursi's ideas, his life and his philosophy will be explored as well. Finally, there is a need to understand what kind of relationship exists between the terms "nurcu" (the followers of Said Nursi) and "fethullahci" (the followers of Fethullah Gulen).

In the third chapter the community's development, tools, methods and framework of its activity as well as its strategy for spreading all over the world will be analyzed. This is important in order to understand the areas where this community's activities take place in Central Asia.

The chapters concerning the philosophy of the leaders of the movement and movement's activity in the world are given in order to provide the background about the community in general, before dealing with its activity in the specific region – Central Asia.

The fourth chapter will be dedicated directly to the analysis of the Gulen community's activity in the particular region – in each of the Central Asian

republics. Here special focus will be devoted to the different schools of the community in each Central Asian republic, the organizations they are guided by as well as the reaction of the governments of each Central Asian republic against the increasing Gulen community's activity during the initial years of independence.

In the fifth chapter main issue – place of Islam and the Turkic identity in the activity of the community in Central Asia will be discussed in detail by analyzing the different perspectives and approaches on the issue.

### ***Methodology***

Owing to the fact, that I could not conduct a field research for this study, my thesis is mainly based on the secondary sources, as well as different websites that belong to the community and community's organizations located in Central Asia. Here I should underline one limitation to this study; sometimes I had to lean on much on the community's own sources since there is not much available information on certain topics other than the ones provided by the community itself. I conducted a review and analysis of the literature concerning the issue. After this analysis, the comparison of the relevant data and statistics was made for further synthesis according to the thesis structure.

Essentially, the literature can be divided into the three parts. The first group presented by literature, mostly dedicated to the personality and views of the leaders of the community – Fethullah Gulen and Said Nursi. The second group is presented with articles and researches that provide us with a general knowledge about a major tool of the community that is Turkish schools. This group also includes the literature dealing with the mechanisms of schools and how they are working. The third group includes the literature related to the Gulen's community activity in the particular

region of research within a definite timetable – Central Asia in the post-Soviet period, which includes primary sources.

I should mention that the first part of the literature on identity, ideology and goals of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen are very widespread and numerous. For example I would mention the work of Camilla T. Nereid “In the light of Said Nursi. Turkish Nationalism and the religious alternative”, where author provides information about main periods of life of Said Nursi and main points of his philosophy. “Turkish Nationalism and the religious alternative”. Zeki Saritoprak dedicated many of his works to the thinking of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gulen.

Moving to the second group of sources I would like to mention that there have been various sources that were useful and irreplaceable in understanding the system of the Gulen community and its schools. One example to such sources is an article by Anne Solberg “The Gulen schools: A perfect compromise or compromising perfectly?”, where Gulen community, key elements of Fethullah Gulen thinking, Gulen schools, their location on a theoretical traditional/ radical continuum are represented.

Passing to the third part of literature, it can be said that despite the fact that this topic is a very actual one, sources about the activity of the community in Central Asian countries are not numerous. However, the issue does not remain untouched and some scholars examine this topic. It is very important to mention that there are mostly two groups of sources. The first part is sources published in the internet site of Fethullah Gulen. They mostly offer the positive point of view on the Gulen community, its activity in general and particularly in the region. the Russian sources, it should be said that in spite of the fact that the issue is very actual in Russia there is

not much fully developed scholarly research regarding the issue. However, some Russian sources take a significant place in this group. Russian sources generally express negative and sometimes very controversial attitude towards the community's activity in the region. The reason of this can be that the sources reflect the position of the Russian Federation, a country which still tries to keep significant influence in the region. Russia does not approve any other country or a foreign organization that aspires to extend its influence not only in the Central Asian region but also in some Russian regions like Tatarstan, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, Chuvashiya, Bashkiriya, Dagestan and Chechnya.

One significant point is that almost in every article in Russian language, scholarly or not, the word pan-Turkism is used because in Russia, Gulen community is understood to be similar as Nurcular and they both are thought to be pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic organizations. People who are active in the Gulen network are called "pan-Turkic strategists" whose intentions based not on religious ideas but on the creation of a Turkic state in Eurasia on the basis of "educated Islam"<sup>1</sup>. Another point of view about the actual motivation of the Gulen community in the region according to the Russian sources is that Turkification is only a tool on the way to Islamization and further creation of the Great Turan. Students learn Turkish first after which the ideas of pan-Turkism, pan-Turanism and radical Islamic dogmas will be inoculated in their minds.<sup>2</sup> Russian political scientists directly argue that: "the main aim of

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Hinov, "Agressivnye zamysly sektantov «Nurdzhular»", Institute of Religion and Policy, November 2006. Online available at: <http://i-r-p.ru/page/stream-event/index-8831.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Novyj Turan v legendah i najavu: udastsja li Turcii obedinit' vseh tjurkov pod odnim polumesjajem", Analitika, 2009. Online available at: <http://analitika.at.ua/news/2009-06-01-9029>



Nurcular is creation of the Great Turan”.<sup>3</sup> Among Russian sources I found useful and fundamental information about the history, structure, development and recent activity of the Gulen community, an Islamic community active not only on the global scale but also in the former Soviet Turkic Republics. One example to such work is Mihail Davydov’s research “Deyatelnost turetskoy religioznoy sekty “Nurcular”.

Among the sources concerning Gulen community’s activity in Central Asia I want to mark out Bayram Balci. He made a detailed research in this direction and his articles provide an in-depth analysis of the issue. He provides us both with qualitative and quantitative data. Based on his papers it is possible to get information about the number of schools, students, Turkish teachers in the countries as well as the curriculum of the schools. Also he underlines the intensions and goals of the community in Central Asia that consist in “reestablishing Islam in the region, which has been dominated for the last seventy years by atheist power” and are referred by him as the “reason d’etre of the organization”<sup>4</sup>. Balci is the only scholar who conducts research not only on Fethullah Gulen community’s activity in general and regards Central Asia as only a part of his study, but indeed directly examines the activity of Fetullahci in the Central Asian region. An important article of his is “The Fethullah Gülen Community as a Transitional Phenomenon”, where the author speaks generally about community and schools and points out the “Turkishness” of the community as the reason for the community schools’ concentration in Central Asia.

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<sup>3</sup> Ivan Shukin, “Rasprostranenie jekstremistskih organizacij v Srednej Azii ugrozhaet stabil'nosti i bez togo problemnogo regiona“ , 2004, <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=2942>

<sup>4</sup> Bayram Balci, “Central Asia: Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary schools”, 2002, Religioscope. Online available at: [http://www.religioscope.com/info/articles/007\\_fethullahci](http://www.religioscope.com/info/articles/007_fethullahci)

Another significant contribution to the research was provided with the works of Hakan Yavuz, a scholar who researches the community's activity. The book "Turkish Islam and the Secular State" edited by him and John. L. Esposito became irreplaceable and very useful while working on not only the third chapter of the thesis but during the whole process of the analysis of the topic.

The literature related to the situation in Tajikistan sources is very limited. In addition to the literature related to the community's activity in the region includes primary sources such as the websites of the community's companies, some of their schools and universities. These sources were indispensable and very useful for my research.

Based on the above mentioned sources throughout this thesis I aim to analyze the educational activities of the Gulen community in Central Asia with a focus on the underlying goals of these activities within the light of Islam and Turkishness.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE GULEN COMMUNITY: FROM SAID NURSI TO FETHULLAH GULEN

In order to examine the ideological background of the Gulen community, there is a need for understanding the ideas of its leader – Fethullah Gulen, analyzing his life experience, career and as well as focusing on other conditions which are influential in the formation of his ideas. However, a detailed analysis of Gulen’s ideas alone will not be sufficient owing to the fact that Fethullah Gulen’s ideas are rooted in Said Nursi’s ideas, the figure that played a significant role in the political life of the Ottoman Empire, and then, in the Republic of Turkey. Therefore in this chapter I will analyze the lives and ideas of Said Nursi, who gave birth to the Nur community, and Fethullah Gulen who, became a follower of the Nursi and gave birth to the new religious group within the Nur community.

#### **2.2 Said Nursi**

##### **2.1.1 The life of Said Nursi**

Said Nursi was born in a Kurdish family of seven children, living in the small village of Nurs, situated in the province of Bitlis in eastern Turkey in 1876.<sup>5</sup> He began his education at the age of nine<sup>6</sup> and studied Islam in the madrasahs of his

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<sup>5</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner “Makers of Islamic Civilization: Said Nursi”. Oxford University Press, 2009. p.5

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

region and obtained his Sufi diploma in 1888.<sup>7</sup> He was given the title of “Bediüzzaman” (Wonder of the Age), due to his reputation as a learned scholar.<sup>8</sup> As Zeki Sarıtoprak states, Said Nursi divided his life into two parts the “Old Said” (Eski Said) (1897–1926) and the “New Said” (Yeni Said) (1926–1949).<sup>9</sup>

Life of Said Nursi in the first period or in the “Old Said” period was firmly tied with the historical events of the last 20 years of Ottoman Empire. After his graduation from madrasah he travelled to various villages and towns in aiming to gather knowledge from local scholars. Later he realized the importance of education, developed his ideas on pedagogy and worked out his own teaching methods based on combining of religious sciences (knowledge) with modern sciences that will lead to a better understanding of religion and strengthening of its truth.<sup>10</sup> In 1907 he went to Istanbul and presented his ideas concerning the significance of improving of living standards and educational conditions in the east of the country.<sup>11</sup> Sultan rejected his proposals, and he supported the Young Turks founded in 1897 in Mecca.<sup>12</sup>

He participated in the military service against the Russians in the World War I and was taken prisoner by them and sent to Kostroma, where he escaped from and returned back to Istanbul later. After the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey he

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<sup>7</sup> Camilla T. Nereid. “In the light of Said Nursi. Turkish Nationalism and the religious alternative”. University of Bergen, 1997. p.14

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Zeki Sarıtoprak. “Said Nursi’s Teachings on the People of the Book: a case study of Islamic social policy in the early twentieth century” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2000. p.322

<sup>10</sup> Horkuc Hasan & Turner Colin, *op.cit.*, p.11

<sup>11</sup> Camilla T. Nereid, *op.cit.*, p.14

<sup>12</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p.16

found out that it was not possible to cooperate with the new government and returned back to his village and stopped being involved in political affairs.<sup>13</sup>

During these years, the works of Said Nursi were mainly dedicated to the conditions under which non-Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire had been living. The non-Muslim peoples mainly included the Greeks and Armenians, and Nursi presented his ideas on how the Muslim populations of the Ottoman Empire, mainly Turks and Kurds should behave towards them. Such problems and other problems concerning the people living in the Eastern part of the Ottoman empire were discussed in his book *Munazarat* (Dialogues). Zeki Saritoprak states:

His book *Munazarat* [Dialogues], which was written as a ‘prescription’ to the common people, addressed questions on constitutional issues in Eastern Ottoman society, including relations with non-Muslims. In writing the book, Nursi used non-academic and popular language, arranged as a series of questions and answers. His discussions or dialogues were with Kurdish tribes of South-Eastern and Eastern Anatolia.<sup>14</sup>

Said Nursi was born and grown up “in the final years of the Ottoman Empire”, when the soon death of the “sick man of Europe” was inevitable. Under such conditions, he was concerned about the rights of non-Muslim peoples, due to the appeal of Islamic political communitys involving jihad against them. This was a period of transition when the activity of Said Nursi shifted from teaching to writing.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Camilla T. Nereid, *op.cit.*, p. 15

<sup>14</sup> Zeki Saritoprak, *op.cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p. 19

Later in the following period, Said Nursi was arrested for participation in the Kurdish rebellion in 1925 and was exiled to Isparta.<sup>16</sup> In this period Nursi began to have students and write his famous *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light).

Besides *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi wrote letters to his students; these letters and some students' replies were composed into the *Lâhikalar* (The Appendices), later included in the *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>17</sup>

The new government did not appreciate his activities, therefore he and some of his students were arrested several time on various occasions. In April 1935, Said Nursi and 120 of his students were arrested. They were accused of having founded “an illegal secret society, aimed at undermining the present regime and destroying the fundamental principles of the state”<sup>18</sup>. In August 1943 he and twenty-two of his students were arrested. Nursi was accused of creating a Sufi *tarikât* (religious sect) and exploiting religious feelings<sup>19</sup>.

In this period of his life writing formed a significant part of Nursi's activity and become the driving force for his community. He moved away from the politics himself and encouraged his followers to do the same. He stressed that he did not even know the names of the then Turkish politicians<sup>20</sup>. He voiced his desire for his

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<sup>16</sup> Camilla T. Nereid, *op.cit.*, p.16

<sup>17</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p.26

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p.27

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.29

<sup>20</sup> Zeynep Akbulut Kuru & Ahmet T Kuru. “Apolitical Interpretation of Islam: Said Nursi's Faith-Based Activism in Comparison with Political Islamism and Sufism”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January 2008. p.102

writings to become a tool to stop the spiritual corruption of the society in the era of materialism.<sup>21</sup> Zeki Saritoprak states:

Most of his writings comprise logical explanations and justifications for core matters of faith and traditions of Islam. To him, faith was the center of life for any individual. He considered this way of service, which developed into a leading school of thought in Turkey, to be an alternative to politics in the name of Islam.<sup>22</sup>

Said Nursi died in Urfa in 1960<sup>23</sup> at the age of eighty-seven and the location of his grave is still unknown. However, during his life he gained a great number of followers and founded a powerful text-based community in Turkey. Among the most comprehensive and popular of his works that was written in the “New Said” period is called *Risale-i Nur* which perfectly reflects his ideas and thoughts. In the following part I will focus on his ideas and thoughts as reflected in his *Risale*.

### **2.1.2 Said Nursi’s ideas and *Risale-i Nur***

In generally, *Risale-i Nur* is a commentary on Quran consisting of 6000 handwritten pages.<sup>24</sup> Colin Turner mentions that *Risale-i Nur* is a work where Quran is interpreted for people to understand it better:

The *Risale* models itself as a sort of hermeneutical prism, catching what its author considers to be the effulgence of Divine light from the Qur’an and refracting it as colours visible to, and understandable by, the eye of the human heart...I shall suggest that we approach the *Risale* as one would a building. In fact, the *Risale* is not one building, but a whole

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<sup>21</sup> Zeki Saritoprak, “Islam and Politics in the Light of Said Nursi’s Writings”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January 2008. p.118

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, “Islam in the Public Sphere. The Case of the Nur Community”, *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. Syracuse university Press, 2003. p.18

<sup>24</sup> Camilla T. Nereid. *op.cit.*, p.7

complex of edifices, constructed at various points along the author's career.<sup>25</sup>

The Risale-i Nur composed of the collected works of Nursi, covering various topics. They are written in various forms: diary notes, prayers, letters and resolutions. Nursi wrote mainly in Ottoman Turkish but some of the parts were originally written in Arabic and Persian. The language is vivid, colorful and highly metaphorical, sometimes understandable only for the trained reader.<sup>26</sup>

In Risale-i Nur all thoughts, visions and ideas of Said Nursi are reflected. According to M. Bilci, Said Nursi in Risale-i Nur explains four ways of perception of God and realizing of "what is right": the Quran (the book), the Prophet (the messenger), the universe (nature) and (human) conscience.<sup>27</sup> The Risale-i Nur determines six fundamental principles of Islamic faith: belief in the uniqueness of God, in the next world, in the sacred books, in the prophets, in angels and in destiny.<sup>28</sup>

C. Turner examines the God's nature in the Nursian perspective which is dealt with in many parts of Risale-i Nur. In Said Nursi's scheme the cosmos is presented as a book where words are the embodiments of the "beautiful names" of God. In Nursi's vision the realm is a mirror, where God's perfection is reflected. Nursi states that God's incomparability and similarity at the same time results in God not being confused with His creation. But in spite of this, God should not be seen as

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<sup>25</sup> Colin Turner "The Six-Sided Vision of Said Nursi: Towards a Spiritual Architecture of the Risale-i Nur", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January 2008. p. 56

<sup>26</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p.45

<sup>27</sup> Mucahit Bilci "Said Nursi's Moral Philosophy", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January 2008. p. 95

<sup>28</sup> Zeynep Akbulut Kuru & Ahmet T. Kuru, *op. cit.*, p.102



unconcerned with daily workings of the cosmos.<sup>29</sup> Also, Nursi pays attention to the man's ability to decipher and realize the nature of God and to find the key to know Him. Here, C. Turner states that according to Nursi the process of finding the faith is a way to correct interpretation of cosmos's nature that means:

To read anything but the words of God inscribed on the pages of the universe, or to see anything but the signs of God in the mirror of created beings, is to betray one's role as vicegerent and to fall short of what it means to be the conscious mirror in which the 'hidden treasure' that is God can be made manifest.<sup>30</sup>

In *Risale-i Nur* a significant part is devoted to the relation between science and religion. According to Nursi in the modern age decay of faith is due to the flourishing of science and education and people's increasing belief in science while ignoring the realm of faith. Therefore in *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi aims to make Islam compatible with modern conditions and prove it by rational arguments<sup>31</sup>. As S. Vahide states Said Nursi aimed to prove that science and religion are not in conflict, but science can be incorporated to Islam<sup>32</sup>. But the primary aim of *Risale-i Nur* is a struggle against atheism:

Nursi was thus arguing that the struggle against aggressive irreligion has to be founded on the strengthening of religious and moral values, and the revitalization of faith. This was the primary aim of the *Risale-i Nur*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p. 57

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59

<sup>31</sup> Zeynep Akbulut Kuru & Ahmet T Kuru, *op. cit.*, p.106

<sup>32</sup> Şükran Vahide, "Reconciliation with Christianity and the West in Said Nursi's Thought and Practice: An Overview", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January 2008. p. 22

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.20

In this sense, naturally Said Nursi believed that communism, being a variety of atheism, its source, and its threats to destroy the human spirituality leads to decaying of society and its eventual immersion into anarchy<sup>34</sup>.

Said Nursi was not far from criticizing of Islamic umma either; he believed that the backwardness of the Islamic world is due to factors such as the growth of despair among Muslims; the death of truth in the social life of Muslims; love of animosity; dictatorship; and the emphasis on efforts to gain personal advantages.<sup>35</sup> Another problem that is detrimental to the Muslim unity, according to Nursi, is that Muslims adopt from Western society not the things they need to adopt. Instead of a blind imitation of Western ideals, they need to borrow from Europe such innovations as democratic and human rights organizations.<sup>36</sup> These factors also form obstacles to the Muslim's positive relation and cooperation with the Christians which was important for Nursi.

Besides these Said Nursi also believed that the problem of the twentieth-century Muslims is the weakening of the individual faith which results in political problems. Muslims should primarily stress their faith instead of dealing with political problems since the realm of spiritual development and political engagement is incompatible. Therefore, he makes a distinction between religion and state that Muslims can live according to the conditions of Islamic faith even if the state does not implement it. He urged Muslims to keep themselves away from politics. According to H. Yavuz, Nursi believed that religion should not be used as a tool for

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Zeki Saritoprak, "Said Nursi on Muslim-Christian Relations Leading to World Peace", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 19, January 2008. p.31

| <sup>36</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p.95

the achievement of the interests of a particular group because it is a life guide for the whole society; and therefore Nursi was against the creation of an Islamic party<sup>37</sup>. In this sense, Yavuz states:

The Nur community, therefore, is not a political Islamic community, but rather a faith community that seeks to raise religious consciousness and to work with other faith communities.<sup>38</sup>

Thereby, it is obvious, that on the basis of all these consideration of Nursi, “Risale-i Nur provides a consistent Islamic perspective on the apolitical service of faith”.<sup>39</sup>

Along with politics, nationalism is viewed as a field that one needs to keep a distance in Nursian ideology. Said Nursi believed that religion is the basis of human consciousness therefore is superior to nationalism. He regarded nationalism as a secular political phenomenon that would harm the Muslim’s unity<sup>40</sup> and threaten the state’s domestic affairs as well as its international relations. Nursi approached the Kurdish problem with the same logic, and despite being accused of supporting Kurdish nationalism, according to Nereid, he was far from this idea and followed the line of friendship and unity between Turks and Kurds based on centuries-old history.<sup>41</sup> Nursi also saw certain elements of racism in Turkish nationalism and due

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<sup>37</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, *op.cit.* p.12

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Zeynep Akbulut Kuru & Ahmet T Kuru, *op. cit.*, p.104

<sup>40</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p.97

<sup>41</sup> Camilla T. Nereid. *op. cit.*, p.98

to the non-religious character of it, rejected it while emphasizing that Turkish identity can never come before Islam.<sup>42</sup>

The Risale-i Nur was banned and only in 1956<sup>43</sup> all restrictions were lifted. During the life of Said Nursi only some parts of Risale-i Nur were printed. Only after 25 years following his death the printed copies of his completed works were presented and translated to the different languages with the efforts of his followers, members of Nur community of Nurculuk,<sup>44</sup>. After that *dershanes*, study circles for studying, discussion and reflection on Risale-i Nur's teachings emerged in Turkey and become widespread all over the country<sup>45</sup>.

Nowadays, the Nur community aspires to shift Islam from an oral-based tradition to a print culture through the claim of developing an education system to awaken and strengthen religious consciousness in people's minds.

## **2.2 Fethullah Gulen**

### **2.2.1 The life of Fethullah Gulen**

Fethullah Gulen, or *Hodjaefendi* (Master) nowadays a widely famous Islamic figure, was born in Erzurum, province of Eastern Turkey in 1941<sup>46</sup>. In 1946<sup>47</sup> he began to elementary school, but after 3 years quitted school because his family moved to another village where he continued to learn Arabic and teachings of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.99

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.7

<sup>44</sup> Hasan Horkuc & Colin Turner, *op.cit.*, p. 115

<sup>45</sup> Mucahit Bilci, *op.cit.*, p. 75

<sup>46</sup> Fethulah Gülen in Short. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Prophet Muhammad from his father<sup>48</sup>. Gulen continued his education in 1952 when he became a student of Hacı Sitki Efendi, and later of Sadi Efendi, and Osman Bektaş<sup>49</sup>. While he was a student, he met the followers of Said Nursi and read *Risale-i Nur* and other works of him. In 1958<sup>50</sup> he went to Edirne where he gave informal teachings in one of the mosques. In 1961 he completed his military service in Ankara<sup>51</sup>. In 1964 he became the Quran teacher in the mosque of Edirne. In 1966<sup>52</sup> he moved to Izmir, where he was appointed as a teacher of Islamic science in the Kestanepazarı Mosque.

In 1968 he fulfilled his Haj duty in Mecca<sup>53</sup>. In 1971 he was arrested for holding religious activities, such as organizing summer camps for the purpose of spreading Islamic ideas<sup>54</sup>. In 1971<sup>55</sup> Fethullah Gulen left his post and Kestanepazarı Hall after which he worked as an imam in the other mosques of the Aegean region. During this time he continued his activities in the educational field and created dormitories for students of high schools and universities.

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<sup>48</sup> Bülent Aras, "Turkish Islam's Moderate Face", *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1998, Vol.5, No:3

<sup>49</sup> Fethullah Gülen in Short. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/>

<sup>50</sup> Bülent Aras. *op.cit.*

<sup>51</sup> "Life chronology" of Fethullah Gulen. Online available at <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/about-fethullah-gulen/life-chronology.html>

<sup>52</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz. "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. Syracuse university Press, 2003. p.20

<sup>53</sup> "Life chronology" of Fethullah Gulen. Online available at <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/about-fethullah-gulen/life-chronology.html>

<sup>54</sup> Bülent Aras. *op.cit.*

<sup>55</sup> A Bried Biography of Fethullah Gülen, Gülen Institute. Online available at: <http://www.guleninstitute.org/index.php/Biography.html>

In 1974<sup>56</sup>, he established the first preparatory courses in Manisa for children from ordinary schools. In 1977<sup>57</sup>, he travelled to Northern European states where during his speeches he encouraged local Turkish residents to preserve their own culture and religion and to integrate to the host societies.

In 1989 he was given a license that enabled him to preach in any mosque of Turkey. After that he preached in the largest mosques of Istanbul and Izmir.

By the mid 1990s<sup>58</sup> the number of his followers reached a sufficient level to be regarded as the social community that is now called Gulen community or Fethullah Gulen community, or *Fethullahci* (the followers of Fethullah), as it is called in Turkey.

In 1999<sup>59</sup>, it was declared that due to certain health problems he moved to the USA in order to receive medical care. Actually this step enabled him to escape the 2000 indictment for encouraging his followers for rebellion in Turkey.<sup>60</sup> He is still living in the state of Pennsylvania with a group of his followers

## **2.2.2 The Thought and Works of Fethullah Gulen**

### **2.2.2.1 Islam and Nationalism**

Gulen's views concerning the role of Islam and nationalism has transformed during his lifetime. In the 1980s Gulen's thought, as B. Agai affirms, were

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Biography of Fethullah Gülen. Online available at: <http://www.fethullah-gulen.org/biography.html>

<sup>59</sup> A Brief Biography of Fethullah Gülen, Gülen Institute. Online available at: <http://www.guleninstitute.org/index.php/Biography.html>

<sup>60</sup> Rachel Sharon –Krespin, "Fethullah Gülen's Grand Ambition. Turkey's Islamist Danger", *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 1998, Vol.15, No:1, p.59

influenced much by the nationalistic Islamic chauvinism<sup>61</sup>. Such views changed in the 1990s when Gulen started seeing the solution to Turkey's problems in the rising of Muslim consciousness in people's mind and in overcoming the dominance of the West in Turkish politics. According to Gulen influence of both the United States and Soviet Union was destructive in terms of international situation. Later he realized that isolation of Turkey would not help with the resolution of the significant problems of the country yet the solution indeed lied within the Turkish society. He understood the need for Turkey's opening itself to the world, but at the same time maintaining its national identity.<sup>62</sup> In this sense it was necessary to develop an educational system while strengthening Turkey's ties with West.

The ideas of Fethullah Gulen were influenced much by Said Nursi yet the thoughts of Gulen are not always the same but sometimes quite different from the Nursi's thoughts.

First of all, according to Bekim Agai, Islam for Gulen means morality and identity<sup>63</sup>. B. Aras states that Gulen does not aim to apply the hegemony of Islamic law – Sharia. His regulations were mainly directed to Islam in the private life of people because religion is a private matter<sup>64</sup>. In this regard the views of Gulen concerning Islam and politics are similar to the thinking of Said Nursi. Gulen mentions primarily the importance of developing personal or communal (not to be

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<sup>61</sup> Bekim Agai "Islam Ethic of Education", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p. 63

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.63

<sup>63</sup> Fethullah Gülen Online available at: "Love and Tolerance": <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/love-and-tolerance/274-education/1854-educational-services-are-spreading-throughout-the-world.html>

<sup>64</sup> Rachel Sharon –Krespin. *op.cit.*, p.60

confused with social<sup>65</sup>) religious consciousness. He points out the superiority of Islam: "Islam is a religion and thus is more than being political, a method, or an ideology"<sup>66</sup>. But while Said Nursi tended to stay away from politics and encourage his followers not to be engaged in politics, Gulen underlines firstly the importance of personal consciousness and then the significance of a state or a political matter:

Gulen always has stressed the communal religious consciousness as the *sina qua non* for the realization of a just society, and second, he insists that the state is absolutely necessary for the survival of the Turkish Islam<sup>67</sup>.

Hakan M. Yavuz states that Gulen's view of Islam is based on the Ottoman experience<sup>68</sup>. He believes that Islam which was born and has been experienced in Anatolia is rather different from the Islam being shared by other Islamic communities, especially Arabs<sup>69</sup>.

Special role plays Sufism in the philosophy of Gulen. According to Rachel Sharon-Krespin, Fethullah Gulen presents himself as a modern Anatolian Sufi on the basis of the great impact of ideas of Sufi philosophers like Jalal ad-Din Rumi and Yunus Emre.<sup>70</sup>

Fahri Karakas implements the term "Anatolian Sufi" for describing the ideology of the community of Gulen. According to Karakas, teachers in the schools

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<sup>65</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz. *op.cit.*, p.24

<sup>66</sup> Hakan Yeşilova, "Islam and Peace: Oxymoron or perfect match?". Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/columns/3677-hakan-yesilova-turkish-review-islam-and-peace-oxymoron-or-perfect-match.html>

<sup>67</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz. *op.cit.*, p.20

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Rachel Sharon –Krespin. *op.cit.*, p.61

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



of network always mention the traditions of Anatolian dervishes - Sufis who believes in the importance of love, tolerance, dialogue etc. According to him, members of the Gulen community themselves share a lot of concepts common with Anatolian Sufism, based on service and contribution to society, collectivism, cooperation, trust and support.

A.T. Kuru states that Fethullah Gulen tries to follow the idea of a middle way that he adopted from Said Nursi. For Gulen, the middle way was an absolute balance, as Islam being the balance between materialism and spirituality. Islam is a middle way between *ifrat* (excesses) and *tefrit* (deficiency)<sup>71</sup>. Relatively Islam views science again as the middle way, as Gulen states: “It does not reject or condemn the modern scientific approach, neither does it deify it”<sup>72</sup>.

Fethullah Gulen’s understanding of Islam is tightly connected with his view of nationalism. Hakan Yavuz calls him a Turko-Ottoman nationalist. He states that this kind of nationalism is based not on common race or blood, but is based on the common historical experience. And Islam forms the basic core of this national identity. A Turk is a Muslim who lives in Turkey, shares Ottoman legacy and regards themselves as Turk. In order to be a Turk you do not need a descent based connection but need to be a Muslim.

It is very important to mention that Fethullah Gulen like Said Nursi does not see any contradictions between Islam and modernity. According to Bill Park, Gulen

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<sup>71</sup> Ahmet. T. Kuru. “Fethullah Gulen’s Search for a Middle Way Between Modernity and Muslim Tradition”, *Turkish Islam and The Secular State*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. Syracuse university Press, 2003. p. 117

<sup>72</sup>Fethullah Gulen, “The relationship of Islam and Science and the concept of Science”. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/recent-articles/905-the-relationship-of-islam-and-science-and-the-concept-of-science.html>

applies an “Ottoman” type of Islam that as he considers based on flexibility, rationality, and openness to other faiths, ideas and science<sup>73</sup> In his “Essentials of Islamic face” Gulen states that Quran cannot be considered as a scientific textbook, rather it reflects “the eternal interpretation of the Book of the Universe and the interpreter of all natural and other sciences”<sup>74</sup>. In addition Islam should positively regard democratization and tolerance. In this sense, he considers the problem is not in the Islam itself in its nature but in its dogmatic interpretations. Relating to this point Bill Park applies the term “Turkishness” to the Gulen’s thinking:

Indeed, he believes Turkey can lead the Islamic world toward this realization, and for all his proclaimed universalism there is “Turkishness” to his thinking. Turkish society is nationalistic, and some of this flavor has been absorbed by Gulen and Fethullahci.<sup>75</sup>

As H. Yavuz mentioned in an interview that according to Fethullah Gulen and his followers Islam is not only to pray five times a day and to read the works of Said Nursi, Islam is action. Thus, Gulen offers rather new type of Islam that can be called “educational” Islam<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Park, “The Fethullah Gülen community as A Transitional Phenomenon”. Online available at: <http://en.fgulen.com/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2443-the-fethullah-gulen-community-as-a-transnational-phenomenon.html>

<sup>74</sup> Fethullah Gulen. “Essentials of Islamic face”: Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/essentials-of-the-islamic-faith/692-does-the-quran-allude-to-scientific-developments.html>

<sup>75</sup> Bill Park, *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://en.fgulen.com/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2443-the-fethullah-gulen-community-as-a-transnational-phenomenon.html>

<sup>76</sup> The Gülen Community: a modern expression of Turkish Islam Interview with Hakan Yavuz, *Relioscope*. Online available at: [http://www.religion.info/english/interviews/article\\_74.shtml](http://www.religion.info/english/interviews/article_74.shtml)

## **The significance of education**

Fethullah Gulen attaches serious value to the science, education and knowledge while he considers that no one is able to achieve a true individuality with Quran in his hands but without knowledge and aspiration to get this knowledge every time:

Education is vital for both societies and individuals. First of all, our humanity is directly proportional to the purity of our emotions. Although those who are full of bad feelings and whose souls are influenced by egoism look like human beings, whether they are really so is questionable. Almost anyone can be successful in physical training, but few can educate their minds and feelings.<sup>77</sup>

Nowadays, according to Gulen, world is immersed in the conflict between religion and science. The crisis and of absence of spiritual satisfaction is a result of the conflict between ideologies that dominated the last two centuries:

Enlightenment communitys that began in the eighteenth century saw human beings as consisting of the mind only. Following that, positivist and materialist communitys saw humans as solely material or corporeal entities<sup>78</sup>.

Thereby, he saw the problem of education in Turkey as a reflection of a social crisis. Islam was not being taught in secular schools due to the state's control of education and these schools were not free from modernist ideology. Besides, since there were no institutions of Islamic education as it used to be in the case of madrasahs, it was not possible to challenge technology and scientific thoughts.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Fethullah Gulen, "Education from Cradle to Grave". Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/about-fethullah-gulen/education/777-education-from-cradle-to-grave.html>

<sup>78</sup>Fethullah Gulen. "Love and Tolerance". Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/gulens-works/love-and-tolerance.html>

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Michel, "Fethullah Gülenas Educator", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito.Syracuse university Press, 2003. p. 72

Gulen argues that religion and science are not necessarily in conflict with each other. Indeed he believes they can be integrated but like his ideological father Said Nursi, he claims the superiority of religion to science:

Religion guides sciences, determines their real goal, and puts moral and universal human values before science as guides. If this truth had been understood in the West, and if this relationship between religion and knowledge had been discovered, things would have been very different<sup>80</sup>.

Gulen believes that modernization is necessary for the country, but its success consists in its scale: modernization must include the modernization of the society by the modernization of individual.<sup>81</sup> For Gulen it is not sufficient to reform the education system only by cleaning it up from the old ideology and to adapt new technology. In addition to all these, there is a need to develop people's consciousness. Gulen, like his predecessor Said Nursi is concerned that people can lose their spirituality. Modernization without its spiritual part may lead to a negative outcome, meaning people may be cut off from their roots and traditional values. While they will be well-prepared to find a job and to be a good worker, they will be far from achieving the human freedom.<sup>82</sup>

Gulen emphasizes the importance of the subject of study, the methods of teaching and conditions: "We must determine what is to be learned and taught, and

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<sup>80</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p.38

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 73

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 74

when and how to do so”<sup>83</sup>. As H. Yavuz notes, for Gulen a lack of religious education leads to atheism, while the lack of scientific one – to fanaticism.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, Gulen offers such an educational system where religious knowledge will be integrated with scientific knowledge together with morality and spirituality. Aiming to set such an educational system he has three goals to reach:

1. To raise and preserve Muslim’s consciousness
2. To revise the connection between science and religion in order to refute the dominance of materialism and positivism
3. To revise Islam in order to restore collective memory<sup>85</sup>

These goals present the means of creating of a new generation the “golden generation” or “the new generation”. The representatives of this generation will be educated with a strong training in science, faith and morality. Here the basic characteristic is faith, because it teaches what is right and what is wrong. The combination of faith, moral values, science and knowledge will be transformed into action and will be used as a tool to solve the problems of the future in Turkey and in the whole world<sup>86</sup>.

Gulen perhaps pay attention to the new generation because of his distinction between a teacher and an educator: “Education is different from teaching. Most

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<sup>83</sup> Fethullah Gulen, “Education from Cradle to Grave”. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/love-and-tolerance/274-education/1855-education-from-cradle-to-grave.html>

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Bekim Agai, *op.cit.*, p. 57

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

people can teach, but only a very few can educate”<sup>87</sup>. He considers being an educator is a more difficult task since an educator should be patient, be a good personal example, know the students well, and have an individual approach to each student based on the student’s character.

Gulen stresses the importance of a teacher’s possession of ability not only to teach but also to be a good educator. He believes that the members of the new generation will be able to overcome the ideologies of the past that hold up the development of the society<sup>88</sup>. The main tool of his community is the educational institutions that he and his followers established all over the world in order to create the generation that will educate the following generations in the context of harmony of religion and science. Through such education Gulen believed that people are supposed not to lose but preserve their spirituality and religious consciousness and live in compliance with religion at the same time.

### **Tolerance and dialogue**

The idea of tolerance forms a significant role in Gulen’s ideology: “Today, more than anything else, our society is in need of tolerance”<sup>89</sup>. The reason for that is explained as Islam being a religion of peace: “Islam is a religion of security, safety, and peace. These principles permeate the lives of Muslims”<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Fethullah Gulen, “Education from Cradle to Grave”. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/love-and-tolerance/274-education/1855-education-from-cradle-to-grave.html>

<sup>88</sup> Bekim Agai, *op.cit.* p.59

<sup>89</sup> Fethullah Gulen, “Love and Tolerance”. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/gulens-works/love-and-tolerance.html>

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

According to Gulen, the type Islam he advocates – the Turkish Islam – is the type of Islam that practices religious pluralism. In order to exemplify this Gulen refers to the Ottoman era:

Muslims have a good record of dealing with Jews: There has been almost no discrimination, no Holocaust, denial of basic human rights, or genocide. In fact, Jews were welcomed in times of trouble, as when the Ottoman State embraced them after their expulsion from Spain.<sup>91</sup>

As Ihsan Yilmaz states, the need of tolerance in Gulen’s thinking is tightly connected with need of dialogue. Thus, according to Yilmaz Gulen is a supporter and a promoter of interfaith dialogue. Gulen states that Islam recognizes all Books and religions that came before it. He underlines that Islam provides such a social system where there is no place for force and hostility, where relations must be based on mutual love, respect and understanding.<sup>92</sup> In one part of his “Love and Tolerance”, Gulen called Islam – a Religion of Tolerance. Gulen states:

If one were to seek the true face of Islam in its own sources, history, and true representatives, then one would discover that it contains no harshness, cruelty, or fanaticism. It is a religion of forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance, as such saints and princes of love and tolerance...<sup>93</sup>

Ihsan Yilmaz applies the term of “moderate Islam” to Gulen’s type of Islam mentioned above: “His discourse represents a kind of “moderate Islam”, even though he strongly rejects such a definition because in his view Islam is already moderate”<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, “Ijtihad and Tajdid by Conduct”, *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. Syracuse university Press, 2003. p.223

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p.229

<sup>93</sup> Fethullah Gulen. “Love and Tolerance”. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/gulens-works/love-and-tolerance.html>

| <sup>94</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz. *op.cit.*, p.223

In this sense, H. Yavuz mentions that for Gulen the essence of tolerance is the behavior that is stressed within community and dialogue is the key for the improvement of international relations.<sup>95</sup>

Along with Said Nursi's thinking Gulen thinks that there is nothing negative in maintaining relations with the West as well as adopting and benefiting from its values as long as they are necessary and do not bring any danger<sup>96</sup>.

In terms of tolerance and dialogue, Gulen promotes not the clash of but cooperation of civilizations through mutual understanding and gathering around common values<sup>97</sup>.

Hence, according to some scholars, tolerance and interfaith dialogue is one of the main tenets of Gulen community's agenda. For instance, Salih Yücel affirms that while speaking about Turkey, Gulen adheres to the creation and maintaining of positive relations between Muslims and all non-Muslims representatives such as Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities. Salih Yücel argues that outside Turkey, his ideas inspired his followers to establish organizations that engage in creating intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Such inspirations were realized through the meetings with the late Pope John Paul II and an invitation from the chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, as well as meetings with the

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<sup>95</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz. "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p.30

<sup>96</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz. *op.cit.*, p.237

<sup>97</sup> Introducing Fethullah Gülen. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/about-fethullah-gulen/introducing-fethullah-gulen.html>



leaders of various Christian denominations<sup>98</sup>. Ihsan Yilmaz states that Turkish businessmen working in Korea brought the Buddhist priest to Turkey in order to show various historical places and to demonstrate how people of various cultures live together peacefully. The administrators of Fatih College in Thailand visit Buddhist authorities to report the progress of the pupils of Gulen schools in their country<sup>99</sup>. Another striking example that Gulen is an adherent of a dialogue between various confessions is offered by Paul Weller:

Fethullah Gulen-inspired popular magazine called The Fountain has opened its pages to Christian authors too, among other things, provide an exposition of key texts in the Christian scriptures.<sup>100</sup>

### **2.3 The Nur community and Fethullah Gulen**

Owing to the fact that Fethullah Gulen was inspired by Said Nursi's ideas, his community is frequently thought to be an independent part of the larger Nur community. However, sometimes scholars tend to separate Fethullah Gulen community from the Nur community on the basis of their difference in ideology and goals.

In this part I aim to examine the relations between Fethullah Gulen and his community within Nur community; and to analyze if Gulen community can be considered as a part of the Nurculuk or not.

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<sup>98</sup> Salih Yücel, "Fethullah Gulen: Spiritual Leader in a Global Islamic Context". Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/review/3586-fethullah-gulen-spiritual-leader-in-a-global-islamic-context.html>

| <sup>99</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, *op.cit.*, p.236

<sup>100</sup> Paul Weller, "An Islamic sign of hope for an inclusive Europe". Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/columns/3676-paul-weller-todays-zaman-fethullah-gulen-an-islamic-sign-of-hope-for-an-inclusive-europe.pdf>

As H. Yavuz states that after the death of Said Nursi in 1960 Nur community divided on several groups<sup>101</sup>. However, some of them continued to work together due to their commitment to the Nursi's writings and moral orientation. They cooperate with each other and at the same time compete over the ways of presenting the community's message to the society<sup>102</sup>.

The first group is known as *Yazicilar* (Clerk), because of their activity in spreading the Risale-i Nur in handwritten form. Later they start to be called *Yeni Asya* (New Asia). The second one was a group with certain political orientation. They nationalized the community and made "Turkish Islam" its core. This group, of which Fethullah Gulen used to be a member, was called as *Yeni Nesil* (New Generation). It became very influential in Turkey. The third group is divided on the basis of ethnic difference. Med-Zehra is the group of Kurdish Nurcus that support Kurdish political rights and oppose the Turkish state. Totally eight major groups which consolidated over the conservative and modernist lines emerged in Turkey. The community of Gulen was among the latest one.<sup>103</sup>

H. Yavuz in his article "The Gulen Community. Turkish Puritans" calls Gulen community as a neo-Nur community and stresses the idea of its prominent difference from the classical Nur community. He explains the difference in the following lines:

Gulen's faith-inspired education community is different from Nursi's exclusively faith community. Gulen is an inspirational leader of a

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<sup>101</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz., "Islam in the Public Sphere. The Case of the Nur Community", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito.p.15

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p.16

transitional education community, whereas Nursi was the formative giant of an intellectual discourse.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the above statement Yavuz also calls Fethullah Gulen as a prominent Nurcu leader<sup>105</sup>. According to Yavuz the different focus of Gulen's ideology is obvious, however he and his community is regarded as a group within the larger Nur community. Like every such community after its fragmentation the Nurcu community was divided over various lines. Fethullahci have their own orientation but still are related to the Nur community.

While there are many articles devoted to the Nur community, in most of them Fethullah Gulen is described as their leader and activity of his community is being attributed to the whole Nur community, especially his international activity. Undoubtedly, it may not be correct to relate the activity of Gulen-inspired community to the various other groups within the Nur community, yet such confusion is a result of what Yavuz states. Gulen is the prominent leader of the Nur community and, perhaps, can be described as the most prominent figure of community. His community is the most active in public and international scheme, and hence more flaring. Thereby while reading articles about activity of the Nur community there is a need to remember that these articles can be mostly related to the Gulen community.

Passing to the conclusion, there is a need to mention some significant moments related to the thoughts of Fethullah Gulen that later become an ideological background of his community. Gulen was inspired by Said Nursi and his *Risale-i*

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<sup>104</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p.19

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p.20

Nur. In this sense some of Gulen's ideas borrowed from the Nursi. Among them the most prominent is the belief in the coexistence of religion and science. Gulen, like Nursi, believed that religion and science are not necessarily in conflict, they can coexist and cooperate each other. Science without religion can lead to the atheism which is according to both scholars a powerful tool that destroys the morality of the people. At the same time religion cannot be separated from science since science should be in the service of religion as a tool proving the main tenets of it. Therefore, Gulen, like Said Nursi believes in the significance and necessity of education for Turkey, for Muslim societies and perhaps for the whole world. Only an educated person can understand God and what He demands from him and only an educated person can decipher His messages in the right way. Thereby Gulen puts education at the center of his community and aims to realize his goals through creating a golden generation – an educated generation whose aim will be to enlighten the next generations.

Gulen's attitude towards Islam was again very similar to that of the Nursi's. Gulen like Nursi regard Islam as a religion of tolerance and dialogue, thus he is a supporter of the interfaith dialogue. But in Gulen's mind relations between Islam and politics is different from the Nursi's. Nursi believed that Islam goes separately from politics and politics should not interfere in Islam. Gulen thinks like Nursi in that Islam is over the politics but state is also important for Islam especially as in the case of Turkey. Nursi supported the Islam of the Ottoman era since during the Ottoman era people of various national minorities and religious groups lived in peace. In this sense Nursi's attitude to nationalism was quiet negative, because he thought that it does not matter what your nationality is and it is more important if firstly you are a

Muslim. Gulen like Nursi believes that Islam does not demand people to live as if they were in the times of the Muhammad. Indeed Muslim communities can adopt some values and accomplishments of the West if it does not bring damage to the community. Gulen also refers to the Ottoman type of Islam. However, Gulen believes that since Turkey is the only secular Muslim country in the world, Turkish Islam due to its flexibility can absorb democratic and other values of the West better than other Muslim countries. Since Islam practiced by Arabic countries, Central Asian countries is different from the Islam of Turkish people, some scholars apply the term Turkishness towards the Gulen's model of Islam which is also the main difference between Gulen's and Nursi's approaches to nationalism. While Nursi said that in Muslim societies there is no place for nationalism because they share a more important common identity – being a Muslim, Gulen promotes an educational Islam based on the Turkish Islam.

This understanding of nationalism and applying it to the community's ideology is very important considering the geographical spread of the community. Nowadays Gulen-inspired community can be found in every continent, they are very widespread in Europe, America and Africa but most of all their presence can be observed in the Central Asian region. The reason for such a large presence in the region could be explained with the role of nationalism in Gulen's ideology and with the perceiving of Central Asia as the motherland of the Turks.

## CHAPTER 3

### GULEN COMMUNITY AND ITS EDUCATIONAL NETWORK

In order to examine the penetration of Gulen community into the Central Asian region it is necessary to understand the nature of the community itself including its history, ideology, aims, intensions and framework. Because without understanding in detail the inner workings of the community, it is not possible to make an analysis of its activities in general and particularly in Central Asia

This chapter provides Gulen community's brief history of development, its organization activities and geographical dissemination as well as other characteristics of the community that are very important for understanding the goals of the community and its agenda. These will be helpful in the further analysis of the community's activity in Central Asia.

#### 3.1 Gulen community's background

Gulen community originated in 1970s<sup>106</sup> when its leader Fethullah Gulen Hocaefendi put his thoughts into practice. He started to attract people by public readings of his sermons that were later recorded and spread all through Turkey.<sup>107</sup>

H.Yavuz defines three main periods of community's development. The first period that Yavuz calls "embryonic" was from 1970s till 1983<sup>108</sup>. In this period

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<sup>106</sup> İřtar Gözaydın, "The Fethullah Gülen community and politics in Turkey: a chance for democratization or a Trojan Horse?", *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 6, December 2009

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Gulen aimed to create an exclusive religious community by teaching in Kestanepazari Quran schools of Izmir to spiritually oriented and intellectually motivated students. In the summer camps both secular and religious education were provided. Yavuz describes the formation of the ideological and political vector of the community during this period as:

Owing to the ideological polarization of Turkey, especially the rise of radical leftist communitys, the Gulen community eventually embraced an anticommunist rhetoric and adopted a conservative nationalist position<sup>109</sup>.

In this period Gulen began to create the network of his community the parts of which were the so called *ışık evler* or lighthouses. These lighthouses were the places where members of the community or the guests had the opportunity to share their ideas, discuss social or political issues and pray together. Besides, lighthouses were used to help the members to find educational opportunities, jobs, and housing. In this sense lighthouses played a significant role in recruiting new members for the community.<sup>110</sup> Gulen describes lighthouses himself as:

Places where the people's deficiencies that may have been caused by their human deficiencies are healed. They are sacred places where plans and projects are produced, the continuation of the metaphysical tension is provided, and courageous and faithful persons are being raised.<sup>111</sup>

The defining feature of the lighthouses as Fethullah Gulen stresses is their military-type discipline. Also Gulen believes that students live with the other

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<sup>108</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p.31

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p.31

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>111</sup> Ian G. Williams, "An Absent Influence? The Gülen Community in Turkish-Islam and Its Influence". Online available at <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/the-fethullah-gulen-community-i/2199-an-absent-influence-the-gulen-community-in-turkish-islam-and-its-influence-on-global-education-and-inter-religious-dialogue.pdf>

members of the community, thereby the presence of the private domain of lighthouses lead to the cultivation of faith-based morality and identity.<sup>112</sup> Lighthouses became a main tool for the community's network, a space where Gulen's ideas are presented and adopted among youth.

The second period of the community's development process which Yavuz calls "The Education Community" is the period of from 1983 – 1997.<sup>113</sup> Yavuz explains the name given by him to this period by the transition from religious community to a "friendly religioeducation community"<sup>114</sup>. In this period community witnessed the decentralization of its structure and spreading of the community to different regions of Turkey. It established ties with state institutions, became involved in economic and cultural spheres of the country. The community's understanding of the significance of the media played a special role in the penetration of the community into the social life of the country. Hence in 1986 community bought out the daily newspaper Zaman<sup>115</sup>. After that Gulen community purchased other influential media sources that bring community's ideas into the public sphere such as Samanyolu TV and Burç FM. At the same time besides media outlets, community had the ownership of a financial institution Asya Finans which have half a billion dollars in capital<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p.32

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p.35

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p.35

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p.36

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p.36



In 1980 when military government was in office an arrest warrant was issued against Gulen<sup>117</sup>. In 1986 Turgut Ozal government withdrew this arrest warrant and favored the ban for Gulen's public preaching to be lifted in order to use his model of Islam against more extremist Islamist groups<sup>118</sup>.

In this period the community established roughly three hundred schools and universities in Turkey:

Initially benefitting from some protective cover from Prime Minister Turgut Ozal... the community has since gone on to open around 200 schools in Turkey since its first was established in 1982, universities such as Fatih in Istanbul, hospitals, charities.<sup>119</sup>

Gulen's interview in dailies such as Sabah and Hürriyet made him gain many sympathizers not only in Turkey but beyond its boundaries. In his speeches on meetings he opposed to the "clash of civilizations" and promoted "the dialogue of civilizations" instead.<sup>120</sup>

In this period the Soviet Union collapsed and the community spread its influence beyond the Turkish borders– to the Central Asia and Balkans.

The third period of the community's development which was named by Yavuz as "Persecution and Forced Liberalization" began in 28 February 1997, after

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>119</sup> Bill Park, "The Fethullah Gulen Community", *Global Politician*. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/columns/3156-the-fethullah-gulen-community.pdf>

<sup>120</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p.42

the post-modern coup as this process was widely called as the then government assaulted Muslim people according to İhsan Yılmaz.<sup>121</sup> İhsan Yılmaz mentions:

Peer rivalries among civil servants who did not have anything to do with practicing Islam, let alone being Gülen followers, led these civil servants to backstab each other by claiming that such and such a person is a Gülen follower and should be fired. Upon closer inspection, the accused were sometimes discovered to be alcoholics or even staunch Islamophobes<sup>122</sup>.

Yavuz explains the behavior of the representatives of the then government through the intention of military generals to seek out all Islamic cultural and social groups in order to prevent fundamentalist Islamic tendency.<sup>123</sup>

In this period Gülen and his community tried to present themselves as a soft and moderate group in comparison with other Islamic groups. But Yavuz suggests that on 21 June 1999<sup>124</sup> the media prompted by the Kemalist government initiated an organized campaign against Fethullah Gülen and his community by releasing his voice recordings that as Today's Zaman Newspaper argues "were later understood to be fabricated by third parties in well-equipped studios"<sup>125</sup>. Liberal form of Islam that community promoted was regarded as tactic tool of the community that has nothing to do with its real goals. Gülen was tried in the Ankara 11st High Criminal Court and

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<sup>121</sup> İhsan Yılmaz, "Jane's Gülen Community Analysis: An Orientalist Misreading (2)", *Today's Zaman*. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/columns/3206-janes-guelen-community-analysis-an-orientalist-misreading-2.pdf>

<sup>122</sup> İhsan Yılmaz, *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/columns/3206-janes-guelen-community-analysis-an-orientalist-misreading-2.pdf>

<sup>123</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen Community. The Turkish Puritans", *Turkish Islam and the Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito., p.43

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> "Gülen: Plot Targets No One but the Nation" by *Today's Zaman*. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/press-room/news/3359-gulen-plot-targets-no-one-but-the-nation.pdf>

was acquitted of all charges that was confirmed in the Supreme Court of Appeals in March 2008.<sup>126</sup>

### **Gulen community's educational network**

Currently Gulen community is very large and has very diverse membership.

As Bayram Balci states:

No one knows exactly the size of Gulen enormous community of followers and sympathizers, but most agree on an average estimate of 3 million members. The community obtains much of its support from young urban men, especially doctors, academics and other professionals.<sup>127</sup>

Broad education of high quality is one of the central elements of the Gulen's ideas and community's activity. It is necessary to mention that the Gulen community, its activities and its leadership are popular themes among the Turkish intellectual elite, where very controversial references can be found. For example, Yavuz argues that their aim is to educate people who will be well-educated, open-minded and will be "sympathizers for Gulen, sympathizers for Islam and sympathizers for Turkey".<sup>128</sup> However, based on the sources in Turkey one can observe that there is a tendency to negatively perceive the community and its leader. As some scholars state, the community's aim is not supposed to be so altruistic when its members act only in order to enlighten gifted pupils and students. Moreover, sometimes the direct association with the name of Fethullah Gulen is Islamization. For example, Nurretin Veren, his former right hand, asserts:

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Bayram Balci, "Central Asia: Fethullah Gulen's Missionary Schools", *Religoscope*. Online available at: [http://www.religioscope.com/info/articles/007\\_fetullahci.htm](http://www.religioscope.com/info/articles/007_fetullahci.htm)

<sup>128</sup> The Gülen community: a modern expression of modern İslam -Interview with Hakan Yavuz. *Religoscope*, 2004. Online available at: [http://www.religion.info/english/interviews/article\\_74.shtml](http://www.religion.info/english/interviews/article_74.shtml)

These schools are like shop windows. Recruitment and Islamization activities are carried out through night classes ... Children whom we educated in Turkey are now in the highest positions. There are governors, judges, military officers. There are ministers in the government. They consult Gülen before doing anything.<sup>129</sup>

Elisabeth Özdalga states that students in the schools have to study the philosophy of Gulen:

In the schools, dormitories and home-like student houses (ışık evleri) set up in the name of Gülen, students are pressured to accept his teachings (brainwashed).<sup>130</sup>

According to Sabah newspaper columnist Emre Aköz's description one can label this as "the educational jihad".<sup>131</sup> It is clear that Islam takes a special place in the educational activity of the community, but controversial data is found on the role of religion in general in different scholars' researches, especially outside the Turkish academic elite. Thus A. Solberg in her paper "Gülen schools: A perfect compromise or compromising perfectly" underlines that Gulen schools do not emphasize Islam as the main subject of studying. It is presented not as a lesson but taught as a main value through the whole process of education. Moreover Solberg argues that owing the fact that Fethullah Gulen is an adherent of interreligious dialogue, a particular importance is given to all religions in these schools not only Islam, but other religions are respected as well:

"When religious education is opted for, it is taught following a confessional multid denominational model of religious education. Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox children are taught separately about their respective religions... we may look at how religious ethos is incorporated

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<sup>129</sup> Rachel Sharon –Krespin, *op.cit.*, p.62

<sup>130</sup> Elisabeth Özdalga, "Redeemer or Outsider?", *Muslim World*, Jul2005, Vol. 95 Issue 3, p.419

<sup>131</sup> Rachel Sharon –Krespin, *op.cit.* p. 62

into the education in other ways... The schools' ethos protects all religions, without discriminating against any of them."<sup>132</sup>

In this sense, one can argue that promoting Islam is only one part of community's agenda while identifying the community's activities within the same category with radical Islam aiming to establish rule of sharia may be a mistake. For example, an article published on March 2008 in the Economist magazine argued that Gulen-inspired community's activity does not content any hint of Islamic extremism.<sup>133</sup>

The Gulen schools are considered to be elite private charged schools where students are selected on the basis of an examination results. Schools' curriculum is generally based on the curriculum of the host country but includes some elements from the Turkish curriculum. The language of instruction usually is English but some lessons are given in Turkish.<sup>134</sup>

Religious education in the Gulen schools takes a special place in the educational process. Anne Solberg singles out four model of religious education in Gulen schools: multi-denominationalist, non-denominationalist models, single-denominationalist, and inter-denominationalist models. The model to be applied is defined by the curriculum of the host country. Thus for example schools in Bosnia religion is taught within the multi-denominationalist model, in Albania in the non-denominationalist model, where religion is not taught as a separate subject, whereas

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<sup>132</sup> Anne Solberg, "The Gulen schools: A perfect compromise or compromising perfectly?". Online available at: <http://kotor-network.info/papers/2005/Gulen.Solberg.pdf>

<sup>133</sup> "Global Muslim Networks. How far they have travelled", *The Economist*. 6 Mart, 2008. Online available at: [http://www.economist.com/node/10808408?story\\_id=10808408](http://www.economist.com/node/10808408?story_id=10808408)

<sup>134</sup> Anne Solberg, *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://kotor-network.info/papers/2005/Gulen.Solberg.pdf>

in Turkey the single-denominationalist model is adapted just like in the state schools. She affirms that schools do not stress the values of any particular religion but aspire to emphasize the common values of different religions and to cultivate the value of the faith in general: “Rather than advocating one religion in particular, the schools place value on faith in itself”<sup>135</sup>.

Christian van Gorder argues that teaching programs of the community schools in Central Asia does not include any religious element at all despite the Islamic orientation of the community. Van Gorder also states that teachers are not allowed to make propaganda of the Nurcu literature, at least openly.<sup>136</sup>

Thomas Michel makes similar arguments with Solberg’s about the educational standards and place of religion in the community’s schools after visiting one of the Turkish school in Zamboanga, a city on the southern Philippine island Midanao. As Michel states, the population of the city in 1995 was composed of Muslims and Christians equally. It was a region where separatist communities struggled against military forces of the Philippine government. Kidnapping, killings, summary raids and arrests were the usual occurrence in the region. Gulen school in the region was giving children “an excellent education and a more positive way of living and relating to each other” according to Michel.<sup>137</sup> Michel found surprisingly the absence of “more explicitly Islamic content” in the school curriculum, but he was explained that due to the “pluralist nature” of the students who were composed of

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<sup>135</sup> Anne Solberg, *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://kotor-network.info/papers/2005/Gulen.Solberg.pdf>

<sup>136</sup> Christian van Gorder, “Muslim-Christian Relations in Central Asia”, *Routledge*, 2008, p. 87

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Michel, “Fethullah Gulen as Educator *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. Syracuse university Press, 2003. p.70

both Muslims and Christians, the universal Islamic values such as honesty, tolerance, harmony, hard work are taught rather than confessional instruction.<sup>138</sup>

Margaret A. Johnson made an analysis of the Gulen schools' educational activities in Indonesia. The first school was opened in 1995, now Gulen schools offer 7 campuses in five cities of Indonesia.<sup>139</sup> Her research is based primarily on the interviews with the representatives of the schools. On the basis of these interviews she argues that universal human values such as love-affection, mutual respect are being taught along with a scientific knowledge. According to the Gulen's followers it is not possible to teach science without religion and religion without faith: "If you just do religion without science, you get ignorance. If you do science with no religion, you get atheism. The combination of both is what we need."<sup>140</sup> The students are taught to live in harmony with other nations and religions and to make this a goal for their life and to continue promoting tolerance and peace. Speaking about a particular religion, according to Johnson, Gulen schools provide educational activity concerning the religion of the country, thus in some schools of Indonesia which is known to have mainly a Muslim population, special attention is being paid in teaching Islam:

Aceh is a province where we can see the effects of Shari'a (Islamic Rule) in all the institutions as well as our school, too. The Acehnese people are very religious in a way that makes you think they're conservative in many aspects of daily life...So a speech on religion is given by a student after lunch every day, and the students

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p.71

<sup>139</sup> Margaret A. Johnson, "Glocalization of the Gülen Education Model: An Analysis of the Gülen-Inspired". Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/323-gulen-conference-in-indonesia/3711-glocalization-of-the-gulen-education-model-an-analysis-of-the-gulen-inspired-schools-in-indonesia.pdf>

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

spare 10 minutes before starting the class in the morning to read Qur'an or say prayers together.<sup>141</sup>

According to Margaret A. Johnson's interview with teachers of Gulen school in Indonesia along with human and spiritual values students of the Gulen schools gain, after graduation they can have more ease in entering into universities and choose the profession they want because the quality of education in these schools conforms to the international standards: "The students we educate here at the school can study at any schools or universities in the world because their education level matches international education standards"<sup>142</sup>.

### 3.3 Global localization of the Gulen schools

Since community's ideology has formed, its goals and boundaries got defined its members managed to establish hundreds of educational organizations following on this ideology and goals. It is hard to find out the definite number of schools in every country but according to the data given by the members of the community the approximate number of schools are as follows:

**Table 1.** Countries and Gulen's educational organizations in these countries

Source: 100 soruda Fethullah Gülen ve Hareketi by Kürşad Oğuz. Habertürk. Online available at: <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/515415-100-soruda-fethullah-gulen-ve-hareketi>

North America	
Canada	Language schools
US	5 schools, about 50 cultural centers
Mexico	1 school and 1 cultural center
South America	
Columbia	1 cultural center
Chili	1 cultural center
Argentina	1 cultural center

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



**Table 1.** continued

Brazil	1 cultural center
Africa	
Morocco	4 schools
Algeria	1 language school
Egypt	1 Language school and dormitories
Mauritania	1 school
Mali	1 school
Niger	1 school
Chad	1 school
Sudan	2 schools
Ethiopia	1 school
Senegal	1 school
Gambia	1 school
Guinea-Bissau	1 school
Guinea	1 school
Burkina Faso	1 school
Ghana	1 school
Togo	1 school
Nigeria	4 schools and 1 cultural center
Cameroon	1 school
CAR	1 school
Congo	1 school
Uganda	1 school
Kenya	4 schools
Tanzania	Educational complex: Primary school and lyceum, medical center
Malawi	1 school
Mozambique	1 school
Madagascar	1 school and 1 cultural center
South Africa	4 schools
Australia and Oceania	
Australia	7 schools
Indonesia	4 schools
Philippines	4 schools
Asia	
Kazakhstan	29 schools and
Tajikistan	13 schools
Kyrgyzstan	12 schools and

**Table 1.** continued

Turkmenistan	20 schools
Uzbekistan	1 school
Afghanistan	4 schools
Pakistan	6schools and 1 cultural center
India	3 schools and 1 language school
Nepal	1 school
Bangladesh	4 schools
Mongolia	4 schools
Japan	1 school, 5 language schools, language
South Korea	1 cultural center
Malaysia	1 school
Vietnam	1 school
Cambodia	2 schools
Myanmar	2 schools
Thailand	3schools
Iraq	4 colleges
Israel	1 cultural center
Yemen	1 school
Europe	
Russian	6 schools
Azerbaijan	12 schools
Georgia	3 schools
Ukraine	2schools
Moldova	2schools
Lithuania	1 cultural center
Latvia	1 cultural center
Estonia	1 cultural center
Romania	4 schools
Bulgaria	3 schools
Macedonia	4 schools
Albania	4 schools
Bosnia and	2 schools
Hungary	1 language school and 1 cultural center
Slovakia	1 cultural center
Czech Republic	1 cultural center
Poland	1 cultural center
Germany	3 schools, language schools and cultural centers

Austria	1 language center
Italia	1 cultural center
Switzerland	1 dormitory and cultural center
Holland	1 dormitory and cultural center
Belgium	1 school, dormitory, language school, cultural
France	Cultural center and language courses
Norway	1 language school and 1 cultural center
Denmark	1 language school and 1 cultural center
Sweden	1 language school and 1 cultural center
Finland	1 college, 1 language school and 1 cultural
Great Britain	1 dormitory, 1 language school and 1
Portugal	1 cultural center
Spain	1 cultural center

Besides these educational organizations, community also established several universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan<sup>143</sup>.

It is clear that Gulen community has spread its presence and educational activity all over the world. Community's educational organizations like schools, language schools, cultural centers and dormitories for students can be found in every continent, almost in every country.

If we take into account that all these institutions were established within 40 years since the community's emergence as of 1970s, it can be said that community is very successful in realizing its goals and accomplished serious achievements for not so long period.

Passing to the conclusion I would emphasize that the activities of the community in educational realm are very controversial and differently regarded by the various sources. On the one hand in one group of articles for the community's

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<sup>143</sup> "100 soruda Fethullah Gülen ve Hareketi by Kürşad Oğuz", *Habertürk*. Online available at: <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/515415-100-soruda-fethullah-gulen-ve-hareketi>

activity the term “education jihad” is applied and Islamization is regarded as its main aim. Articles of this group mostly argue that establishment of the Islamic rule or at least promoting Islam is the main goal of the community, and education is a tool that the community uses in order to reach this goal. The views presented in such sources underlines Gulen’s philosophy that is promoted through the “brainwashing”, during the educational process.

On the other hand, “pro-Gulen” sources state that the schools follow the curriculum of the host country and religion is being taught in the way that the host country does. Islam taught in the schools of community only if it is a state religion. A clear example to this is the case of Indonesia. Students are taught Islam and gathered to pray and read Quran together. But in non-Muslim countries students are not taught Islam, they were taught in their religion if the host country requires or they were not taught in any religion in particular rather being taught the value of faith in general. Students were taught certain values that are emphasized in all religions like humanity, mutual respect, mutual understanding, tolerance and dialogue. Children are taught to love people who surround them in spite of their religion, nationality, and ethnicity and to make such views as life style while trying to convince other people behave in a similar way.

Pro-Gulen sources promote the idea that the values that are taught in Gulen schools are especially important in the countries where people have different ethnic, national and religious background, and have conflicts (even serious civil wars) because of such fractions. In the hostile regions of the world these schools give two things that the region really need – a peaceful atmosphere, establishing good relations between fighting sides and the education.

Pro-Gulen sources also argue that while the education given in these schools follows the education given by the country's other schools, due to the additional elements of education in the community' schools, these schools provide a higher quality education. In order to support this view, pro-Gulen sources states that students after graduation can easily continue their education in the universities of these countries. Since English is the language of instruction in these schools (along with Turkish), according to pro-Gulen sources students are also able to get in universities abroad and become more competitive in the job market.

Gulen community offers not only such schools, but also language schools and cultural centers that also give students opportunities to get a quality education in their countries.

The establishment of these educational institutions and education that they offer is an important tool in the way of accomplishing the ideas of Fethullah Gulen.

In the first chapter I discussed these ideas and intentions. Gulen emphasizes the crucial importance of the education, the need to enlighten people, but at the same time not to forget about improving the integral part of the soul of the person. According to Gulen the absence of faith destroys human spirituality, thus religion and education are the "two wings of one bird"<sup>144</sup>. Fethullah Gulen stresses the dialogue between religion and tolerance in behaving vis-à-vis the people of other confessions. Some scholars argue that the aim of community is to realize the things that are significant in the Gulen scheme and schools act in order to educate and implement these values in the student's minds. However, there is no common view

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<sup>144</sup> Margaret A. Johnson , *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/323-gulen-conference-in-indonesia/3711-glocalization-of-the-gulen-education-model-an-analysis-of-the-gulen-inspired-schools-in-indonesia.pdf>

on Gulen's ideas and the real intensions of his community are still subject to controversies among various scholars. Therefore it is beyond the scope of this study to find out whether the community aims only to educate students in order to enlighten them as one group of sources argue or educational activities is only a tool in order to achieve other goals and the community indeed has a hidden agenda as another group of sources suggests.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE GULEN SCHOOLS IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

In this chapter my aim is to explore the Gulen-inspired schools in each of the Central Asian republics and analyze the education they offer to students. Owing the fact that education is a key element of community's activity; its analysis will help me to understand the very much debated elements of education these schools promote as Turkishness and Islam.

In order to analyze the nature of the education that is offered in these schools I will explore the following:

1. Number of schools in the country, number of teachers and pupils as well as the level of education they offer.
2. How the schools are evaluated by the population of the country in general and by the parents of children who attend these schools.
3. Since in each country the educational centers are coordinated and guided by a certain company, there is a need to analyze the activity of these companies including the available data on the structure, branches and aims the company follows. This will help us to understand the interior motives and implicit purposes of these companies if there is any.
4. It is not possible to evaluate the educational activity of the Gulen community in Central Asian republics without considering the attitude of the

authorities towards these schools, because further activity of the community depends on the government's position.

#### **4.1 The activity of the Fethullah Gulen community in the Central Asian countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union**

There is a tendency to believe that Fethullah Gulen community's representatives came to the Central Asian republics after the break of the Soviet Union, however this is not correct. Before the collapse of the USSR, Gulen community had already ten-years of experience in its activities in the former Soviet territory<sup>145</sup>. Some Turkish businessmen were to play a significant role in the community's plans for the future. Many people were getting ready in Turkey to be sent to the region to help with the community taking root in Central Asia. This is well reflected by Balci through the following quote:

“Before the collapse of the Soviet Union many Nurcu in various cities in Turkey had been preparing themselves to ‘conquer’ Central Asia. They included businessmen, students, teachers and journalists.”<sup>146</sup>

But if one is talking about the large-scale influx of missionaries to the region, it can be argued that this only started after the independence of the Central Asian countries. This was also the time when there was a rise of pan-Turkic ideas to unite all Turks and Turkey's increasing aspirations to play role of the new “Big brother” in the region<sup>147</sup>. As Balci argues at this period -Turgut Özal played a very significant role:

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<sup>145</sup> “100 soruda Fethullah Gülen ve Hareketi by Kürşad Oğuz”, *Habertürk*. Online available at: <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/515415-100-soruda-fethullah-gulen-ve-hareketi>

<sup>146</sup> Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p. 155

<sup>147</sup> Vladimir Avatkov, “Perekrestok geopoliticheskikh interesov Rossii i Turcii - Kavkaz i Central'naja Azija”. Online available at: <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1240908360>



“Turgut Özal, Turkey’s leader at that time, helped the initial mission activity on the part of Gülen’s schools. Each school displays a big picture of Turgut Özal.”<sup>148</sup>

Such an atmosphere served as a sociopolitical precondition for the opening of the first schools of the community in 1992-1993. In this period significant number of schools was opened and the Gulen-inspired newspaper *Zaman* started to be published in the region. In the period of 1998–99 there were about 75 Gulen’s educational establishments in Central Asia:

**Table 2.** Worldwide distribution of schools of Fethullah Gülen’s community, 1997

Source: Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p.156

Country	Number of schools	Number of pupils	Number of
Kazakhstan	29	5684	580
Uzbekistan	18	3334	210
Turkmenistan	13	3294	353
Kyrgyzstan	12	3100	323
Tadzhikistan	5	694	107
Tatarstan	6	1802	217
Russia	5	323	63
Chuvashia	2	311	79
Crimea	2	218	47
Siberia	4	438	101
Dagestan	5	938	123
Georgia	3	244	48
Bulgaria	4	523	123
Moldavia	2	225	40
Romania	4	415	78
Albania	2	966	74
Bosnia	2	109	22
Macedonia	1	102	16
Iraq	4	184	26
Australia	5	718	37
Indonesia	1	41	18

<sup>148</sup>Bayram Balci, *op.cit.*, p.155

It is very important to mention that the above table not only underlines the fact that the number of schools, students and teachers was high in Central Asia but it was definitely the highest compared to the other parts of the world. It should be taken into account that only in seven years these schools appeared and became numerous in the region, while in other parts of the world the activity of the educational institutions had already started before 1991. Thus, it is obvious that Central Asia, owing to its particular importance, was and still is attractive to the community and its activity became relatively successful in the initial years of independence.

## 4.2 Community's activity in Kazakhstan

### 4.2.1 Schools of the community

The Gulen community initiated its activities in Kazakhstan in the first years of the independence of the country. The schools did not gain popularity quickly. People were suspicious about the schools and about the subjects being taught there. At the time they supposed the real aim of the community is to influence ethnic Kazakhs through these schools. But later schools were accepted as legitimate among Kazakhs and gained trust and good appreciation from the government.<sup>149</sup>

**Table 3.** Community's schools in Kazakhstan

Source: Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, p. 175

List of Gulen community's schools in Kazakhstan (1996-1997)					
Locality	Gender	Main Subjects	Opened in	Numbers	Number
Almaty-Tolgar	Male	General	1993/94	157	18
Almaty	Female	General	1993/94	246	25
Aksai	Male	General	1994/95	290	30

<sup>149</sup> Berna Turam, "National Loyalties and International Undertakings", *Turkish Islam and The Secular State.*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, p. 198

**Table 3. continued**

Almaty	Male	Oriental	1994/95	230	26
Jambul	Female	General	1994/95	100	11
Turkestan-	Male	General	1992/93	194	15
Almaty	Male	Physics	1992-93	120	13
Kzyl-Orda	Male	Physics	1993/94	256	24
Kzyl-Orda	Female	General	1994/95	143	16
Akmola(Astana)	Male	Physics	1994/95	134	15
Aktobe	Male	General	1993/94	263	26
Arkalyk	Male	Physics	1993/94	166	15
Atyrau	Male	General	1993/94	206	22
Chimkent	Male	General	1993/94	333	29
Chimkent	Male	Oriental	1993/94	122	13
Chimkent	Female	General	1993/94	150	16
Kokchetav	Male	General	1992/93	235	26
Jambul	Male	General	1993/94	263	28
Jezkazgan	Male	General	1993/94	230	22
Karaganda	Male	General	1993/94	250	24
Kustanai	Male	General	1994/95	133	15
Ust-	Male	General	1993/94	189	21
Pavlodar	Male	General	1994/95	169	19

The table above contains the statistics of 1997 and according to this data, there were 28 Gulen schools in Kazakhstan. In 2001 the number of schools reached to 31 with 5,664 students and 580 teachers from Turkey.<sup>150</sup> Currently in Kazakhstan there is one university, 27 lyceums, one primary school and one language school.<sup>151</sup>

The schools are thought to be high-prestige schools. In order to enter the schools, students must take a nationwide exam.<sup>152</sup> But according to Kevin Miller the schools are high-prestige ones not because of the educational element and gifted students but because of their origin:

<sup>150</sup> Bayram Balci, "Central Asia: Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools" Online available at: [http://www.religioscope.com/info/articles/007\\_fetullahci.htm](http://www.religioscope.com/info/articles/007_fetullahci.htm)

<sup>151</sup> Nedim Şener, "Ergenekon Belgelerinde Fethullah Gülen Ve Cemaat". *Güncel Yayınları*, 2009, p.188

<sup>152</sup> Berma Turam. *op.cit.*, p.197

Many of the students accepted to the schools were either children of government officials and/or children from well to do families. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Muslims, were not being accepted into their schools...<sup>153</sup>

Undoubtedly, this is a good method to prepare the people who will be influential in the future. But it should be mentioned that community aiming to promote Turkey, its history, culture and language; and promote the adoption of these values by Kazakhstan's society and by people all around Central Asia, needed a wider audience than only people from the country's elite. Thereby, most probably the students of the schools can be children from the well-off and powerful families of Kazakhstan but only those who deserved it by passing an exam. This fact is proved by official information about admission requirements in one of the schools of the community Nurorda International School (NIS). Children who have an intension to enter the school must:

- Be at least (by the 1st of September) 72 months old for the 1st grade after passing a logic exam.
- Pass an English Proficiency Exam after the logic exam if he or she is going to study in the upper grades.<sup>154</sup>

Also, there are some privileges for NIS entrance for students such as :

- The students from other schools of the KATEV (Kazakh Turkish Education Foundation),
- The students who are current students in NIS schools,

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<sup>153</sup>Kevin Miller, "Islam in Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan: the Nurcu community and the Hizb ut Tahrir". Online available at: [http://www.amerAsianworld.com/islam\\_in\\_kazakhstan.php#top](http://www.amerAsianworld.com/islam_in_kazakhstan.php#top)

<sup>154</sup> Nurorda International School. Admission. Online available at: [http://nurorda.kz/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=5&lang=english](http://nurorda.kz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=5&lang=english)

- The children's parents who are the staff of NIS.<sup>155</sup>

Admission requirements into the Suleyman Demirel University (SDU), the only university of the Gulen community in Central Asia, for undergraduate problems is the certificate of the "English Proficiency Test", or passing a test in English language proficiency followed by an interview in English<sup>156</sup>, for the graduate programs there is a need for specialty examination, certificate of higher professional education and foreign language examination<sup>157</sup>. If speaking about the national composition of the students, schools are mostly attended by Kazakhs, but there are Russian and Turkish students as well.<sup>158</sup>

The educational curriculum of the community schools does not include religious content with the exception of a history of religions course, the content of which is generally secular. Studying of Turkish has a special role in the educational activities. In spite of the fact that in NIS, Turkish language officially is not compulsory and there are optional languages like Chinese, it is the language of instruction of some of the courses.<sup>159</sup> However the fact that Turkish language is not the official language of the schools does not prove that the schools are not following the goal of spreading the ideas of Turkish Islam. According to Berna Turan, the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. Nurorda International School. Admission.  
[http://nurorda.kz/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=5&lang=english](http://nurorda.kz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5&Itemid=5&lang=english)

<sup>156</sup> Suleyman Demirel University. Undergraduate admission. Online available at:  
<http://www.sdu.edu.kz/undergraduate>

<sup>157</sup> Suleyman Demirel University. Graduate admission Online available:  
<http://www.sdu.edu.kz/undergraduate/graduate>

<sup>158</sup> Berna. Turam. *op.cit.*, p.195

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. Nurorda International School. Clubs.  
[http://nurorda.kz/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=7&Itemid=7](http://nurorda.kz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7&Itemid=7)

education in these schools includes extracurricular activities that play a significant role in forming of minds of students:

After school, the students are taught “practical” manners such as hygiene, bathing, clothing and so on. Some of these lessons may even interfere with the students’ private and personal habits. The students become familiar with Turkish customs, traditional values, cultural codes and sanctions, and the meaning and importance of the national days of Turkey, which they are invited and encouraged to celebrate.<sup>160</sup>

Students of the schools by the time of graduation are fluent not only in English but in Turkish and develop a certain attachment and affiliation with the Turkish culture. It is necessary to mention not only the quality of the education in these schools but also the presence of all the conditions provided for the education at such level. Repaired buildings and classrooms are equipped with modern equipment. The level of facilities of the community schools is far from that is available in most other schools of Kazakhstan, especially in the early independence era.

#### **4.2.2 Kazakh-Turk Education Foundation (KATEV)**

Kazakhstan is a country where Gülen-inspired schools are the most numerous in Central Asian region; in addition there are not only lyceums but also a university. There is a need to coordinate all these schools. Hence, it is not possible study the activity of cemaat (community) in Kazakhstan without mentioning the Kazak-Türk Eğitim Vakfı (Kazak-Turk Education Foundation) – KATEV. All community’s schools of Kazakhstan is under the guidance of this organization. KATEV was founded in 1997 on the basis of an agreement between Kazakhstan and Turkey in 1992 in order to coordinate the educational institutions of Turkish side.<sup>161</sup> It is

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<sup>160</sup> Berna Turan, *op.cit.*, p.196

<sup>161</sup> KATEV: Information about KATEV foundation. Online available: <http://www.katev.kz/en/46.html>

sponsored by Turkish businesses, charitable groups and by the community itself.<sup>162</sup> KATEV's primary functions are the coordination and supervision of the schools. Its educational branch includes two elements eğitim (education) and öğrenim (teaching). Teaching department provides schools with curriculum, courses etc., while the aim of the educational department is the implementation of these. KATEV also plays the role of a "Turkish center", its duties are to host new guests from Turkey, helping them with their accommodation and adaptation in the city etc. All Turkish Holidays are celebrated in KATEV; it is a place of meeting of Turkish people of Almaty and other people of community.

In the official website of KATEV it defines itself as "the golden bridge between related peoples of Kazakhstan and Turkey in the field of culture and education development" and underlines its aim as educating competitive specialists that will be able to compete with developed countries on the international level; demonstrate their skills in the field of education, technology, art and culture; preserve and develop national values of their people".<sup>163</sup> In other words it is a Turkish center engaging in social, cultural, educational, sometimes commercial activity in Kazakhstan.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Bill Park, "The Fethullah Gülen community as a transitional phenomenon". Online available at: <http://en.fgulen.com/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2443-the-fethullah-gulen-community-as-a-transnational-phenomenon.html>

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> KATEV. <http://www.katev.kz/en/46.html>

### 4.2.3 Position of the government on the community's schools

KATEV was founded on an intergovernmental basis as it was mentioned above and it is an evidence of the fact that during the initial years of independence, the government of Kazakhstan encouraged the developing of the community's activity in the country and spreading its schools.

The reason for such an appreciation of Gulen-inspired schools was probably the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union: poor socio-economic situation and unstable political situation. The Kazakh government must have to remove the Soviet ethnicity that was created by the Soviet government during the Soviet era and replace it with a new ethnic and national self-consciousness that was Kazakh.

The schools were an excellent tool in the way of reducing Russian influence and Kazakhification for the Kazakh leadership<sup>165</sup>. This became clear when in 1991 and 1992 the representatives of Gülen community signed agreements with the regional governors<sup>166</sup> and in 1992-1993, 4 Turkish lyceums were opened with the support of both countries' leaders Nursultan Nazarbaev and Turgut Ozal.<sup>167</sup>

However, as Educational Portal of Kazakhstan reported, a big scandal related to the one to the lyceum of community took place in 2008. In Kazakh-Turkish lyceum of Chimkent parents of the pupils declared that in spite the lyceum was a state school, a fee for the education was asked:

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<sup>165</sup> Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003.p.157

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> KATEV. Kazakh-Turkish High Schools. Online available at: <http://www.katev.kz/en/aa1.html>



Education for the students of the seventh grade was determined in the amount of 113 Tenge per year, parents of the students of the senior classes of high school pay between 45 and 100tenge per year<sup>168</sup>.

The salaries of the Kazakh teachers and part of the expenses were met by the regional budget while the rest of the expenses and salaries of Turkish staff were supposed to be covered by KATEV. Yet in reality the expenses of KATEV were covered by the pupil's parent's payments. Also many bureaucratic breaches were discovered. One of the significant charges was the propaganda of the Gulen organization among the pupils, though the lyceum was secular.<sup>169</sup>

After the prohibition of the Gulen community in Russia in 2008, officials of Kazakhstan's attitude changed for the worse and the organization included in the list of the organizations that are recognized as terroristic in Kazakhstan<sup>170</sup>, yet neither KATEV nor schools of the community were closed. B. Balci explains this fact by the non-centralized character of the administrative machine: "In Kazakhstan the administrator of a region (oblast') has the prerogative of reaching educational agreements with foreign companies"<sup>171</sup>.

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<sup>168</sup> "V gosinternate goroda Shymkenta s roditelej brali den'gi za obuchenie i propagandirovali religioznye vzgljady sredi detej", Informacionnyj portal "Zakon". Online available at: <http://www.zakon.kz/107970-v-gosinternate-goroda-shymkenta-s.html>

<sup>169</sup> "V gosinternate goroda Shymkenta propagandirovali religioznye vzgljady sredi detej" by *Obrazovatel'nyj portal Kazahstana*. Online available at: <http://www.kazeducation.net/content/view/34/12/>

<sup>170</sup> Yelena Ryabina "PRINUDITEL'NAJa RADIKALIZACIJa (o repressijah protiv nezavisimyh musul'man v Rossii)" Online available at: <http://www.hrights.ru/text/ProgrREFUGEE/MONITORING/REPORTSmonitoring/report1.pdf>

<sup>171</sup> Bayram Balci, , *op.cit.*, p. 158

### 4.3 Community's activity in Turkmenistan

#### 4.3.1 Schools of the community

The first step towards opening the community's schools in Turkmenistan was made in 1990 during the Perestroika era when Turkmenistan's government started formal negotiations with Turkey's *Başkent* Educational Firm over the possibilities of cooperation in the field of education. As a result both sides agreed to develop a network of Turkmen-Turkish schools in Central Asia.<sup>172</sup> After the independence Turkish schools began to appear in Turkmenistan:

**Table 4.** Community's schools in Turkmenistan.1996-97

Source: Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, p.176

Locality	Gender	Main subjects	Opened in	Number	Number
Ashgabat	Mixed	University, General	1994/95	419	43
Ashgabat	Male	General	1992/93	378	40
Tashauz	Male	General	1993/94	192	21
Kerki	Male	General	1994/95	147	17
Charjou	Male	General	1994/95	226	27
Buzmein	Male	General	1993/94	138	19
Tejen	Male	General	1993/94	149	18
Mary	Male	General	1993/94	248	28
Bairam-Ali	Male	General	1993/94	231	23
Kunya-Urgench	Male	General	1993/94	187	20
Nebit-Dag	Male	General	1993/94	181	26
Turkmenbashi	Male	General	1993/94	134	20
Ashgabat	Female	General	1994/95	187	19
Ashgabat	Male	Technology	1994/95	150	25
Ashgabat	Mixed	Foreign Languages and computing	1994/95	327	7
Total				3294	353

<sup>172</sup> Victoria Clement, "Turkmenistan's New Challenges: Can Stability coexist with reforms? A study of Gulen schools in Central Asia" Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2523-turkmenistans-new-challenges-can-stability-co-exist-with-reform-a-study-of-gulen-schools-in-central-asia-19972007.pdf>

In comparison with Kazakhstan, schools of the community in Turkmenistan are not as numerous as in Kazakhstan. Schools in Turkmenistan are mainly general schools without specialization. Among 15 schools only one school and the only university are mixed in terms of gender composition, the rest are male schools.

After the independence, the government of Turkmenistan decided to change the system of education and create a new educational system in order to remove the Russian influence and vestiges of the Soviet past. Government replaced Soviet educational system with a lower quality one. This is well reflected in that the president of Turkmenistan S. Niyazov replaced some basic classes in the schools with spiritual treatise “Rukhnama” in 2001. Also in 2002 as a result of educational reform, primary, secondary and high school education all together became 9 years (previously was 10 years in total) while higher education became only 2 years with another 2 years of practice in enterprise (it was 5 years during the Soviet era).<sup>173</sup> All of these are indicators that the quality of education worsened after the independence. In this sense Gulen-inspired schools filled a vacuum in the field of education in Turkmenistan.

Gulen-inspired schools offer education with a quality higher than in the other schools of the country with a secular curriculum that emphasize natural sciences and

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<sup>173</sup> Alexey Vinogradov, “O sostojanii russkojazychnogo obrazovaniya vTurkmenistane. Pervye Ermakovskie chtenija «Sibir': vchera, segodnja, zavtra»: *Materialy regional'noj nauchnoj konferencii*, Novosibirsk, 2009. Online available at: <http://www.prometeus.nsc.ru/contents/books00/vinograd.ssi>

mathematics.<sup>174</sup> One of the Turkmen students of Gulen-schools states that it is not possible to get such a quality education in Turkmen public schools.<sup>175</sup>

However, curriculums of the Gulen schools were changed since the opening of the first schools. In 2005 schools had to remove all religion-related subjects from the curriculum<sup>176</sup> as Bill Park affirms: “It seems that Turkmen regime was becoming unhappy about both the pan-Turkic and Islamic ideology of the Gulen network in the country”<sup>177</sup>. In 2003 the schools excluded Russian language from the curriculum<sup>178</sup> due to the state-controlled anti-Russian cultural programs.

The admission to the schools is made through the exams. In order to enter the schools, children need to pass an entrance exam:

- Exam for enrollment in primary school consists of 100 questions
- Exam for enrollment in high school includes 75 questions on mathematics, Turkmen and Russian languages, intellectual capability, history, Rukhnama and other.<sup>179</sup>

According to V. Clement, salaries of the teachers in the Turkish schools of Turkmenistan are much higher than that of the teachers of public schools:

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<sup>174</sup> Victoria Clement, *op.cit.*, p.575

<sup>175</sup> “S mechtaj o velikom Turane”, Avangard krasnoy molodezhi. Online available at: <http://www.akm1917.org/vzgl/vz10-22.htm>

<sup>176</sup> Farangis Najibullah. Online available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp042609.shtml>

<sup>177</sup> Bill Park, “The Fethullah Gülen Community”. Online available at: <http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2008/12/park.asp>

<sup>178</sup> Alexey Vinogradov, *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://www.prometeus.nsc.ru/contents/books00/vinograd.ssi>

<sup>179</sup> Bashkent Educational Center.Examinations. Online available at: <http://www.bashkenteducation.com/bashkent/en/index3.php?q=sinavlar&&dili=en>

Local teachers, conducting courses in such subjects as Turkmen language, Russian language, and the history of Turkmenistan, sought out work in the Turkish schools for the high-level of pay as well as better conditions. These instructors received salaries at least three times that of teachers in Turkmenistan's public education system...<sup>180</sup>

The attitudes among the parents of the students towards the Turkish schools are very controversial. Despite the fact, that the curriculum is secular, -the attitude of some teachers and extra-curricular activities lead some families decide not to send their children to the schools. As V. Clement states: "Some parents have complained that their children suddenly developed an interest in visiting the mosque or "developed a more religious attitude"... Despite this minority attitude, a far greater number of families wish to enroll their children in the Turkish schools, even families who are not Muslim"<sup>181</sup>.

It is important to mention here that the education of Gulen-inspired schools has provided many students in Turkmenistan after their graduation to easily enter both private and public universities of Turkmenistan while some of them pass the exam of Freedom Support Act program (FSA) funded by the State Department of USA and then study in American universities.<sup>182</sup>

#### **4.3.2. *Baskent* Educational Firm (Başkent Eğitim Şirketi)**

*Baskent* Educational Firm (Başkent Eğitim Şirketi) is a financial and administrative organization, sponsored by Turkey and Turkish businessmen in

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<sup>180</sup> Victoria Clement. *op.cit.*, p.576

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p.578

<sup>182</sup> Evgenij Menc, "Neobhodimye shagi dlja postroenija jeffektivnogo partnerstva v sfere obrazovaniya" Online available at: <http://www.gundogar.org/?0110492560000000000013000000>

Turkmenistan that coordinates community's activity in Turkmenistan.<sup>183</sup> Baskent Educational Center (Baskent Bilim Merkezi) is the pedagogical center within the Baskent Educational Firm. Its goal is mainly "to train young generation with knowledge, high morals, tolerance, ability to transfer knowledge into life, loyalty to the nation, love of the motherland as well as the ability to communicate with world, productivity, and modernity"<sup>184</sup>.

The Baskent (Baskent Bilim Merkezi) helped with the establishment of all the schools mentioned above and offered English language classes for a nominal fee.<sup>185</sup> Baskent (Baskent Bilim Merkezi) gives children the opportunity to spend their free time by playing table tennis, using computer and internet. Also, the Center organizes various competitions among schools like painting, signing in four different languages (Turkmen, English, Turkish and Russian) or computer project competitions, exhibitions; picnics and tours to Turkey<sup>186</sup>.

#### **4.2.3 Position of the government on the community's schools**

One of the community's features of activity in Turkmenistan is its interaction with the Turkmenistan's government. As V. Clement states:

"Until recently, it was understood that Turkish businessmen often contributed to the financing of these schools in Turkmenistan as a necessary step in the bidding process for contracts with that Niyazows government"<sup>187</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> Victoria Clement, *op.cit.*, p.576

<sup>184</sup> Baskent Educational Center. Goals. Online available at:  
<http://www.Baskenteducation.com/Baskent/en/index3.php?q=misyon&&dili=en&akt=5>

<sup>185</sup> Victoria Clement, *op.cit.*, p.577

<sup>186</sup> Baskent Educational Center. Activities. Online available at:  
<http://www.Baskenteducation.com/Baskent/en/index3.php?q=aktiviti&&dili=en&akt=7>

<sup>187</sup> Victoria Clement, *op.cit.*, p.582

Hence, the Turkish businessmen have a privileged position in Turkmenistan that was established during the presidency of Niyazov and continued under the Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov rule. In Turkmenistan Turkish members of the community was placed to the the high-level governmental positions:

Muammer Turkeyilmaz, Turkmenistan's Deputy Education Minister, and Seyit Embel, Head of the Educational Center, have been critical to Baskent's success and demonstrate the community's adaptability. Baskent is another follower of community.<sup>188</sup>

Besides in the initial years after the collapse of the Soviet Union many administrative posts in these schools were taken by Turkish nationals, but in 2004 Niyazov within *Milli Galkynyş Hereketi* (National Revival Community) declared that only ethnic Turkmens could be the head of schools. After that Turkish nationals held only secondary administrative positions, however the Muammer Turkeyilmaz and Seyit Embel continued to hold their positions.<sup>189</sup>

There is no source mentioning the ban of the Gülen community or recognizing it as extremist or terrorist organization in Turkmenistan.

#### **4.4. Community's activity in Uzbekistan**

##### **4.4.1. Schools of the community**

Uzbekistan was not an exception in terms of the increasing number and activities of the community's schools in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Uzbekistan, according to the Table 5, 1997 their number reached to 18:

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

**Table 5.** Community's schools in Uzbekistan 1996-1997

Source: Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p. 177

Locality	Gender	Main subjects	Opened in	Number of pupils	Number of teachers
Tashkent	Male	General	1992/93	243	15
Kibraï-Tashkent	Male	General	1993/94	185	11
Tashkent	Female	General	1993/94	148	9
Tashkent	Male	Economics	1993/94	214	14
Tashkent	Male	Computing	1993/94	154	14
Nukus	Male	General	1992/93	180	12
Fergana	Male	General	1992/93	203	12
Andjian	Male	General	1993/94	166	11
Angren	Male	General	1993/94	155	11
Samarkand	Male	General	1992/93	198	12
Namangan	Male	General	1992/93	232	14
Bukhara	Male	General	1992/93	225	12
Urgench	Male	General	1992/93	205	12
Kokand	Male	General	1993/94	215	16
Jizak	Male	General	1993/94	187	11
Termez	Male	General	1993/94	144	10
Tashkent Ulugbeg Interanional School	Male	Business and management	1995/96	120	12
Tashkent	Mixed	Languages	1993/94	160	2
Total				3334	210

As we can see, for a relatively not a large territory as of Uzbekistan, community schools were sufficiently numerous in spite of the fact of absence of the university of the community. From eighteen schools three of them had a specialization like computing, economics business and management.

Schools were free of charge except the Ulugbek International schools where one year of education cost 5000 USD. The financing of the schools were provided by the Association of Uzbek and Turkish Businessmen.<sup>190</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Bayram Balci, *op.cit.*, p. 160



Schools were prestigious among people on the basis of the high quality of education given there. Graduates became fluent in several languages<sup>191</sup>.

Russian scholar L. Iljuhin states that among 300 Turkish teachers in Uzbekistan, more than 120 people had neither pedagogical training nor any experience in education. More than half of the staff of the Turkish high schools belonged to various politicized and religious organizations. As L. Il'uhin states:

All of them engaged in religious propaganda of pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism among students and their parents inviting to visit Turkish schools with religious bias. People graduated from the high schools of organized religious cell "Nurcular" recruited their friends and acquaintances and got appropriate salary<sup>192</sup>.

However, it is hard to believe that while the schools of community in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan provide high-level of education and good conditions for the well educated teaching staff, teacher in the schools of community in Uzbekistan are not qualified. But it is not possible to know whether the standards of education was low since the organization and its schools was already banned in Uzbekistan.

#### **4.4.2. Position of the government on community's activity**

During the 1990s Uzbek President Islam Karimov was trying to reduce the presence of the community in Uzbekistan including a ban on the distribution of

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<sup>191</sup> "People, accused for the affiliation to the "Nur" religious community, are convicted in Uzbekistan" *Fergana News*, 2009. Online available at: <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2506>

<sup>192</sup> Leonid Iljuhin, "Turetskiy gambit. Vozmojno li segodnya reanimatsiya idei obyedineniya turkskih narodov Centralnoy Asii". Online available : <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1197303780>

Zaman<sup>193</sup> leading to the prohibition of the organization's activities totally in 2000 including the closing off of its schools.

There are some possible reasons for such a reaction by the Uzbek government towards the community's activity in Uzbekistan. B. Balci mentions that the crisis between Ankara and Tashkent has a constant character. Turkey refused to expel Uzbek oppositionists who found shelter as refugees in Turkey. Other reason, according to B. Balci was the strong policies of Ankara towards Uzbekistan: "Karimov is also hostile to a strong Turkish foreign policy in Uzbekistan (and indeed in Central Asia as a whole). His aim is to deal not exclusively with Turkey but also with other countries, including Russia."<sup>194</sup> Also Balci mentions that such a reaction of Uzbek government on *cemaat*'s activity in Uzbekistan was provoked by the declaration in 1990s of the Turkish Embassy in Uzbekistan about the fundamentalist and Islamist nature of the community, that rooted in the conflict between Turkish Embassy and *cemaat* itself. However, it was the only time, when Turkish government expressed negative attitude to the community:

It is true that in the early 1990s a conflictual relationship developed between the Turkish embassy in Tashkent and the Directorate of the *cemaat* schools there. The crisis between the *cemaat* and the Uzbek government was provoked by a report produced by the Turkish embassy about the nature of the Nurcu community. The report warned the Uzbek government about the danger of this community, which according to the embassy's research had proved to be fundamentalist and Islamist. This instance was an exception in Turkey's attitude to *cemaat* activities in Central Asia, however.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Bill Park, "The Fethullah Gülen community". Online available at: <http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2008/12/park.asp>

<sup>194</sup> Bayram Balci, *op.cit.*, p. 156

<sup>195</sup> Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p.168

On February 16th the First channel of the Uzbek television broadcasted a documentary, named “The Beam Leading into Darkness”. The film was prepared by the National Security Service (NSS) of Uzbekistan and declares the community of Said Nursi as an “extremist sect”. The film states that the community aims to establish a grand Turkic state occupying the territory from Siberia to Balkans.<sup>196</sup>

Concerning this problem it can be supposed that such a reaction of Uzbekistan authorities were caused by a variety factors: Uzbekistan got its independence 20 years ago, which maybe a long time for a man’s life, but not for the history of a state. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union all former Soviet countries found themselves in a systematic crisis: poor economic situation, poverty, and lack of a strong power in the state apparatus. Under such conditions some groups began to emerge with the goal of controlling the state system. These groups have an ideology that they consider to be the best for the state. If Karimov managed to be in power, essentially he had to fight against his enemies and in his case enemies were the adherents of radical Islam (Hizb ut-Tahrir mainly). He also saw Gulen community as a power interfering in the domestic politics of his country. Even if the Gulen community was not actually threatening; Karimov preferred taking measures in order to prevent the emerging of any political group that can threaten his power.

## **4.5. Community’s activity in Kyrgyzstan**

### **4.5.1 Schools of the community**

After independence Gülen-inspired schools appeared in Kyrgyzstan too. The number of schools in 1997 are as follows: 14 lyceums, an International University

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<sup>196</sup> “People, accused for the affiliation to the “Nur” religious community, are convicted in Uzbekistan” *Fergana News*, 2009. Online available at: <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2506>

“Ataturk-Ataloo”, International School “Silk Road”, language and computer centers.<sup>197</sup>

**Table 6.** Community’s schools in Kyrgyzstan (1996-1997)

Source: Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, p. 175

Locality	Gender	Main subjects	Opened in	Number of pupils	Number of teachers
Bishkek	Male	General	1992/93	249	35
Aichurok	Female	General	1993/94	168	26
Issyk-Kul	Male	General	1992/93	262	28
Naryn	Male	General	1993/94	181	24
Osh-Sema	Male	General	1992/93	302	32
Osh	Male	Technology	1993/94	174	27
Tokmak	Male	General	1993/94	130	22
Kademajai	Male	General	1993/94	187	25
Kizil-Kiya	Male	Business	1994/95	129	23
Jalal-Abad	Female	General	1995/96	78	18
Jalal-Abad	Male	General	1993/94	233	31
Bishkek	Mixed	General	1996/97	?	32
Total				2093	323

Students are admitted to the schools through entrance exams: “There are two-steps in this admission process. In the first step, students take a test to demonstrate their general educational knowledge. Approximately 50.000 students enroll annually in this first step. The successful candidates (approximately 10.000) take another test of logic and mathematics. This is the second step”.<sup>198</sup> Among the students there are orphans, fatherless and motherless people. The national composition of the schools is

<sup>197</sup>Sebat International Education Institute. Nashi uchrezhdenija Online available at: [http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=15](http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=15)

<sup>198</sup> Ibrahim Keles. “Contributions of the Gülen schools in Kyrgyzstan”, 2007. Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2467-contributions-of-the-gulen-schools-in-kyrgyzstan.html>

as follows 74 percent Kyrgyz, 13 percent Russian, 6 percent Uzbek and 7 percent others<sup>199</sup>.

Education in the lyceums begins from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade when mathematics, physics, biology lessons are taught in English. Along with the Russian and Kyrgyz languages, Turkish language is the part of the curriculum. All lyceums have the necessary facilities for a high-standard education.<sup>200</sup>

The quality of education demonstrates the success of Gulen schools students in the international competitions in 2008-2009, where a team of students studying in the Turkish lyceums in Kyrgyzstan got 3 gold, 5 silver and 7 bronze medals.<sup>201</sup> In other competitions such as World Physics Olympics, International Turkish language Olympics or International Computer Graphics Projects Competition, it was again Kyrgyz students from Gulen community's schools who gained a number of medals.

The community's university International Ataturk-Alatoo University is located in Bishkek and started its activity in 1997-1998. There are 3 faculty and 15 departments. Acceptance to the university is done according to the results of a special exam provided every year. Language of instruction is English. But students have opportunity to study other foreign languages:

Except English, students study Kyrgyz, Russian and Turkish languages. Students who have proficiency level of English language can take French and German languages as a compulsory subject. Besides,

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Sebat. Obrazovanie. Online available at:  
[http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=8&Itemid=17](http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=8&Itemid=17)

<sup>201</sup> Sebat. Dostizhenija. Online available at:  
[http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=10&Itemid=19](http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=10&Itemid=19)

successful students are sent abroad to such countries as Turkey and Germany for either internship or travel.<sup>202</sup>

The university has foreign partner universities as Kocaeli University ,Turkey, Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus, Zurich Technology University, Switzerland, Epoko University, Albania, Virginia International University, USA, Troy University, USA and others<sup>203</sup>. These contacts were established with the help of the coordinating firm SEBAT.

#### **4.5.2 Sebat International Education Institute (SEBAT)**

All Turkish lyceums and educational centers are under the guidance of Sebat International Education Institute. It is a non-governmental organization that was established on the basis of an agreement between the Ministry of Culture and Education of Kyrgyz Republic and Turkish Educational Association “Sebat” in 1991. SEBAT acts according to the agreement between the Ministry of education and culture of Kyrgyz Republic and Turkish educational association “SEBAT” signed on May 5th 1992<sup>204</sup>. There is lack of sources about SEBAT, but it is structured in a similar way like KATEV or The Baskent Educational Firm (Başkent Eğitim Şirketi) in that it is sponsored by Turkish businessmen and *cemaat* followers.

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<sup>202</sup> International Atatürk-Alatoo University. O nas. Online available at: Online available: [http://www.iaau.edu.kg/v1/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=56&lang=r](http://www.iaau.edu.kg/v1/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=56&lang=r)  
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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Sebat International Education Institute. O nas. [http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=4&Itemid=13](http://www.sebat.edu.kg/ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=4&Itemid=13)

#### **4.5.3 Position of the government on community's activity**

Despite the fact that the Gulen community recognized as an extremist organization in Kyrgyzstan -after such recognition by Russia in 2008<sup>205</sup> *Cemaat* lyceums and SEBAT are still functioning in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Moreover in spite of the fact that the official position of the government is not clear, in general government is not totally harsh on the educational activity of the Gülen organization in the borders of its state. For example, the then ministry of education of Kyrgyzstan Ishengul Bolcurova stated: "Kyrgyzstan opened to the world in the field of education with Sebat" (2002).<sup>206</sup>In 2004 the Foundation of Spirituality of Kyrgyzstan awarded Fethullah Gülen for his contribution to peace all over the world through educational activities<sup>207</sup>. It is highly likely that the high-quality education of the Gulen-inspired schools was the` main reason for the positive attitude of the government of Kyrgyzstan towards the community's schools.

#### **4.6 Community's activity in Tajikistan**

Tajikistan is the only country in Central Asia with a non-Turkic population but a Persian one. Probably, owing to this fact, the literature on the activity of the community in Tajikistan is not so numerous.

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<sup>205</sup> Yelena Ryabina, "PRINUDITEL'NAJA RADIKALIZACIJa (o repressijah protiv nezavisimyh musul'man v Rossii)". Online available at: <http://www.hrights.ru/text/ProgrREFUGEE/MONITORING/REPORTSmonitoring/report1.pdf>

<sup>206</sup> Ibrahim Keles. *op.cit.*

<sup>207</sup> Zeki Satitoprak, "OTNOSHENIE ISLAMA K MIRU I NENASILIJu: OPYT TURCII", 2006. Online available at: <http://ru.fgulen.com/content/view/2206/16/>

After Tajikistan gained its independence, Iran exerted a significant influence in the country which is also a Persian-speaking country<sup>208</sup>. Despite the strong Iranian influence, Gülen-inspired schools are also present in Tajikistan. In 1997 there were 5 schools in Tajikistan with 694 pupils and 107 teachers<sup>209</sup> while in 2010 the number of schools increased to 13<sup>210</sup>. The significant presence of the schools in Tajikistan in spite of the fact that it is not a Turkic country can be explained by Gülen's idea of nationalism that based purely not on ethnicity itself but includes a cultural element to its definition<sup>211</sup>

The education of *cemaat*'s schools in Tajikistan is a high-standard one as it is in the other Central Asian countries. Here the students are taught in English, Turkish, Russian and Tajik. Farangis Najibullah quotes one of the students of the Gülen schools as follows: "I've traveled to many countries to take part in the Educational Olympics, I went to Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and Vietnam. I mean we are given an opportunity to see the world, to broaden our knowledge, and to represent Tajikistan in the international arena."<sup>212</sup>

The authorities of Tajikistan are worried about the spreading of Turkish influence and pan-Turkism since such ideas are thought to be promoted through the

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<sup>208</sup>M. Hakan Yavuz, "The Gülen community", *Turkish Islam and The Secular State*, M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito. p. 39

<sup>209</sup> Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p. 175

<sup>210</sup> "100 soruda Fethullah Gülen ve Hareketi", *Habertürk*, Online available at: <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/515415-100-soruda-fethullah-gulen-ve-hareketi>

<sup>211</sup> Bayram Balci, . *op.cit.*, p. 175

<sup>212</sup> Farangis Najibullah. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp042609.shtml>



education in these schools<sup>213</sup>. Nevertheless the schools are still functioning in Tajikistan and supposed to be prestigious educational centers among the population.

Passing to the conclusion, it can be said that the activity of the Gülen-inspired schools in Central Asia raises different questions about the real content of such activities. One thing that is shared by many is that the high-standard of education offered by schools in each of the five republics. In each Central Asian republic, the community opened schools where the language of instruction is mainly English, in addition to which the students are taught in Turkish, Russian and the local language. The schools of the community provide all the facilities for a high-quality education. Especially in Turkmenistan schools played a significant role in the education of children during the initial years of the post-Soviet era where as the result of the Niyazov's educational reform the quality of the public education became very poor.

The schools are most numerous in Kazakhstan that can be explained by the relative political openness of the country. The sponsoring company called KATEV is known not only in Kazakhstan, but in all over Central Asia. Its functions are creating and correcting the curriculum of the schools, creating international contacts, developing relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey, promotion of Turkey by organizing celebrations of Turkish national holidays and days of Turkish culture. The position of the government is relatively positive towards the activities of the schools in the republic, since the schools are thought as an aid for the Kazakh government's policy of Kazakhification and as a tool for erasing the remnants of the Soviet ideology.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

The schools are also relatively numerous in Turkmenistan and they played an important role in the education of the children as of the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The schools are guided by The Baskent Educational Firm which not only coordinates the educational process of the schools but also provides them with facilities and also give English courses for a nominal fee. The government of Turkmenistan like in the case of Kazakhstan has a relatively positive attitude towards the community's activity in the country since the community was seen as complimentary to its national-building efforts and helping with the cultivation of the Niyazov's cult. It should be mentioned that Turkmenistan's political regime is strict and closed, therefore community was not as active as in Kazakhstan.

In the first years of independence schools of the *cemaat* were quite numerous in Uzbekistan, but then Uzbekistan banned the organization and its schools were closed. It was caused by the fragile position of the government, which fought for the power by such strict methods. Uzbekistan's authorities see the enemy in the community, the presence of the *cemaat* was evaluated by them as an increasing Turkish influence and as a threat for the spreading of Islamic fundamental and radical ideas in the country.

In Kyrgyzstan schools were not as numerous as in the countries mentioned above but relative to its population the number of community's schools can be thought to be high. They are thought to be prestigious schools in the country due to the education they provide. The schools are guided by SEBAT company. Government regards the activity of Sebat and its schools mostly positively because the students and graduates of the schools are successful later in life.

The situation in Tajikistan is not so clear, since the sources are not so numerous, but it can be undoubtedly said that the presence of *cemaat* in Tajikistan is evident. The schools are quite numerous. The government is suspicious about the spreading of pan-Turkist ideas through the schools, but they are still present in the country.

In most of the republics of Central Asia, Gülen community declared as an extremist organization and its activity is forbidden, however the schools of the community still function in the region and have support among the population. The popularity of the schools largely depends on the quality of education and the success rates of the schools' graduates particularly considering the poor educational infrastructures of these republics in the post-Soviet period.

## CHAPTER 5

### UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE GULEN COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

In this chapter I aim to focus on the orientation, intentions and goals of the community and reflect different approaches to community's activity as well as seeing how they are pertinent to the Central Asian case and finally to examine how the intentions of the community work in practice in the region.

#### **5.1 The goals and intentions of the Gulen community's educational activity in Central Asia**

In the previous chapter I discussed that Islam is a controversial topic in the agenda of the community in its activity abroad. In the analysis of the Gulen's community's activity in the Central Asian region another prominent element that what Bill Parks referred as "Turkishness" takes place.

Primarily, I consider it is very important to mention that Turkishness takes its roots from the foreign policy of Turkey. With the initial euphoria over the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian countries, in the Turkish foreign policy circles it was emphasized more often that Central Asia is the land of Turks' forefathers and there is a need to reconnect ties among Turkic peoples and establish cooperation among Turkic countries.

The feeling of the closeness of Turkish people with the people of Central Asia presented in the Turkish society and sometimes reflected in its social

communities like in the case of the Gulen community. For instance Bill Park in his article “The Fethullah Gulen Community” explains the reasons for the Central Asian countries’ attractiveness for Gulen community’s members as the similar Turkic ethnic and linguistic origin of the Central Asian population. Furthermore, the other similarity is a so called folk Islam in Central Asia and Turkey that absorbed many elements from pre-Islamic era. The author underlines the focus on Turkism as a major goal of the brotherhood in the region than that of Islam owing to Gulen’s Turko-Islamic world view.<sup>214</sup>

According to Gulen, Anatolia is indebted to Central Asia for its high degree of civilization achieved during the period of the Ottoman Empire. He states, that “in the distant past, Islam and Turkish culture arrived in Anatolia from Asia as a result of the missionary activities of dervishes and of mystics called “*alpheren*”. He often refers to the *alpheren* and compares his community and his followers to them. According to H. Yavuz, the community has an aim to help “sister republics of Turkey” by the creation of cultural bridges between Turkey and Central Asian countries which will help to revive Islam after 70 years of atheistic socialist regime.<sup>215</sup> Therefore by such promoting activities in Central Asia Fethullah Gulen, as he states, is repaying a moral debt. His followers, when asked about their motivation for being active in Central Asia repeat the same phrase that they came to pay their historical debt called “vefa borcu.”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Bill Park, “The Fethullah Gülen community”. Online available at: <http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2008/12/park.asp>

<sup>215</sup> Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam”

<sup>216</sup> Nuska Botoiarova, “Islamic Fundamentalism in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Kyrgyztan: real or imagined threat”, Middle East Technical University, 2005, p.113

It is very important to mention the rather different approach of Russian scholars to the community's activity in the region. Almost in every article in the Russian language, scholarly or not, the word pan-Turkism is used. In Russia, Nurcu community is understood to be the same with Gulen community and they are both thought to be pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic organizations. They are called "pan-Turkic strategists" whose intentions based not on religious ideas but on the creation of a Turkic state in Eurasia on the basis of "educated Islam"<sup>217</sup>. Another point of view about the actual motivation of the Gulen brotherhood in the region according to Russian sources is that Turkification is only a tool on the way to Islamization and further creation of the Great Turan. Students learn Turkish first after which the ideas of pan-Turkism, pan-Turanism and radical Islamic dogmas will be inoculated in their young minds.<sup>218</sup> For instance in the article of the *Izvesti'a* newspaper authored by Victor Bulavin the aim of the community by using the ideology of moderate Islam and pan-Turkism is to bring up the generation in the Central Asian and Turkic regions of Russia to be loyal to Turkey.<sup>219</sup> Russian political scientists and theologians directly argue that: "The main aim of Nurcular is the creation of Great Turan".<sup>220</sup>

Such a position is the reflection of the Russian official perspective of the community and its activity in Russia. In 2008 the organization was banned in Russia

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<sup>217</sup> Victor Hinov. "Agressivnye zamysly sektantov «Nurdzhular», Institute of Religion and Policy, 1 November 2006, <http://i-r-p.ru/page/stream-event/index-8831.html>

<sup>218</sup> "Novyj Turan v legendah i najavu: udastsja li Turcii obedinit' vseh tjurkov pod odnim polumesjacem". Online available at: <http://analitika.at.ua/news/2009-06-01-9029>

<sup>219</sup> Victor Bulavin, "Cektanty shpionili za Rossiej", *Izvesti'a*, Mart, 2011. Online available at: <http://www.izvestia.ru/world/article3153483/>

<sup>220</sup> Ivan Shukin, "Rasprostranenie jekstremistskih organizacij v Srednej Azii ugrozhaet stabil'nosti i bez togo problemnogo regiona", 2004. Online available at: <http://www.fergananews.com/article.php?id=2942>

and claimed to be extremist. As the secretary of the Federal Security Council Nikolay Patrushev argued:

In this way the information about the situation in the North Caucasia has being gathered, the manipulation of the Russian youth towards pan-Islamist and pan-Turkist ideas was being carried out, propaganda actions were held, candidates for recruitment for the creation of a pro-Turkish lobby in the local authorities were being explored, penetration to the law machinery and public organizations were made.<sup>221</sup>

In this case in order to recognize if there is a presence of pan-Turkic ideology and inspirations of creating a Turan state in the agenda of the community there is a need to examine what is the essence of the pan-Turkic ideology. According to I. Fadeeva, Russian scholar of Turkish nationalism, the origins of pan-Turkist ideology root in the emergence of nationalistic communities in the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the 19th century. Among the factors for the emergence of pan-Turkist ideas are the nationalist ideas that were spreading out of the nationalist tendency among Christian population of the Ottoman Empire; formation of independent or semi-independent states in the Balkans; separatist tendencies among the non-Turkish Muslims, cooperation of Turks with Europe and influence of the European policy on the Ottoman Empire.<sup>222</sup>

Jacob M. Landau states that the ideology of pan-Turkism was a response to pan-Slavist activities and its pressure such as Russification. In this sense the group who took the lead in initiating and propagating ideas of pan-Turkism was Tatars, who was for a long time under the Russian rule. The famous figure in this group was Ismail Gasprinsky, of Gaspıralı, as he is known in Turkey. His aim was to work for a

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<sup>221</sup> “Verhovnyj sud nalozhil zapret na dejatel'nost' tureckoj "Nurdzhular", *Izvesti'a*, April, 2008. Online available at: <http://www.izvestia.ru/news/news170203>

<sup>222</sup> Irina Fadeeva, “Ot imperii k nacional'nomu gosudarstvu”, M., 2001. p.20

union of all Turkic groups in Russia under the spiritual guidance of Turkey. His journal *Tercüman* (Interpreter) was successful and popular in Russia.<sup>223</sup>

Another significant ideologist of the Turkish nationalism and pan-Turkism was Ziya Gökalp. According to him, Turkic peoples are the people with a common rich history and their aim is to recreate this history, culture, which is common for all Turks as well as creating their common country – Turan, which is an ideal for the Turks, where all Turks live and speak a common Turkic language. For him state was almost a synonym for the nation, therefore he was against a multi-national state that is doomed to fall.<sup>224</sup>

In 1910s many organizations propagating pan-Turkism emerged in Turkey: Türk Derneği (Turkish association), Türk Yurdu (Turkish homeland), which later merged with Türk Ocağı (Turkish hearth) and Türk Bilgisi (Turkish knowledge) are among such. Türk Ocağı defined its main aim as the improvement of Turkic people and their language by increasing the level of national upbringing, as well as improving the national and economic systems of the Turkic people.<sup>225</sup> Thus, it can be said that the ideology of pan-Turkism became very popular on the eve of the World War I and thought to take the place of the a national ideology in the Ottoman Empire. When the Kemalist power came to power the national ideology became Turkism or Turkish nationalism which was supposed to spread only in the borders of the Turkish Republic, yet pan-Turkist aspirations remained alive and improved throughout the years.

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<sup>223</sup> Jacob. M. Landau. “Pan-Turkism.: from irredentism to cooperation”, Indiana university Press, 1995. p.8

<sup>224</sup> Rafajel’ Muhammetdinov “Zarozhdenie i jevoljucija tjurkizma”, 1996. p.135

| <sup>225</sup> Ibid. p. 157



Before the World War II and at the beginning of the events of 1939, when the Second World War began, as Landau states “pan-Turkism was still a small, elitist community in Turkey”. Turkish government was strictly neutral during the years of the war, but pan-Turkist followers such as Sançar, Türkkan and Atsız saw a great opportunity to realize pan-Turkist goals, therefore they aspired the government to join the war. Türkkan, the Publisher of the pan-Turkic journal “Bozkurt” (grey wolf) in his pamphlet “On the road of nationalism” defined Pan-Turkism as the “Turkish nationalism” and the basic principle of pan-Turkism, according to him, was a “national union” of the 65 million Turks inhabiting Bulgaria to Altai. Sançar was a supporter of the concept of “Turkish race” that evidently includes the Outside Turks, who live beyond the boundaries of Turkey and who are not supposed to be Turk or speak Turkish but feels Turk himself. Atsız also supported the idea of the union of all Turks the number of which he estimated was between eighty two and ninety nine millions.<sup>226</sup>

After the World War II, the main direction of pan-Turkism became fighting with Communism, because the large majority of Outside Turks was living in Soviet Union under the rule of Communism. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s they were active in anti-Communist groups. One of them was *Türkiye Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği* (Association for Fighting against Communism in Turkey). Among pan-Turkist organizations outside Turkey Western Cultural Association, National Centre for the Liberation of Eastern Turkestan etc. were such organizations.<sup>227</sup> One of the active followers of the pan-Turkist ideas of this period was Alparslan Türkeş. He was

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<sup>226</sup> Jacob. M. Landau, *op.cit.*, p.111

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* p. 149

transferred pan-Turkism to a political level. In 1965 he was chosen as the chairman of the Republican Peasant Nationalist Party and brought forward his conception of “Nine rays”. At the center of his concept was the idea of the consolidation of all Turkic people under the rule of a single state with its own flag. In order to reach this aim he offered the following measures:

1. Using mass media to protect the rights of colonized Turkic peoples
2. To help them through diplomatic mechanisms
3. To strengthen the unity of Turkic people through their culture<sup>228</sup>

In 1980s pan-Turkism began to penetrate into the academic circles of Turkey. In 1980 the professor of Istanbul University Turan Yazgan established *Türk Dünyası Araştırma Vakfı* (The Foundation of the Turkic World Studies). Its main goals are:

1. Cooperation with the public national organizations, academic and creative elite of the Turkic people in the field of science, culture; establishing contacts with the world Turkic community.
2. Organization of international meetings, conferences and forums.
3. Publishing of journals *Türk Dünyası Tarih Kültür Dergisi* (Journal of history and culture of Turkic world) and *Türk dünyası araştırmaları* (Turkic world studies).<sup>229</sup>

By the end of 1980s the political life of Turkey was liberalized when the 8<sup>th</sup> president Turgut Özal came to power. During this time pan-Turkist and pan-Islamist organizations again started emerging.

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<sup>228</sup> Dokuz Yshyk Doktrini. Uni bozkurt. Online available at: <http://unibozkurt.com/s102-bozkurt.html>

<sup>229</sup> Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfının web-sitesi. Online available at: <http://www.turan.org.tr>

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought the changes to the ideology of pan-Turkism. Turkic peoples who were living for a long time firstly under the rule of Tsarist Russia, later under the Soviet rule became independent. New countries of Central Asia emerged. In this sense Turkey started to realize its inspirations towards its Turkic brothers firstly on the political level as it was mentioned earlier. Meetings and summits started to be held. New economical and political ties was planned to be established.

In the political scene of Turkey some pan-Turkist parties emerged. In 1983 the Conservative Party of Turkey was renamed as National Labor Party with the emblem, where sickle and nine arrows (symbols of Türkes's doctrine) were presented. In 1993 the party was renamed to the Nationalist Community Party.<sup>230</sup>

Pan-Turkism is demonstrated on the political level through the organization of summits with the participation of Turkic states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The first one was held on 30-31th of October, 1992. Along with summits the national assembly of the Turkic peoples so called *kurultay* began to be held the first one being on March 21st, 1993. In the 10<sup>th</sup> national assembly held in 2006 in Kemer, the Prime Minister of the Turkish Republic Recep Tayip Erdogan claimed that the participant countries have common cultural and historical roots and urged them to make the cooperation between Turkic countries a significant element of their foreign policy.<sup>231</sup> *Kurultays* were actively supported by the Foundation of the Friendship, Brotherhood and Cooperation of the Turkic Peoples (TÜDEV) aiming to:

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<sup>230</sup> Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi. Tarihçe. Online available at: [http://www.mhp.org.tr/mhp\\_tarihce.php](http://www.mhp.org.tr/mhp_tarihce.php)

<sup>231</sup> Alexandr Gur'ev, "Tjurkskij faktor vo vneshnej politike Turcii", Institut of the Middle East, Moscow, 2006. Online available at: <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2006/28-09-06b.htm>

Create a bridge between Turkey and Turkic world in cultural and national sense in the field of culture and religion with the aim of creating an atmosphere of brotherhood, friendship and cooperation.<sup>232</sup>

In this sense it is clear that pan-Turkism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced a significant development and has nothing to do with the pan-Turkism of the beginning and the middle of the century. Moreover, pan-Turkism experienced a qualitative transition after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Due to the Soviet Union's collapse main "enemies" of the pan-Turkism disappeared as Tsarist Russia, later Soviet rule and communism became things of the past. Turkic states became independent and began take their political decisions by themselves. This way the establishment of the political ties, a common economic space, and a confidential atmosphere of friendship became possible. Pan-Turkist organizations changed the direction of their activity. Nowadays pan-Turkism's essence should not be confused with pan-Turkism ideas in the period of its origin. Today pan-Turkism organizations do not aim to unite all Turkic peoples under the rule of a single country as Turan, but it is to share and maintain their common history, culture, values and traditions and, naturally, their common ethnic background – Turkicness.

Turkish authorities and academical elite tend to believe that on the basis of the fact that Central Asian countries were living under the Russian rule then after Soviet rule for a long time it held back their political and economical development and destroyed some cultural values. In this sense, Turkey that was independent all this time and made its own domestic and foreign policy on its own is a superior state to the Central Asian republics in terms of political, social and cultural development. Fethullah Gulen argues that aiming to help to Turkey's "sister republics" carries out

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<sup>232</sup> Türk Devlet ve Toplulukları Dostluk, Kardeşlik ve İşbirliğini. Online available at: <http://www.tudev.org.tr/amacimiz>

his *vefa borcu*. In educational activity of his community in Central Asia Turkishness plays a significant role and the community emphasizes some elements and values that as the members of the community state are proper only to Turkey: like Turkish language, specific model of Islam. Thus it is possible to apply term “Turkishness” as a prominent characteristic of the community.

## 5.2 Turkishness in practice

In order to understand how the goals of the community are reflected in practice, particularly whether the element of `Turkishness` is emphasized it is necessary to analyze the curriculums of the Gulen schools in Central Asia. Generally schools' education emphasized natural sciences and mathematics. Also the study of languages is an important part of the curriculum. Students of these schools are taught in English, Turkish and language of the particular country (Turkmen, Tajik etc.) and Russian as a must course. Special attention was given to English for which preparatory classes were organized.<sup>233</sup>

Bill Park emphasizes the Turkishness, referring to the obligatory study of Turkish language in the education of the Gulen schools:

“The Turkishness of Gülen schools is certainly more evident than their Islamism. This emphasis on Turkish language and culture has even won over some of the usually suspicious representatives of Turkey’s secularist political class”<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup>Victoria Clement, *op.cit.*, Online available at: <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2523-turkmenistans-new-challenges-can-stability-co-exist-with-reform-a-study-of-gulen-schools-in-central-asia-19972007.pdf>

<sup>234</sup> Bill Park, “The Fethullah Gülen community as a transitional phenomenon”, Online available at: <http://en.fgulen.com/conference-papers/contributions-of-the-gulen-community/2443-the-fethullah-gulen-community-as-a-transnational-phenomenon.html>

However according to B. Balci there are no pan-Turkist or nationalist tendencies in the community's missionary activities:

“There is no nationalist or pan-turkist aspect to their veneration of their ancestors (and indeed, for example, there are many Kurds teaching in the schools in Central Asia and Kurds are important in the community in Turkey). In this respect they are completely different from the representatives of Türk Dünyası Aras, tirmaları Vakfi (The Foundation for Turkic World Research (TDAV)) who are also present in some schools in Central Asia teaching Turkish, economics and other subjects.”<sup>235</sup>

For instance if we take a look at the below table of language of instructions in the Gulen schools of Turkmenistan, we can find that subjects like Computer skills, General History, General geography, Morality, History of religions and philosophy are all being taught in Turkish:

**Table 7.** Subjects taught in the Turkish schools in Turkmenistan, 1997–98

Source: Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p162

Subject	Language
Turkmen language	Turkmen
Turkish language	Turkish
English	English
Russian	Russian
Mathematics	English
Physics	English
Chemistry	English
Biology	English
Science	English
Computer skills	Turkish
History of	Turkmen
General history	Turkish
General geography	Turkish

<sup>235</sup> Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam”, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003. p.161

**Table 7.** continued

Geography of Turkmenistan	Turkmen
The President's Policy	Turkmen
Morality ( <i>Edep</i> )	Turkish
History of religions	Turksih
Philosophy	Turkish
Sport	Turkmen
Music	Turkmen
Drawing	Turkmen

The fact that from 21 courses 7 are taught in Turkish, 6 in English and only 1 in Russian (and it is the Russian language course) while the rest are taught in Turkmen is worth of attention. Officially, English is a main language of instruction followed by Turkish, but indeed, as we can see in the table above, most of the lessons are taught in Turkish, not in English.

However, Oliver Ray does not see a prospect for Turkish to become a significant foreign language in the region, he states, that English will eject Russian as a foreign language from the region thanks to these schools:

In these schools, the second language is English, and they often serve as a launch-pad for education in western countries. Within ten or 20 years Russian will no longer be the preferred foreign language of the elites, it will give way to English.<sup>236</sup>

However one can see not English but Turkish as the most used foreign language in these schools. Also students after graduation, continue their education not only in western countries, but in Turkey thanks to the scholarships provided by the country on favorable terms.

One must not forget that the languages of Central Asia belong to the same Turkic language group yet they are very different from Turkish. Considering the fact

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<sup>236</sup> Oliver Roy, "The New Central Asia", I.B.Tauris, 2007. p.180

that this region has strong historical, political and economic ties with Russia due to their common past, Russian language is still widely used in many of these countries despite the nation building policies of independence period. The knowledge of Russian language still remains as an advantage to get a well-paid job, to get a better education and such. In this sense the lack of Russian and dominant position of Turkish language in the schools is another indicator of the Turkishness emphasized by the schools. In the long run this situation will most probably result in students speaking fluent English and Turkish which will open their doors to Turkey while closing another door to Russia, because of poor Russian language skills. But, however, if the real intension of the organization was to promote the popularity of Turkey as well as promoting loyalty to Turkey and thereby increasing its influence in the region, doing this through Turkish language is a good way to realize it.

Also one must pay attention to the type of the courses that are taught in Turkish. Among the non-humanities, only the course on computer skills is taught in Turkish even though computer language is generally English. However humanities such as courses like Philosophy, the History of Religions, Morality, General History, and General Geography are taught in Turkish. These fields of study form the soul and frame young people's mind, and leave significant trace in their mind therefore teaching of these courses in Turkish has important implications for the argued Turkishness of the education provided in these schools.

*Moskosky Komsomolec* newspaper argues that in the Gulen schools of Central Asia and Russia, students are being taught by Turkish teachers who do not speak fluent Russian or any other local language (Kazakh, Turkmen etc.). It is also argued in the same source that in the history lessons it is stated that historically Turks were



the most civilized people than the people of the region. Turks had come and helped them developing their culture. They would tell about reforms of Ataturk instead of teaching them about Great Peter's Era. Svetlana Meleyeva writes:

“Children are shown surprising “Map of Turkic World”. It includes Turkey, Northern Cyprus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. many regions of Russia, Iraq, China, Mongolia, Afghanistan are not forgotten here. This geopolitical nonsense is hardly drumming into the heads of teenagers in many schools, including high schools, for example, in the Turkish-Kazakh University named Ahmet Yesevi.”<sup>237</sup>

M.N Davydov states that Nurcular are very active in Central Asia and the Caucasus and argues that teachers make students read Quran in Turkish in order to spread Islamic and pan-Turkist ideas. According to M.N Davydov they also emphasize the importance of learning of Turkish and English while underlining learning Russian as an unnecessary attempt.<sup>238</sup>

Another Russian scholar affirms that teachers during the lessons praise the values and ideologies of pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism:

“Students 5 times in a week listen to lectures related on history and divine predestination of pan-Turkism and special role in daily life of Orthodox Islam. The most diligent “pupils” get direction to Turkey for more fundamental mastering of pan-Turkic theory and practice”.<sup>239</sup>

However there are contrasting views as well, for example Sanobar Sherbatova does not see anything threatening in the activities of the brotherhood. On the contrary

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<sup>237</sup> Svetlana Meleyeva, “Rassledovanie "MK": tureckaja islamskaja sekta uspeshno osvivaet Rossiju”. Online available at: <http://www.nomad.su/?a=8-200212070008>

<sup>238</sup> Mihail Davydov, “Deyatel'nost turetskoy religioznoy sekty “Nurzular”, Institution of Middle East, 2007. Online available at: <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/03-11-07b.htm>

<sup>239</sup> Victor Hinov. *op.cit.* Online available at: <http://i-r-p.ru/page/stream-event/index-8831.html>

she underlines the quality and relatively low-cost education where not only English but also Turkish language is used as the languages of instruction.

Owing to the difference of data provided above and their controversial character it is not possible to know definitely if there is such obvious pan-Turkic propaganda with elements of Islam in the Gulen schools of Central Asia. However, at the very beginning of 2000s governments of all countries banned the Gulen-inspired community<sup>240</sup>. Various reasons and arguments of this action were claimed in each of the republics on the basis of the schools' political and social character, however the main and basic reason was spreading of Islamic and pan-Turkic ideas among the students of the schools. Thus, the interior motive of the community to promote a certain model of "Turkish Islam", Turkish nationalism and the idea underling the kinship of all Turks in Central Asia led to the prohibition of the organization in the region. However, in spite of the prohibition of the community's activity, the schools of community and organizations they are coordinated by are still active in the region. This became possible since there is no official membership of the community. It is not possible to prove if the teachers or directors of the schools are the adherents of the community. Sometimes schools of Gulen enrolled as Turkish schools in the host country that are supported by the governmental structures of the Turkish Republic.

The number of Gulen schools in 2010, are as follows: Asia: Kazakhstan - 29 schools, Tadzhikistan – 13 schools, Kyrgyzstan – 12 schools, Turkmenistan – 20 schools, Uzbekistan – 1 school.<sup>241</sup> The continuing existence of community related

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<sup>240</sup> Mihail Davydov, *op.cit.*

<sup>241</sup>“100 soruda Fethullah Gülen ve Hareketi” , *Haberturk*. Online available at: <http://www.haberturk.com/polemik/haber/515415-100-soruda-fethullah-gulen-ve-hareketi>

schools indicate that the organization continues to be active in the region but does not make it openly. Park argues that current government of Turkey is in close relations with the community:

The community constitutes a major part of Turkey's current social and political evolution, signified by the electoral fortunes of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP), with which it overlaps.<sup>242</sup>

Taking into account the fact that the schools of the community are mostly known as s "Turkish lyceums" in the region, it is possible to assume that despite the ban of the organization schools are still active because they do not act as community's schools openly but as schools established by Turkish government intension.

Based on the diversity of ideas and arguments presented throughout this chapter about the Gulen community, it becomes clear that there are a variety of opinions about the community's activity in the region as well as its goals and intensions. For example Western scholars who have a more neutral tone mostly emphasize the high quality of education in the schools, the absence of extremism in the activities of the community, and ideology based on the Turkish version of Islam disposed to the tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and coexistence with democracy, modernity and science. On the other hand Turkish academic elite applies Islamization to the community's activity in the region due to the tendency to consider that in Turkey community's main aim is to undermine the secularity of the state . Russian government and academic elite which and still partially aspires to be the only power controlling region, consider Gulen community to be an organization

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<sup>242</sup> Bill Park, "The Fethullah Gülen community". Online available at: <http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2008/12/park.asp>

that carries pan-Turkist and pan-Turanist ideals in order to reduce or remove the influence of Russia from Central Asia.

I argue that there is an element of “Turkishness” that is prominent in the community’s activities in the region. Based on the arguments of Gulen and some scholars, through promoting Turkish culture and language, the community does not aim to make all students in their schools to identify themselves strongly as a Turk, rather the community tries to introduce Turkey and Turkish culture with the aim to create a bond between the students and the country. However it is hard to talk about a single Turkish culture, therefore it is widely debatable what kind of Turkish culture is promoted by the community. Students are taught to be loyal to Gulen and to Turkey, and after graduation students becoming businessmen, bureaucrats or scholars favor further penetration of Turkish organizations into the region. The aim of the community is not to create the Great Turan yet to adapt a model based on Turkishness blended with Islamic elements.

Of course in order to understand how deep the “Turkishness” of the community the attention should be paid to its practice. Sources, related to this problem provide controversial information. Generally, “Turkishness” insensibly penetrates through the education in the schools of the community. On the other hand, Russian sources affirm that whole education is based on the ideas of Pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism, that students only study history of Turkish language and history instead of studying Russian language and history. They always mention the symbol “Turkic world map”, which students are always shown throughout their education in these schools.

However, it should be noted that in addition to the students with Turkic background the students of non-Turkic origin also study in these schools. If there were intensive Turkic orientation in the schools, students would be selected according to their ethnic origin. Developing sympathy towards Turkey is not the same thing with the intension to make everyone identify themselves as Turks. I argue that it is the fear of pan-Turkism that promotes such claims otherwise French or German schools would create a similar reaction as they also introduce a foreign language and culture. Also one should bear in mind that these are private schools so parents have always a choice what school their child will attend.

One should also remember that after independence Central Asian republics had their own nation-building projects on the rise “with some emphasis of their own pan-ideology”<sup>243</sup>. If Turkey intends to develop its political economic and cultural ties with the newly independent republics, strong promotion of pan-Turkist and pan-Turanist ideology would create reverse effects and deter the government of these states to take more serious action, because after the almost seventy years of Soviet rule these republics for sure do not want another “Big Brother.”

Regarding the Islamization of the region, it is hard to believe that a community with Islamic background has no aim to promote Islam in the region which lived for seventy years under the atheistic Communism. However before the prohibition of the community, the schools of Fethullah Gulen were more numerous and quiet popular so I argue that if there was an evident promotion of Islam with radical elements that aims to establish rule of sharia, they would not have such popularity.

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<sup>243</sup> Jacob. M. Landau, *op.cit.*, p.223

Despite this, it is not possible to deny the fact that a certain promotion of Islam took place in the activity of the community which Gulen and other scholars refer as the Turkish model of Islam. According to this view Turkey is the only Muslim country with a secular political system, and Fethullah Gulen community aims to apply this model in the “sister republics” of Central Asia in order to create close relations with them.

The other issue is the perception of the community’s activity in the Central Asia, and Russia. Activity of the community was met with suspicion and displeasure because after 70 years of Soviet era, of total dependence on socialism and communism the leaders of the governments of these countries want to take decisions concerning domestic and foreign policy of their states independently. The activities of organizations such as Fetullah Gulen community make them believe that they can lose their independence and right to act like sovereign. The prohibition of the organization is a natural response on their activity based on such an ideology. The schools are still active in the territory of these countries but only by keeping their connection with the community a disclosed one and the number of schools are slightly reduced in the region, especially in Uzbekistan.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Fethullah Gulen community is a relatively young socio-religious community that gained a very controversial reputation. Its global activity is perceived differently in Turkey, Russia and in the Western countries. Its activity in Central Asia is considered in a different perspective as well since it is a region where schools of the Gulen community are widespread. The main topic of arguments is the role that Islam and Turkishness play in the activity of the community in the republics of Central Asia.

One of the most widespread ideas among the scholars of Turkey is that Gulen community aims to indoctrinate Islamic concepts to the people's minds through the education given in the community's schools in the region. According to the Russian academic and political elite along with "pan-Islamism" "pan-Turkism" and "pan-Turanism" plays an important role in the community's activities in the region, the ultimate aim of which is to establish the "Great Turan" where all Turks will live.

Historically Central Asia is considered as the "motherland" of Turkic people, therefore naturally the Turks of the Turkish Republic feel and share common or similar identity with that of the Turkic people of Central Asia. But Central Asia was under Russian rule for a long time and only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union became available to establish relations with Turkey.

Obviously Tsarist Russian and the Soviet rule afterwards left their imprint on the society, culture and mentality of the people of Central Asian republics. In this sense through the establishment and development of political, economical, social and cultural ties with Central Asian republics, Turkey attempts to revive or create common values based on a similar ethnic identity.

In my thesis I discussed briefly the ideology of pan-Turkism, its history and evolution. Modern pan-Turkist ideas are far from the ideas of the past when pan-Turkism appeared as a strong ideology. Initially pan-Turkist ideology of the idea of Great Turan was dominant, but now while pan-Turkism focuses on the idea of cooperation between countries populated by Turkic people, it does not aspire the goal of consolidation of all Turkic peoples within the border of one state. May be such ideas can be found only in the programs of ultranationalists of Turkey. This type of pan-Turkism can be called as Turkism, since it does not aim to unite all Turks but only aspires to maintain a common Turkic identity.

Idea of emphasizing of Turkic identity takes place in the Gulen community's activity's agenda. And it is tightly connected to Islam. Islam takes a significant role in the relations between Turkey and republics of the Central Asia. During the Soviet period religion was officially recognized as a useless element of society that was substituted with the new Soviet ideology. Therefore in Central Asia a decay of Islam was observed. However, it was not possible to make people totally forget their faith. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Islam again started to gain value in the society of the republics.

Islam is not a homogeneous concept. Fethullah Gulen, as some scholars argues, is an adherent of so called "Turkish Islam", adopted from the philosophy of



Nursi, the type of Islam that came from the times of Ottoman Empire where various peoples of different ethnicities and religions lived under the rule of empire. In the scheme of Gulen, Islam is a religion that does not know any ethnic or national differentiation, a religion that encourages tolerance and dialogue with people especially those who are not Muslims. In this type of Islam, Muslims should not reject the West, and they can cooperate with that West and adopt the things that can be useful, for example science and technology.

Gulen believe that Turkey has the “vefa borcu”, a moral debt to Turkey’s sister republics and to Central Asia as Turks’ motherland. In this sense the Gulen community by using this argument, aims not only to revive Islamic values in the region but also to promote a certain type of Islam that is called “Turkish Islam” in Central Asia through its educational activity. “Turkish Islam” is the way that the community argues as the type of Islam practiced in Turkey and promotes this particular view among students. However, one must not think that community gives a clearly religious education. In its curriculum, the community follows the curriculum of the host country. If there is no place for religion in the curriculum of the host country, such subject does not take place in the curriculum of the Gulen schools. In some sources it can be find that promotion of Islam is being carried out through the extracurricular activities as well. However, since my thesis is based on the curriculum, and educational programs of the schools, I could not find any evidence for this. Therefore it was not possible for me to detect the presence or the absence of the mentioned extracurricular activities. But, owing to the fact that non-Muslims such as the Russian minorities in the Central Asian republics also attend these schools, one can assume that in these schools children are not educated with

directly Islamic values but common values shared by every religion such as tolerance, mutual respect, benefaction.

Owing to the fact that Gulen community tends to promote a “Turkish Islam” in Central Asia, it is possible to apply the term “Turkishness” introduced by Bill Park. In the schools of the community in Central Asia academic staff is composed mostly of Turkish teachers, Turkish is the language of instructions in many subjects also Ottoman history is taught. Approaches to such elements of Turkishness in the schools are also very controversial. Some sources call this pan-Turkism and believes that its aim is to bring up a generation in the republics of Central Asia which will take high-government positions and will be loyal to Turkey or favor the country and some other sources argue that the community aims only to introduce Turkey to the society of the region, to revive common cultural values of people of Central Asia and Turkey.

Based on the available sources it is not possible to follow extreme points of view that Gulen community aims to create Great Turan, or rule of sharia, or apply radical Islam with elements of pan-Turkism in Central Asia. Yet it can be argued that Islam and Turkishness takes a significant place in the activity of the community, but they are far from radical Islam and pan-Turkism, they are values to be promoted in the society of Central Asia that are considered by Gulen community to be common socio-cultural elements of Turks in Turkey and in Central Asia. Thus one can assume that the goals of the activity can be the establishment of strong ties with the people of Central Asia and presenting Turkey as an example to follow. But we cannot say more about the role of Islam and Turkishness in the community’s agenda due to the lack of evidences.

However, in Russia and some of the republics of Central Asia, the Gulen community was recognized as an extremist organization due to its possible radical agenda. Despite this fact, schools of the community are still active in the region, only in Uzbekistan their amount visibly declined to one school. In other countries governments do not close these schools. For example in Turkmenistan government did not recognized the community as terroristic organization but only required them to exclude religious subjects from the curriculum of the schools.

Speaking generally about the educational activity of the community in the region, there is a need to mention the quality of the education given in its schools. On the grounds of the primary sources, and some scholarly articles it can be concluded that these schools are perceived in the region as elite schools, which give one of the best education of the international standards, moreover schools are provided with modern facilities. In Central Asia these schools are considered to be competitive with the public schools and sometimes are considered to be higher level.

The quality of education in the community's schools can be considered high in comparison with the poor conditions of the public schools in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the period of transition almost all post-Soviet countries witnessed massive crisis in all spheres of live. One of the most painful process was experienced by the republics of Central Asia. Political and economical problems did not leave any time or energy for dealing with the problems in social and cultural spheres. Obviously this was reflected negatively on education. At the moment many public schools of the region lack even the fundamental needs for a high quality of education. Due to the economic crisis schools were not equipped with the facilities necessary for education and many of the facilities remaining from the

Soviet time are in very poor condition and at the same time there are no funds for the purchasing of the new ones. So compared to the public schools, the schools of the Gulen community provide the region with educational organizations of high level and perhaps has filled a vacuum in this respect.

Gulen community is active in the region for more than 20 years, within this period community established many schools in each of the Central Asian republic and became very active in the region through their educational activities. Throughout this thesis I tried to analyze the intentions of the community through establishing schools. Even though there are various opinions on the issue, based on the curriculum of the schools and some other resources on the issue I argue that schools do not follow a purely Islamic or pan-Turkist agenda in the region yet they aspire to provide a particular type of education that underlines elements of both Turkishness and Islam.

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