

Despite some pessimistic forecasts of the future of the Eastern Partnership, the initiative is already an established and active component of the European Neighborhood Policy, and EU is unlikely to abandon it or to try to replace it with some other means of cooperation in the East.

KAZAKH-TURKISH LYCEUMS: PROMOTION OF GÜLENISM IN KAZAKHSTAN

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A B S T R A C T

Today, education has come to the fore in international relations as an important factor of cooperation between states. Ankara uses it as a “soft power” instrument to promote the ideas of Turkic unity and cultural closeness of the Turkic world.

The Kazakh-Turkish lyceums (KTLs) opened in the Republic of Kazakhstan on the initiative of the presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and Turgut Özal occupy the leading positions in education in Kazakhstan. After a failed coup d'état in Turkey, Ankara officially asked the states where these lyceums were functioning to close them as part of the network of the Gülen movement Hizmet, which raised and educated its loyal followers.

Open borders and the diversity of educational models can be regarded as a challenge to the local society, which is confronted with a huge variety of ideas and opinions influencing the lives and minds of common people. Education is no longer a sphere of cultural impact ("soft power"), but, rather, has become a factor of state security.

Despite the measures taken by the Kazakhstani authorities, the problem created by the KTLs has not yet been sorted out: the Gülen schools continue to function and promote the ideology of Gülenism among the future members of the political and financial

elite of Kazakhstan. We have analyzed this problem through the lens of the soft power theory and securitization to find an answer to the question of whether the lyceums not only endanger bilateral relations, but also threaten security of the Republic of Kazakhstan in other respects. In other words, should this problem be reviewed to eliminate the risks or should it be disregarded in view of its great importance as a "soft power" instrument and its close connection with economic modernization and social progress.

The ideological components, rather than the educational programs per se are raising doubts: loyalty to the Gülen ideology is being instilled in the minds of the future elite and leaders of Kazakhstan. Irrespective of the extent to which the movement is involved in Islamic proselytism and propaganda of Turkism, it negatively affects the processes of national construction, nation's self-identification and formulation of the national idea, social security and stability, religious unity, etc.

KEYWORDS: *Kazakhstan-Turkish relations, education, Kazakh-Turkish lyceums (KTLs), the Gülen movement, securitization, soft power.*

Introduction

In any developed information society, education becomes a strategic resource of the state and its powerful instrument on the international arena. Ankara promotes the idea of Turkic unity and cultural closeness of the Turkic world, and realizes it by contributing to the development of education in Kazakhstan, which is an important factor in cooperation between the two countries.

The network of private Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums (KTLs) appeared in Kazakhstan in the early 1990s with Ankara's support as an important instrument of Turkish soft power in Kazakhstan.

The Turkish contribution to the educational system of Kazakhstan cannot be overestimated; the competitive advantages of the graduates testify to high-quality education, which explains why they are perceived as elite educational establishments in Kazakhstan.

According to official statistics, KTLs currently occupy the top lines in the republic's ratings: In 2017, all KTLs (there is a total of 27 in the country) were among the 100 best schools assessed by the results of the National Testing System (a comprehensive testing system for all college-bound high-school students). All in all, during the years of independence, KTL students accounted for 70-80 percent of Kazakhstan's participants in all international subject competitions. In 2017, 251

out of 1,400 KTL graduates were admitted to the most prestigious Nazarbayev University, which is geared towards Western standards and teaches in English. According to statistics, one-third of 700 first-year students were KTL graduates.¹

Until recently, these schools were perceived as a mutually advantageous mechanism of cooperation between Turkey and Kazakhstan: the former used the KTLs to promote its interests through soft power, while the latter improved its system of education. Everything changed in 2013-2014, when, despite their efficiency and the important role in bilateral cooperation, the lyceums became a stumbling block in the relations between the two countries.

The uncompromising conflict between the Erdoğan government and Fethullah Gülen, a prominent Islamic preacher and head of the informal Hizmet movement, forced the Turkish powers to pressurize the structures connected with it. Ankara could not limit its efforts by the struggle against the local Gülen followers; it tried to control their assets in other countries. As could be expected, it paid particular attention to Turkish schools controlled by the movement, KTLs being no exception.

Ankara considered them a part of the Gülen network, which propagated loyalty to the Gülen movement, and asked other countries through diplomatic channels to close them in their territories. As could be expected, this stirred up a storm of discussions on Kazakhstan's social media. The local powers publicly confirmed that the schools would not be closed; they were supported by the spokesperson of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, who stated that "this prospect is not being discussed today."² The failed military coup of 2016 in Turkey revitalized the subject: the Turkish authorities laid the blame on Gülen's supporters. The KTL issue was revived in Kazakhstan; the government had to clarify its position on the issue and proceed with certain measures in relation to the lyceums.

The fact that the president of Kazakhstan was the first head of state to pay an official visit to Turkey after the attempted coup meant that Kazakhstan supported the policy pursued by Erdoğan and his administration. Nursultan Nazarbayev explained his visit: "I came here to support my brother Erdoğan and the Turkish state."³ As could be expected, the lyceums figured prominently at the talks. At a press conference Nazarbayev stated: "It is not in our interests to take actions against Turkey. We have reached an agreement." He also stated that "Kazakhstan will expel any Turkish teacher linked to an Islamic cleric."⁴ Soon after the visit it was announced that "the 33 Turkish-Kazakh schools in Kazakhstan ... are to be renamed 'Bilim' (Education) Innovative Lyceums."⁵

Despite the measures implemented by the Kazakh authorities, the KTL problem remains on the table: they continue teaching the future political and financial elite of Kazakhstan loyalty to the Gülen ideas.

The Theoretical and Methodological Basis of Our Studies

An analysis of the problems discussed requires a reference to the soft power theory, which its author Joseph Nye defined as the ability to attract and entice, rather than coerce. Education as part of

¹ See: A. Erkebulan, *Poytiial li otezd turetskikh uchiteley na kachestvo obrazovania v KTL*, Forbes.kz, 29 May, 2018, available at [https://forbes.kz/process/education/uderjat_planku_1527513459/], 2 February, 2020.

² A. Kosenov, *V Kazakhstane ne budut zakryvat kazakhsko-turetskie litsei*, Tengrinews.kz, 10 April 2014, available at [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/v-kazakhstane-ne-budut-zakryivat-kazahsko-turetskie-litsei-253367/], 2 February, 2020.

³ *Nazarbayev: visit v Turtsiu ia sovershil, chtoby podderzhat moego brata Erdogana*, Nur.kz, 5 August, 2016, available at [<https://www.nur.kz/1212132-nazarbaev-o-poezdke-v-turciyu-etot-vizi.html>], 6 February, 2020.

⁴ T. Gumrukcu, A.J. Yackley, *Kazakhstan to Expel Teachers Linked with Gülen Movement* // Reuters.com, 5 August, 2016, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-kazakhstan-education/kazakhstan-to-expel-teachers-linked-with-gulen-movement-nazarbayev-idUSKCN10G1PI>], 7 February, 2020.

⁵ *Gülen-linked Turkish Schools in Kazakhstan Being Renamed*, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, 18 October, 2016, available at [<https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-Gülen-turkish-schools-renamed/28061316.html>], 7 February, 2020.

soft power is a mechanism of communication, an instrument that increases attractiveness and consolidates a country's prestige outside its borders. By offering high-quality knowledge and competencies, as well as progressive educational and research technologies, a state creates an attractive image among the population of other countries. Education and its institutions as part of soft power can serve as instruments of foreign policy interests of one state within another.

Today, when educational models transcend borders, the Kazakhstani society is living amid a variety of ideas and opinions that elude a black-and-white definition as positive or negative factors. This means that the sphere of education should be analyzed not only in the context of its political impact (soft power), but also as a state security factor.

This brings us to a discussion of education from the point of view of whether the state considers the influence of foreign educational institutions a security issue. The elusive nature of the KTLs' ideological activities in Kazakhstan has made them a security issue. The reason is not in their educational programs, rather, it is their ideological impact on the future elite and future leaders of Kazakhstan, which may become loyal followers of the Gülen ideology.

Whether or not a certain issue poses a threat to state security is decided in the course of discussions by the state or the political elite. In the absence of an agreement, the answer can be found in expert discourse designed to identify the risks or signs of latent threats to state security.

The authors have proceeded from the fact that educational services extended to students from outside the state borders are one of the key instruments of propagation of the language, culture and ideas of the country or the movement that provides the services in the first place.

The paper attempts to determine (at the expert opinion level) whether the KTLs that promote Gülen's ideas in Kazakhstan and realize certain ideologically loaded political technologies present risks to the country's security.

The Religious and Political Nature of the Gülen Movement Hizmet

It is highly important to identify the concepts and aims of Gülen's organization because the Kazakhstani people know next to nothing about the Hizmet movement and its activities in Kazakhstan. The real state of affairs is even worse: Kazakhstan's expert community does not know enough about the activities of Gülen and his followers which might negatively affect the quality of analytical support of the state's security policy.

Turkish analyst Soner Çağaptay has described the Gülen organization as "a tight-knit Islamic brotherhood with political ambitions and endowed with a strong, near devotional, attachment to its founder."⁶ Its philosophy relies on the idea of Hizmet ("service" in Turkish); in a wider sense it means religiously motivated services. Gülen and his supporters look at the Hizmet conception through the lens of "pleasing God."⁷

This means that the Hizmet members consider everything done by their organization to be duties of a faithful individual, and teachers of foreign Turkish schools being no exception—they are invariably driven by this factor.

The movement is a hierarchy, in which all and everyone has a role to play. Its ideology presupposes that the members strictly follow instructions from superiors, which makes Hizmet a fairly efficient structure where all decisions are realized fairly promptly.

⁶ S. Çağaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdoğan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, I.B. Tauris, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2020, p. 111.

⁷ H. Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, p. 80.

Gülenism, which promotes the concept of religion modernization stands apart from many other Muslim movements of the East. Gülen is the follower of a prominent Islamic intellectual Saïd Nursî (1873-1960), who believed that amid a crisis of sorts in the Muslim world Islam should be modernized to become integrated with science.⁸ This explains why Hizmet concentrates on education and educational establishments as a foundation, from which to preach Islamic values.

The quality of knowledge is an important instrument of shaping the “golden generation” of Muslims, who should not only remain loyal to the Turkish Islamic tradition, but be well-educated.⁹

To sum up: on the one hand, the movement is promoting the Turkish version of Islam, on the other, it is building up a dialog with the conventional West.

- First and foremost, the national factor in the organization’s religious teachings is too obvious to be missed, hence the very small number of the Gülen schools in the Arab world.
- Secondly, it has become clear that the Muslims should leave their self-isolation behind, since their integration in the current international processes is too important to be ignored.

In view of the above, Hizmet speaks of itself as a relatively moderate religious teaching—a highly positive characteristic against the background of other Islamic movements that are highly critical of Western values.

The movement is an authoritarian structure on the inside: it functions on strictly hierarchical principles, under which collective decisions are unthinkable and unimaginable. Each of its members must fulfil orders from above.

The image of Hizmet as a moderate movement is positively assessed: its educational establishments function both in countries with Islamic majorities and in the West. Since 1999, Gülen has been living in the United States despite the Turkish authorities’ efforts to extradite him. An extensive network of Turkish schools (160 educational establishments) is functioning in 20 U.S. states.¹⁰ They have no intention of converting American students to Islam: very much in line with the movement’s philosophy, it strives to create a positive image of Turkey and its version of Islam, to make the Gülen movement more attractive in the eyes of followers of other confessions and Western society as a whole.

Gülen’s followers look at their schools as a profitable business; U.S. budget supports their educational establishments with \$150 million annually; just as elsewhere, some of the teachers are Turkish citizens.¹¹ Several years ago American authorities launched regular revisions of the schools suspected of abusing taxpayers’ money.¹² According to *Der Spiegel*, Gülen’s followers regularly donate 10 percent (or even up to 70 percent) of their income to the movement, not always voluntarily.¹³

This means that money plays an important role in the movement’s strategy. It should be said that by informally connecting people, Hizmet is functioning as social capital: it regularly supports those of its followers who need either moral encouragement or money. All members are expected to pay individually sized dues to corroborate their loyalty.

⁸ See: B. Balci, *Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus since the Fall of the Soviet Union*, Transl. into English by G. Elliott, Hurst & Company, London, 2018, p. 52.

⁹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁰ See: S. Cagaptay, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

¹¹ See: *US Charter Schools Tied to Powerful Turkish Imam*, cbsnews.com, 13 May 2012, available at [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-charter-schools-tied-to-powerful-turkish-imam/>], 7 February, 2020.

¹² See: *U.S. Network of Turkish Cleric Facing Pressure as Those at Home Seek Help*, Reuters.com, 26 September 2016, available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-gulen-usa-insight/u-s-network-of-turkish-cleric-facing-pressure-as-those-at-home-seek-help-idUSKCN11W0BL>], 8 February, 2020.

¹³ See: C. Holton, C. Lopez C., *The Gülen Movement: Turkey’s Islamic Supremacist Cult and its Contribution to the Civilization Jihad in America*, The Center for Security Policy Press, Washington D.C., 2015, p. 19.

Rigidly organized, with a relatively moderate ideology, the movement extends its activities into the political sphere. According to expert assessments, the Gülen movement is developing into an organization with ambitious political aims,¹⁴ which is common in the Muslim East: all sorts of religious brotherhoods have political ambitions; The Muslim Brotherhood that came to power in Egypt when Mubarak was deposed is a recent example.

The widely quoted words Gülen addressed to his followers confirm Hizmet's intentions, particularly in Turkey: "You must move in the arteries of the system without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach the power center... Until the conditions are ripe they [the followers] must continue like this... You must wait until such time as you have gotten all the state power, until you have brought to your side all the power of the constitutional institutions of Turkey."¹⁵ This is the program for coming to power in any country, pure and simple.

The events that have been unfolding in Turkey since the early 2000s testify to the fact that Hizmet had already launched its program. It placed its supporters in all sorts of Turkish official structures, first and foremost, the judicial and law and order structures. According to Soner Çağaptay, the failed military coup d'état was initiated by a group of generals "at least partially affiliated with Gülen."¹⁶

This explains why Hizmet is frequently called a state within a state. What is even more important is the fact that its followers are more loyal to it than to their respective states. As an informal structure, it is an evasive enemy, since the organization and its members have neither registration or other credentials. Despite the large-scale purge in Turkey's state structures, with which the state responded to the unfolding crisis, we can say with a great degree of probability that there are Gülen's " sleeper " supporters in various official structures, who will " wake up " upon orders to resume their struggle against the Turkish government.

The KTLs as Carriers of Gülen's Ideas in the Kazakhstani Society

The first lyceums opened in Kazakhstan in 1992 on the initiative of presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and Turgut Özal, spreading far and wide across the country to become a common element in all major cities. They have moved to the fore as leaders in secondary education in Kazakhstan, earning top places in the rating of the republic's schools.¹⁷

Both states needed these schools: Kazakhstan obtained schools with a high level of education funded by private sponsors, while local authorities were expected to provide them with adequate premises. Not only did it improve the overall quality of education in Kazakhstan, it also helped in the search for national and religious identity within the Turkic sphere of influence.

Kazakhstan and Central Asia in general, with its deeply rooted cultural, historical and political ties with Turkey, are the most suitable platform for Ankara's soft power. Still, in the 1990s the Turkish military establishment and secularists were somewhat concerned about the activities of the Gülen movement abroad. Ankara, however, pragmatically supported Hizmet, which opened its educational establishments in foreign countries.

¹⁴ See: H. Yavuz, *op. cit.*, pp. 85, 90.

¹⁵ C. Holton, C. Lopez, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ S. Çağaptay, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

¹⁷ See: A. Erkebulan, *op. cit.*

Gülen's followers looked at the Central Asian countries as a testing area where they could learn how to operate on the transnational level. Even before the Soviet Union's disintegration, Gülen and his followers in various Turkish cities "were readying themselves to conquer Central Asia."¹⁸

Today, Kazakhstan comes second after the United States in the number of Gülen educational establishments.¹⁹ There are 30 lyceums, two international schools, two colleges and the Suleyman Demirel University.²⁰ They operate under the Kazakhstan and Turkey Educational Foundation (KATEV—Kazakhstan ve Türkiye Eğitim Vakfı), set up specifically for this purpose and controlled by the Gülen movement.²¹ The lyceums offer gender-isolated education, a scheme that is still present in many Muslim countries.

The KTLs are extremely popular among the local population, despite the complicated entrance exams. In 2017, there were 25 candidates per vacant spot,²² which is explained by the top-notch quality of education. The above numbers are the best confirmation.

Competitiveness of the KTLs. The following factors ensure their excellent results:

- First of all, according to Gülen's concept of the "golden generation" of contemporary Muslims, the lyceums select the most promising and able children through competitive exams. Prospective students pass tests on several subjects, the Kazakh language being one them, which gives certain advantages to pupils of Kazakh schools. The lyceums enroll 12-year-old pupils for the simple reason that the most gifted had already demonstrated their worth and were ready to master new subjects. The lyceums operate as boarding schools, which improves the results to a certain extent; the day is strictly regimented, with education and self-education being the main points.
- Secondly, the KTLs are totally autonomous, despite the fact that their programs are correlated with the official educational structures; teaching is strictly individual, this fully applies to the textbooks and the highly flexible educational process.
- Thirdly, the KATEV Foundation, whose budget depends on the money earned by the movement through business and other activities, supplies the lyceums with necessary resources.
- Fourth, the KTL administrative structures pour a lot of money into upgrading the teaching staff's qualifications. Their motivation is further consolidated by stipends (up to 230 thousand tenge) paid by the KATEV,²³ in addition to the wages paid by the Ministry of Education and Science of the RK. In the early 2020, a teacher's average salary in Kazakhstan was 197,000 tenge. Religious motivation of Gülen's followers can serve as another stimulus for the KTL teachers: work is regarded as service to God and is, therefore, a duty of any faithful person. This is what one of the graduates had to say about his Turkish teachers: "...they dedicated their best years to educating the children of Kazakhstan; many of them had arrived when still very young, boys and girls of 18-20 years. The majority of them, the first generation, the first wave of the teachers had arrived during the most difficult years of Ka-

¹⁸ B. Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam," *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003, p. 154.

¹⁹ See: P. Alexander, "Turkey on Diplomatic Push to Close Schools Linked to Influential Cleric," *Voanews.com*, 31 August, 2017, available at [<https://www.voanews.com/europe/turkey-diplomatic-push-close-schools-linked-influential-cleric>], 10 February, 2020.

²⁰ See the site of the manager of the Kazakh-Turkish lyceums of the Foundation: [<https://bil.edu.kz/>].

²¹ See: B. Balci, *Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia...*, p. 155.

²² See: A. Erkebulan, *op. cit.*

²³ See: M. Bekmaganbetov, *V KATEV govoriat, chto oni ne imeiut otmoshenia k Giulenu*, *Rus.azattyk.org*, 27 June, 2016, available at [<https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-tureckie-licei-kazakhsko-turecky-universitet/27884615.html>], 11 February, 2020.

zakhstan's history. They did not come to earn money; rather, they were driven by a high and noble aim—to share their knowledge and principles with us, the children of Kazakhstan,”²⁴ Hence the conclusion: Gülen's followers movement are driven by their ideas, rather than material interests.

The graduates' competitive advantages are largely due to their better knowledge of English, since certain subjects (natural sciences and mathematics) are taught in English. Turkish is another foreign tongue in the curriculum. These are the main points of attraction for students and their parents.

KTL's religious agenda. Some experts suspect that Gülen was initially driven by the idea of Islamic revival in the region that was immersed in atheism for over seventy years.²⁵ Gülen's supporters had not hesitated to promote their ideology inside and outside the lyceums, stirring up mistrust and rejection among both the common people and the ruling class.

Pragmatically minded Gülen supporters changed their tactics to what is called “*temsil*,” which literary means “presentation.” It surmises proliferation of religion by means of soft power through good deeds of believers, which are to serve an example to be followed. According to *temsil*, the lifestyle and highly moral behavior of a Muslim should form a positive opinion of Islam that will attract more followers. This radically differs from the proselytism of *Tablighi* that relies on open religious propaganda.

The readjusted tactics has proven efficient. This has been thoroughly confirmed by former students and their parents' testimonies about Turkish teachers as highly educated and highly moral professionals loyal to the Gülen ideas. A teacher from one of the Istanbul Gülen schools said the following: “There are many means and methods to bring somebody to Islam: first, you should win the hearts of your students by giving them a good example to inspire admiration of your lifestyle, integrity and discipline. You will not need books to teach Islam; you should use your body language; what you wear and how; how you communicate with your pupils and other people as a means to transfer the Islamic lifestyle without discussing Islam as a religion. When your pupils become attracted by your behavior, they will gradually understand your behavior and thought model and seek to copy it. At this stage, you may gradually start discussing the real reasons behind your way of life and, finally, when they are ready, you will reveal Islamic literature to them.” The main idea is to present them with an image of a good Muslim. This explains why morals and ethics figure prominently in Gülen's followers' worldviews. This fully applies not only to schoolteachers, but also to all followers of the movement among businessmen, journalists, etc.²⁶

In view of the movement's highly cautious approach to proliferation of Islamic values in their lyceums, not all children, but only the most perceptive of them, experience religious influence. The fact that children live in boarding schools makes the process easier. According to field studies of Turkic scholar Bayram Balci, KTL officials do not engage in missionary activities. This task is transferred to the so-called *abi* (elder brother); these spiritual teachers introduce students to the basics of Islam and teach them to read *namaz*.²⁷ One of the graduates has described the religious life in her lyceum: “Yes, the teachers used religion as an instrument of education and upbringing; they told us all sorts of educational parables without imposing any specific religion. Many of us graduate from the lyceums in scarves, long skirts and in covered clothing, yet this was our personal choice.”²⁸

²⁴ *Prepodavately kazakhsko-turetskikh litseev prosyat ubezhishcha v Kazakhstane*, Tengrinews.kz, 27 September, 2017, available at [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/prepodavately-kazakhsko-turetskikh-litseev-prosyat-ubezhishcha-327354/] 15 February, 2020.

²⁵ See: B. Balci, *Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia...*, p. 155.

²⁶ See: N. Sultanmuratov, *Obrazovanie po-turetski, ili faktor Giulena v Kazakhstane*, Institute of Asian Studies, Almaty, 2018, p. 9, available at [<https://institute.asiakz.com/files/files/attachments/79/obrazovanie-po-turecki-nuriddin-sultanmuratov.pdf>].

²⁷ See: B. Balci, *Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia...*, p. 164.

²⁸ K. Pridatchenko, *Otkrovenia KTLshchika*, Yvision.kz, 29 December, 2014, available at [<https://yvision.kz/post/454060/>], 11 February, 2020.

The strategies used by Gülen followers and the Jesuits are very similar.²⁹ They rely on their educational structures to create an elite, which will later open the doors to power and influence in the country. Even if proliferation of Islamic values was and remains the cornerstone of the movement's ideology, Hizmet demonstrates a certain deal of flexibility: conscription of new supporters or at least sympathizers is one of the movement's main tasks. This leads to mutually advantageous informal relations and adds to the movement's potential.

The risks created by the Gülen movement as assessed by Kazakhstan authorities and society. The above suggests that Kazakhstan, and its Central Asian neighbors, for that matter, confronted with the rising wave of fundamentalist movements should formulate its attitude to Gülen's ideology that is promoted in its territory by the KTLs. In July 2016, the failed coup d'état, which Ankara had pinned on the Gülen movement, added urgency to this problem. The Turkish authorities demanded that Central Asian countries should close all Gülen lyceums that operate in these states. The responses differed from country to country. "The deterioration of relations between the Turkish government, the Gülen movement and Uzbekistan in the 2000s resulted in a drastic reduction of the Gülen movement's influence and presence in the region."³⁰ The Turkish Attaché for Education was deported from Uzbekistan. "In May 2014, Uzbekistan's government was the first to close all Gülen schools in its country."³¹ Their image in Central Asia started to deteriorate, and seeds of mistrust and fear of Islamic infiltration gradually started to rise. In 2015, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan closed the Gülen schools on their territories, Tajikistan was not very far behind,³² in full conformity with its plan to cut down the number of active religious organizations. The Party of Islamic Revival of Tajikistan was banned.

Kazakh and Kyrgyz authorities allowed the lyceums to function; they returned to partial measures: the schools received a new name, while the majority of Turkish teachers were replaced with their local colleagues; some of the Turkish teachers were unable to extend their visas.³³

The problem of Gülenism in Kazakhstan was not conceptualized since, as President Nazarbayev pointed out, the schools had been transferred under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan and, therefore, had nothing to do with the Turkish Islamic scholar Gülen.³⁴ For its part, the Ministry informed the public that Turkish officials could in no way influence the KTLs funded from the Kazakh budget and working according to the state educational standards.

There are several reasons behind this.

- First, Kazakhstan has demonstrated a lot of pragmatism: the lyceums allowed the country to modernize and upgrade its educational system to make it more competitive.
- Secondly, KTLs were no longer regarded as a threat to social and state security. In fact, the popularity of certain Islamic values was encouraged as an expected religious renaissance in the country, the religious life of which had been suppressed in Soviet times.
- Thirdly, it should be kept in mind that the Kazakhstan leaders interpreted the request of the Turkish authorities to close the lyceums as an interference in their domestic affairs and believed that to agree with it would demonstrate weakness.

²⁹ See: B. Balci, *Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus since the Fall of the Soviet Union*, p. 55.

³⁰ S. Mori, L. Taccetti, *Rising Extremism in Central Asia? Stability in the Heartland for a Secure Eurasia*, Brussels, European Institute for Asian, February 2016, p. 12, available at [http://www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/EIAS_Briefing_Paper_2016_Mori_Taccetti_Central_Asia.pdf], 2 February, 2020.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² S. Brletich, "Tajikistan, Turkey and Gülen Movement," thediplomat.com, 21 August, 2015, available at [<https://thediplomat.com/2015/08/tajikistan-turkey-and-the-gulen-movement/>], 15 February, 2020.

³³ See: T. Wesolowsky, A. Mamashuly, "They'll Take Us into Custody": *Turkish Teachers in Kazakhstan Fear Going Home*, rferl.org, 8 October, 2017, available at [<https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-turkey-teachers-gulen-repatriation/28780416.html>], 14 February, 2020.

³⁴ See: "Nazarbayev: turetskie uchitelia ne budut ekstradirovany v Turtsiu, tema zakryta" mk-turkey.ru, 16 September, 2017, available at [<https://mk-turkey.ru/politics/2017/09/16/kazahsko-tureckie-licei-ne-imeyut.html>], 17 February 2020.

The negative response of the public to the Turkish request proved to be the final and the most significant argument. The social networks were boiling with discussions in which lyceum graduates (there are about 25,000 of them in the country³⁵) demonstrated a lot of vitality. People unrelated to the Gülen schools were also very positive about their results and spoke highly of their educational merits. Galia Amitraeva, chairperson of Ar-Namys, the Public Association of Teachers and Lecturers has offered her opinion on the issue. “I can say with a great deal of certainty that there is no threat at all. This is an educational organization that does its job well and provides real knowledge. To my mind, there are no violations. I met the children from the Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums and can say that these are normal schools that give good knowledge. Contrary to the what some people think the Lyceums do not belong in Turkey... Today, the KTLs mostly staffed with our teachers.”³⁶ This was the key line of the discussions supported by graduates, their parents, experts and officials.

Hizmet has always skillfully used the media to promote its interests. The *Zaman* newspaper published by the Gülen movement (the most popular in Turkey at the time until it was closed by the Turkish authorities) informed the readers about Gülen’s opinion on different issues. The locally published *Kazakhstan Zaman* and social media were also involved in the discussion. The public figures connected to the movement to different extent were also conscripted to support the KTLs and the results of their educational activities. Economist Oljas Khudaibergenov, member of the board of trustees of a KTL, was involved in a discussion with Turkish officials; he wrote an open letter to the Turkish Ambassador to the Republic of Kazakhstan, in which he disagreed with the latter’s negative opinion about the activities of the Gülen movement in Kazakhstan and his arguments.³⁷

Conclusion

An analysis of the ideological theses of the KTLs in Kazakhstan confirmed that they should be regarded as a threat to social and state security and should be neutralized as such.

We have proceeded from the following factors: the ideology of Gülenism is still present in the lyceums, while the efficient mechanisms of idea dissemination and conscription of new members or at least sympathizers are still in place; proliferation of religion through soft power continues and the nature of Islam being disseminated remains the same.

The attitude of society and the state to the ideas of Gülenism realized through the lyceums can be described as another risk. The generally positive assessment of the KTLs is explained by the pragmatic approach of the Kazakh side to high-quality education and the advantage of having competitive graduates. The issue, however, is much broader than the quality of education. The lyceums can and should be considered as an instrument of instilling loyalty to Gülen’s ideas among Kazakhstanis. In the presence of various Islamic trends in Kazakhstan, Gülen version of Islam, which claims the status of a modernized version of Islam that is open to science, cannot be considered an acceptable variant.

The measures already taken by the state to reorganize the lyceums do not provide sufficient risk control. The problem could not be and was not solved by deportation of a certain number of Turkish teachers. Their Turkish colleagues and Kazakh graduates hired as teachers were also supporters of the Gülen movement. This is not all: the lyceums are still controlled by the KATEV Foundation,

³⁵ See: E. Erkebulan, op. cit.

³⁶ N. Batrakova, *Umy malenkikh kazakhstantsev vne opasnosti! Giulen na nikh ne vliiaet*, ktk.kz, 2 August, 2016, available at [<https://www.ktk.kz/ru/blog/article/2016/08/02/71202/>], 5 February, 2020.

³⁷ See: Oljas Khudaibergenov: “Prepodavатели, kotorye vernulis iz Kazakhstana v Turtsiu, sidiat v tiurme bez suda i sledstvia,” Tengrinews.kz, 21 September, 2017, available at [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/oljas-hudaybergenov-prepodavately-kotoryie-vernulis-326984/], 10 February, 2020.

which hires the teaching staff. There are quite a few potential supporters of the movement among the local teachers who are graduates of KTLs.³⁸ The problem can be resolved by moving the Turkish schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education of the RK and out of KATEV's control. This may, however, negatively affect the teaching process and the level of education which means that the lyceums will no longer be able to maintain the high level of tri-lingual education, and which the officials of the Ministry of Education will not endorse.

The virtually nonexistent analytical assessment of the state policy on Gülen's ideas and his teaching can be described as one of the risks; nothing has been written so far about its role in and its impact on the public and religious spheres in Kazakhstan. Bayram Balci has offered the most exhaustive analysis of this range of problems in his work.³⁹

The absence of a discussion can be probably explained by the problem's weak conceptualization in the republic's official discourse even if it is absolutely clear that the mounting regional threats and risks require a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of religious and public movements, the Gülen movement among them, on the structures of the Central Asian states.

Regardless of the extent to which this movement is involved in Islamic proselytism and propaganda of Turkism, it threatens the processes of national construction, self-identification, formulation of the national idea, maintaining social security and stability, religious unity, etc. unfolding in Kazakhstan while its interference in these processes might plunge Kazakhstan into crises and instability.

³⁸ See: N. Sultanmuratov, *op. cit.*

³⁹ See: B. Balci, *Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus Since the Fall of the Soviet Union.*