



**Fethullah Gülen**  
&  
**The Hizmet Movement**



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## Foreword

**T**his booklet is about Fethullah Gülen who has emerged as one of the most interesting public figures in contemporary Turkey. He is a retired state-licensed preacher and is considered one of the most influential intellectuals not merely in his native Turkey but also in the world. He is regarded as the initiator and inspirer of the transnational civil society movement, known as the ‘Hizmet Movement’. Along with a considerable following, he also has opponents and critics, which makes Gülen one of the most discussed personalities in contemporary Turkey. This work therefore aims to offer a closer look at his ideas and profile as well as some information about the Movement that he inspires.

Fethullah Gülen was born in Turkey in 1941. With substantial Islamic scholarly credentials, throughout the last four decades, he has been admired as a soft-spoken yet influential preacher. He has motivated hundreds of thousands to engage and invest in sustaining peace and the betterment of community relations through non-denominational educational institutions, intercultural dialogue centres, media outlets and relief organisations. The Hizmet Movement is now active in more than 150 countries and is regarded as a significant social, educational and spiritual movement in the contemporary world. It is a civil, autonomous, decentralised and inclusive

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movement aiming at contributing to developing a fully human society, durable peace and greater understanding between people.

Gülen exemplifies a simultaneous combination of a devout believer, an intellectual, a spiritual leader and an activist. This unusual combination mostly explains his appeal. He has also developed a readership and interest among those of other backgrounds and cultures, including in Europe and the United States. This is evidenced best by the growing diversity of the movement, which now attracts support from non-Turkish and non-Muslim backgrounds.

Gülen supports democracy, diversity, equal access to human rights, freedom of belief for all, loyalty to the law of the land and opposes the instrumentalisation of religion in politics. He is strongly against the abuse of religion in politics and asserts that there is no such thing as an Islamic state. He recognizes democracy as the only viable political system of governance.

Fethullah Gülen began actively promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue long before the 9/11 attacks in the United States. He is against any form of terrorist activity and violence. He unequivocally rejects suicide killing, whatever the circumstances and context. He emphasizes dialogue, and this emphasis is based on the view that dialogue is necessitated first and foremost by

our very humanity. This is why he communicates that we are human first, Muslim or of any other religion and culture next. He is among the few Muslim scholars who have consistently and publicly condemned the brutal acts performed in the name of Islam in various parts of the world.

There is a growing body of literature on Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement, be it academic, apologetic or polemical. While some of this literature poses harsh or unsubstantiated criticisms, some is written in reverential tones. This work is therefore produced to give a concise introduction to Fethullah Gülen himself and his ideas and the emergence, development and objectives of the movement that he has initiated. We hope that this booklet helps those who would like to have a better understanding of this influential person and the movement affiliated with him.



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## Who's Fethullah Gülen?

**F**ethullah Gülen is a Turkish-Muslim scholar, opinion leader and peace activist. He is a preacher by profession and worked as a state-licensed preacher in Turkey till 1981. He is regarded as the initiator and inspirer of the transnational civil society movement which is called Hizmet by its participants and referred to by some as the “Gülen Movement”.<sup>1</sup> He is respected by participants as a living model of devotion, piety and altruism. Gülen is also considered one of the most influential intellectuals not only of modern Turkey but also worldwide. For instance, in July 2008, he was listed by Foreign Policy and Prospect magazines as the top public intellectual from among a hundred candidates. Gülen, however, considers himself only a volunteer in the civil movement he has inspired and defines his role as an ‘adviser’ or ‘motivator’ at most.

### A Brief Biography

Gülen was born in Erzurum, Turkey in 1941. The milieu in which he was brought up was religiously conservative and had a strong and lively spiritual tradition. In Turkey's early republican era, when official public education was still limited and classical-religious education was banned, Gülen, like many others, received his education in non-official study circles carried out by former *madrassa* academics.<sup>2</sup> He was trained in the Islamic sciences in these circles under the tutorage of renowned scholars and spiritual masters around his hometown. His religious education consisted of studies in classical Islamic disciplines such as Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), prophetic tradition

(*hadith*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Arabic and Persian as well as Islamic spirituality (known as Sufism in the West). As a student keen to seek knowledge, he completed his *madrassa* education within a relatively short time, but he never had an opportunity to receive an official education. Later, however, he obtained his high-school diploma by passing the required exams through independent study. In the course of his life, along with his study of Islam, he has also educated himself in natural sciences, philosophy, literature and history, both from Eastern and Western traditions. It was this broad-ranging reading that equipped him for his well-known comprehensive discourse.

Gülen began preaching at a relatively young age. In 1959, he passed an exam administered by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) of Turkey, and he was awarded a state preacher's license. He then officially began to preach in Edirne. At the age of twenty-eight, he was promoted to a post in Izmir, the largest province of the west coast of Turkey, where his outstanding discourse began to crystallize and his audience to expand.<sup>3</sup> He was then appointed to posts in a number of different cities within the western part of Turkey as an official imam and preacher. Meanwhile, Gülen was also travelling around many cities in Turkey and in some European countries to give sermons in mosques and speeches at gatherings in various locations including theatres and coffee houses. Though he officially retired from preaching in 1981, Gülen, as a preacher emeritus, gave his most celebrated series of sermons between 1988 and 1991 in the biggest mosques of the

country, where thousands of people were present to listen to him. Due to health concerns, he terminated his public preaching in 1991, but continued to hold small conversation circles which often consisted of answering questions from the audience.

His speeches did not focus exclusively on religious texts but included a broad array of such topics as science, history, modern philosophy, social justice, human rights, moral values and education. He also expanded the function of the mosque by launching a question-and-answer series in which he responded to people's concern and curiosity regarding the challenges of modern times. Gülen's preaching style and discourse particularly attracted the attention of college students and ordinary people all around the country. Especially during the years of political turmoil in Turkey, he witnessed many young people's attraction to extremist ideologies via the violent polarisation of socialism and nationalism. He strove to inspire the Turkish youth and lead them toward an apolitical way of service to society, based on a peaceful life-style. His speeches were recorded and embraced throughout the country. As he states of this period, he simply thought to cultivate this public credit to channel good intentions and devotional energy towards a positive end. Gülen describes this initially national and subsequently universal positive end or ideal as “gathering around high human values” by means of education and dialogue.

In 1999, Gülen moved to the United States to receive medical care for his diabetes and cardiovascular

disease. He underwent a heart operation in 2004. Upon the recommendation of his doctors, he chose to stay away from the politically charged atmosphere in Turkey, particularly after the military memorandum in 1997 (mostly referred as a “post-modern coup”). He was then granted permanent residency by the U.S. authorities. He currently lives at a retreat facility in Pennsylvania together with a group of students and scholars. He receives visitors as his health permits. He spends most of his time in reading, writing, editing, personal worship, and receiving medical care.



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# Significance

**F**ethullah Gülen has emerged as one of the most interesting and prominent public figures of the contemporary Muslim world. Through appealing ideas and perspectives and a lifelong dedication to altruistic service, he has demonstrated the ability to transform the mindset and attitude of the public. The following six points are relevant in order to consider the significance of his ideas and social activism.

## Gülen as a Muslim Scholar and Intellectual

Fethullah Gülen is, first and foremost, a Muslim scholar with expertise on various Islamic disciplines. He represents a living model of the traditional *‘alim* profile.<sup>4</sup> He has a sound knowledge of both classical and contemporary interpretations and discussions by Muslim scholars. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.1111), Jalaladdin al-Rumi (d.1273), Yunus Emre (d.1321), Ahmad Sirhindi (d.1624), and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d.1960) are perhaps those who have had the most impact on his intellectual life and his interpretation of Islam. He also often quotes from the classical Persian poets like Firdawsi (d.1020), Anwari (d.1189), Saadi (d.1292), Hafez Shirazi (d.1390) and Abd al-Rahman Jami (d.1492). However, Gülen is also well-read in European philosophy and literature. He is able to converse with the latter comfortably through his writings and addresses.<sup>5</sup> He has, moreover, a thorough understanding of the philosophy of modern science and embraces knowledge that encourages the pursuit of scientific and technological advance.

Fethullah Gülen is a prolific writer. He has authored more than 60 books and many articles on a variety of topics. He contributes to a number of journals and magazines. He writes the lead article for the magazines *Fountain*, *Yeni Ümit*, *Sızıntı* and *Yağmur* that are published by companies sympathetic to his ideas. In addition to printed publications, his ideas are accessible to an increasing population through various radio and TV networks and websites.<sup>6</sup> His works are translated into many European languages and others including Arabic, Urdu, Russian and Indonesian.

## Gülen and Contemporary Islam

While Gülen’s understanding of Islam is rooted in Sunni orthodoxy, he communicates a non-contentious, universal, Sufi-oriented and human-centred interpretation of Islam. Rather than promoting a Reformation in Islam, he advocates a “renewal” (*tajdid*) whereby the normative religious sources are reflected afresh with acknowledgment of the necessities and understanding of the present age. In this process, reasoning should play a pivotal role, and a holistic, inclusive and dynamic approach should supersede the exclusivist, literal and legalistic one.

Owing in part to his early exposure to and acquaintance with Islamic spirituality (i.e. Sufism), Gülen is known for his consistent emphasis on the spiritual dimension of Islam. He disapproves of proselytism and the oppressive practice of faith since they are, in his view, contrary to the very nature

of faith itself. This is also why he has consistently disfavoured attempts to turn religion into a political ideology. He often highlights the precedence of representation (*tamsil*) over presentation (*tabligh*) in practising faith.

One of Gülen’s main concerns has been to seek solutions to the tremendous sense of strain, alienation, defeat and disintegration felt by Muslims for over two centuries. Gülen highlights the need for Muslims to feel at home in the modern world through education, self-criticism and understanding. This will, in turn, enable them to be contributors to the world community. This contribution, he points out, should take place in a civil framework that promotes:

- Constant positive action that leaves no room for fighting and anarchy;
- Activities that contribute to social and community cohesion;
- Absence of material or worldly expectations in return;
- Actions based on moral virtues that build trust and confidence;
- Involvement in constructive and action-oriented work rather than creating conflict or being reactive.

## Public Stance against Violence

Gülen has been recognized for his consistent stance against the use of violence with religious rhetoric. He

was among the first Muslim scholars who publicly condemned terrorist attacks in various parts of the world. He condemned the 9/11 attacks in a statement published in the New York Times and the Washington Post on September 12 and 21, 2001 respectively. He was again the first Muslim scholar to rebuke those responsible for the Beslan massacres by Chechen rebels in 2004. He also published statements in which he openly denounced attacks which were carried out in the name of Islam and which killed many people in such countries as Turkey, Spain, UK, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, France and Yemen. Similarly in September 2014, he paid paid for announcements in leading European, US and Kurdish newspapers in which he deplored the brutal atrocities committed by the ISIS terrorist organisation. Furthermore, he has given interviews to Turkish, American, Italian, Canadian, Russian, Kenyan, Bulgarian, Japanese and Kurdish newspapers in which he categorically condemned the use of political, ideological and religious reasons to justify acts of terror. He has appeared on many national television programs publicly condemning such acts. He also helped publish a scholarly book on the Islamic perspective on terror and suicide attacks, condemning such attacks on religious and humanitarian grounds.<sup>7</sup> Gülen has not expressed his views on terrorism only to Western readers but has voiced them in mosque sermons with congregations of thousands of Muslims. Some of his anti-terror statements were made long before the 9/11 tragedy. For instance, he publicly denounced Saddam Hussein’s firing of rockets on Israeli cities and he

unequivocally rejected suicide bombings in the Holy Land.

Gülen reiterates in his speeches and sermons that peace, justice and stability are of the utmost significance to Islam. He opposes the use of violence to achieve vested political interests. Gülen sees terror as a crime against humanity and he affirms

### ISIS Cruelty Deserves Our Strongest Condemnation

As a practicing Muslim deeply influenced by the tenets of my faith, I strongly condemn the brutal atrocities of the ISIS terrorist group. Their actions are a disgrace to the faith they proclaim and are crimes against humanity. Religion provides a foundation upon which to establish peace, human rights, freedoms and the rule of law. Any interpretations to the contrary, including the abuse of religion to fuel conflicts, are simply wrong and deceitful.

ISIS is not the first group to use religious rhetoric to mask its cruelty—Al Qaeda did so 13 years ago and Boko Haram more recently. What they all have in common is a totalitarian mentality that denies human beings their dignity.

Any form of violence against innocent civilians or persecution of minorities contradicts the principles of the Qur'an and the tradition of our Prophet (upon whom be peace and blessings). ISIS members are either completely ignorant about the faith they proclaim, or their actions are designed to serve individual interests or those of their political masters. Regardless, their actions represent those of a terrorist group and, as such, they should be brought to justice and compelled to answer for their horrific crimes.

I send my heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased in Iraq and Syria, and to the families of James Foley, Steven Sotloff and David Haines. May God give them strength, patience and perseverance, and alleviate their suffering. I also pray for the immediate and safe release of hostages and ask God, the Merciful, to lead us all toward mutual respect and peace. I invite everyone around the world to join me in these prayers.

**Fethullah Gülen**  
Islamic scholar, preacher and social advocate

**Gülen condemned the 9/11 attacks in a statement published in the New York Times and the Washington Post. Similarly in September 2014, he paid for announcements in leading European, US and Kurdish newspapers in which he deplored the brutal atrocities committed by the ISIS terrorist organisation.**

the Qur'anic and the Biblical view that killing one person is like massacring all humanity. Unlike some who seek religious justification for terrorist methods and suicide bombings, Fethullah Gülen boldly announces that “it is hard for a person to remain a Muslim if he becomes involved in terrorism. Islam does not approve killing people in order to attain a goal. One cannot achieve Heaven by murdering another person.”<sup>8</sup>

### Pro-Democratic Approach

Gülen recognizes democracy as the most viable and perhaps the best political system of governance. He argues that humankind has not yet designed a better governing system than democracy despite its shortcomings.<sup>9</sup> Democracy, he affirms, is a process of no return that evolves and improves, and people should strive to modernize and consolidate democratic institutions in order to have a society where individual rights and freedoms are respected and protected. He has many times underlined the compatibility of Islam with a true democracy. In his view:

Islam, while inviting people to live the divine message, does not offer a certain type or a detailed form of a political regime, state or administrative system. Islam, first and foremost, targets spiritual perfection at individual level and the common good (*islah*) at societal level. It leaves the political-administrative preferences to the free wills and choice of people. In Islam, the power is formed by people's free declaration of will, which they themselves deserve. Islam, while granting the right to practice one's belief, leaves also the right to believe or not to the free choice of a person. What Islam intends is a perfect application of religious freedom for all.<sup>10</sup>

This is why Gülen denounces transforming religion

into a political ideology while acknowledging that citizens may take an informed and responsible part in the political life of their country. He supports diversity, equal access to human rights, freedom of belief for all, and loyalty to the law of the land. He is strongly against the abuse of religion in politics and asserts that there is no such thing as “an Islamic state”. In his view, state-imposed religion (which means a certain interpretation of it) ultimately leads to hypocrisy and insincerity, which evidently clash with the faith message of Islam. This is why he is very critical about “the supposedly Islamic regimes that are state-determined and limited to sectarian approval” in the contemporary Muslim world.<sup>11</sup> Gülen has been recognized for consistent disapproval of the movements and revolutions appealing to political Islamism. He was harshly criticized by political Islamist groups in Turkey when he declared in 1994 that “it will not be possible to reverse the process of democracy.”

### A Muslim Pioneer in Interfaith Dialogue

Gülen has emerged as one of the most persuasive and influential voices in the Muslim community calling for dialogue as a step towards universal peace.<sup>12</sup> He has pioneered a rejuvenation of the inter-faith dialogue spirit in the Islamic tradition, which was forgotten amidst the troublesome years of the early twentieth century. Gülen recalls dynamics that are already embedded within the Qur'an and ages-old Muslim tradition, and he tries “to build a convincing argument that tolerance, love, dialogue and compassion are genuinely Islamic values that Muslims have a duty to bring to the modern world.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, Gülen insists that the inter-faith approach is a necessity today, and this is not only required by the pressing realities of our age but also by the

very source of Islam. By tolerance and dialogue, Gülen understands embracing people regardless of differences in opinion, worldview, ethnicity or faith. There is a need to recognize that differences do exist and the objective is not to ‘correct’ but to hear and listen to the other side.<sup>14</sup> For him, what people have in common is far greater than what divides and separates them. He, moreover, communicates that our shared humanity precedes our religious or ethnic identity; we are first human beings and then Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu or other.<sup>15</sup>

His promotion of this spirit has resulted in the creation of a great many foundations and dialogue centres all over the world. In addition, Gülen has been credited with bringing about a positive atmosphere in relationships between the Muslim majority and the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, where the latter have experienced many difficulties for many decades. Gülen's efforts for dialogue and better understanding were recognized by a private audience with the late Pope John Paul II in 1998. He has also met many leading people in Turkey and outside, including the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron – the former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, John O'Connor – the late Archbishop of New York and Leon Levy – the former president of the Anti-Defamation League. Gülen's spirit of inclusivity has stretched, moreover, to embrace not only those of other faiths, but also to those of no-faith. On various occasions he has not hesitated to meet, talk and exchange views with people who are very critical about faith or have no faith.

Gülen's ideas and approaches have also inspired many outside Turkey to take initiatives in their local contexts to promote intercultural understating, empathic acceptance and social cohesion.

### Education as a Means of Sustainable Peace

Perhaps, the most striking feature of Gülen's life and work is the fact that his vision and ideas have not stopped at rhetoric but have instead been globally realized as civil projects. Among these projects, the most remarkable are the educational institutions that have been established in different parts of the world. Gülen has continuously emphasized that peace, social justice and respect for diverse cultures and faiths can be achieved by educated individuals who are grounded in modern science, strong morality and practical altruism. For him, education should not be limited to formal instruction but should address comprehensively the spiritual, intellectual and physical dimensions of our beings. He accordingly encouraged his audience to establish non-confessional schools, rather than religious ones or mosques; these schools would combine the best state-of-the-art scientific training with character education.



**Gülen's efforts for dialogue and better understanding were recognized by a private audience with the late Pope John Paul II on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1998.**

These educational institutions are now operating in about 160 countries and comprise primary and secondary schools, universities, language schools, kindergartens and tutorial centres. Regardless of their location, these schools exemplify harmonious interfaith and intercultural relationships, a successful combination of spirituality and science, and philanthropic dedication for the sake of humanity. They also improve access to quality education, notably for girls and women. Particularly, in conflict-ridden regions such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, the Philippines, Bosnia-Herzegovina, southeast Turkey and northern Iraq, these institutions are known to increase educational opportunities and contribute to communal cohesion, which in turn decreases the appeal of terrorist groups with exclusivist agendas.<sup>16</sup> In addition to contributing to social harmony, these schools have also been recognized for their success in international science competitions.

Fethullah Gülen does not run or own any schools. These schools have been established by educational companies or foundations founded for this purpose. Some of them are joint ventures with host countries. Each is an independently run institution and mainly sponsored by local entrepreneurs along with altruistic educators and dedicated parents. The tripartite relationship among parents, educators/teachers and sponsors is regarded as a distinctive feature of these schools. Although the inspiration to get involved in education comes from Fethullah Gülen, the curriculum and management of the schools are left to the educators, who take their decisions in compliance with the educational system of the host countries. These schools adhere consistently to a secular curriculum; and they communicate universal human values rather than any confessional instruction.

## What is the Hizmet Movement?

The Hizmet Movement is a worldwide civic initiative rooted in the spiritual and humanistic tradition of Islam and inspired by the ideas and example of Fethullah Gülen. It is a transnational, cultural and educational movement that focuses on the betterment of the individual for a positive change in society. The movement is distinguished by its stress on dialogue and respect, support of democracy, its progressiveness in integrating tradition with modernity and its humanistic outlook. The participants in the movement call it *Hizmet*, which means “voluntary service” in Turkish. Gülen describes it as “a movement of volunteers gathered around high human values” and disapproves of the attribution of the movement to his name.

### Origins and Evolution

Fethullah Gülen has always been acknowledged as an “unusual preacher” by his audience. His preaching style, altruistic social activism and ascetic lifestyle have attracted many people from all walks of life in his native country. His sermons and speeches have been recorded on audiotapes since the early years of his preaching. These recorded sermons have been enthusiastically embraced, extending the reach of his ideas, message and vision.

Gülen's initial audience in Izmir became the seed of a faith-based community. This community, at the outset, mainly comprised college students and owners of small and medium enterprises in Izmir and around. This small community later began to invest in education through student dormitories, tutorial

centres and secondary schools. The community later expanded to encompass citizens from very different backgrounds, including non-Muslims who share the humanistic dimension of Gülen's vision if not its Islamic roots. Since the early 2000s, the movement has gained a more transnational character.

The ever-expanding public response to Gülen's message has culminated in a social phenomenon which is better described as a transnational faith-inspired civil society movement than as a local faith-based community. The contribution of the people supporting the movement in time crystallized not only in educational institutions but also in community centres, cultural organisations, publishing houses, media institutions, professional and trade networks, hospitals and relief organisations both in Turkey and abroad. The Hizmet Movement is today recognized as one of the most dynamic movements originating in the Muslim world.



**Yamanlar High School, the first school established by Hizmet-inspired people in Izmir.**

## Goals and Nature

The participants in the movement have the faith that any type of service to humanity seeks the good pleasure (*rida*) of God, which is, they believe, the ultimate goal of Muslim life. Within that framework, the objectives of the movement can be summarized as follows:

- Achieving full potential as human beings through balancing mind with heart and inner endeavour with social activism;
- Achieving full potential as a society through shared human values, fundamental human rights and a sense of responsibility;
- Achieving peace and social cohesion through understanding, respect and partnership.

In order to achieve these goals, the movement highlights empathic acceptance, respect, love, dialogue and friendship, consultation/deliberation, constructive action and volunteerism as the guiding principles. The people supporting the movement, furthermore, consider ignorance, poverty, and polarisation as the main problems that should be addressed at the global level. The movement, hence, prioritizes involvement in education and media, sharing and cooperation for sustainable economic development, and intercultural and interfaith dialogue respectively to tackle these challenges.

The Hizmet Movement has consistently remained non-reactionary, non-confrontational, inclusive and independent. It is neither an ideological nor a political movement. Political choices are left to the individuals, and there is no monolithic support for a certain political leader or party among the participants. The movement, furthermore, categorically disapproves

the politicisation of religion in general and Islam in particular. It is a severe critic of political Islam and has never been an Islamist movement.

The spirituality of the Hizmet Movement resembles that of early Sufis within the spiritual tradition of Islam who sought balance between inward and outward dimensions of faith, that is, between the rituals and spiritual purification.<sup>17</sup> There are many Sufi elements in the teachings of Fethullah Gülen as he is himself inspired by several Sufi masters. However, the movement is not a Sufi brotherhood, nor has it ever been a sect.

## Organisation and Financing

The bases of the movement are diverse service projects that are initiated, funded or conducted by people who are motivated to various extents by Gülen's humanitarian discourse. Though movement participants tend to refer to Gülen as "*Hocaefendi*", which means "respected teacher" in Turkish, he does not have a holy status. The movement does not have a central organisation or formal membership. It is much more like a loosely knit social network. This social network comprises many organisations and institutions that differ in the scope of their activity. They are independent of each other in financial and organisational terms, so the movement has no hierarchical or central structure. They mostly operate at the local level, and quite frequently people in this network do not all know each other. They establish project-based relationships as needed and sometimes collaborate on various aspects of their activities. All the establishments run by the movement participants operate within the legal and political system in place and respect the legal framework within the relevant state.

The projects and organisations sponsored by Hizmet are numerous, international and costly in terms of human and financial capital. Questions regarding the financing of these initiatives are periodically raised by critics and newcomers. While on occasion some people have raised the possibility of collusion with Middle Eastern governments, others are suspicious that Western government agencies are financially backing the projects. Aware of such speculation, Hizmet institutions are now more concerned about proactive financial transparency.

Gülen has never had personal wealth to be able to sponsor projects himself.<sup>18</sup> He has, instead, appeared at many fund-raising dinners and visited individuals to try to convince them to support projects. In time, the businesspeople and entrepreneurs who are committed to the ideals promoted by Gülen began to establish local circles to discuss how his vision could be applied in their local communities. Along with businesspeople, these circles also consist of many other individuals who would like to contribute to various Hizmet projects. These numerous local circles are indeed largely responsible for keeping the wheels turning financially for the initiatives undertaken by the movement.<sup>19</sup> These circles are responsible for managing and overseeing the financial resources received. Each institution has its own independent accounting system and is accountable to the local and state authorities as well as to the institution's sponsors. Along with the fund-raising dinners held by these circles, various projects are sponsored by Turkish or local entrepreneurs and organisations through in-kind donations, charitable contributions and underwriting.

In order to fully understand the financial structure and operation of the Hizmet Movement, it is

imperative to take into consideration the cultural-religious practices relating to philanthropy and charity in Turkish society and some Islamic concepts pertaining to a believer's financial duties. The Hizmet Movement is recognized for its success in construing charity in Islam in a modern and refreshing way, and in convincing Muslim believers to perform their financial duties in such a manner that they constructively contribute to the well-being of all.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the altruistic spirit of the participants and their acceptance of volunteerism as a key principle enable them to undertake many projects at below-market costs. It is evident that the contribution of the participants in the movement includes not only financial giving but also freely given sacrifices of time and energy, and intellectual and physical effort.



**Volunteers of Kimse Yok Mu, the major Hizmet-inspired relief organisation, distributing in 2014 prepaid debit cards to Syrian refugees living in Turkey, in cooperation with the UNHCR.**

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gülen himself does not approve of this phrase and prefers to call it a “movement of volunteers who gather around high human values.”

<sup>2</sup> Madrasas in the Ottoman Empire were higher education institutions that offered a wide range of studies. They were in some ways similar to present-day universities; however, unlike them, the ultimate objective of these institutions was to solidify and consolidate Islamic practices and theories.

<sup>3</sup> Both Edirne and Izmir are recognized in Turkey as multi-cultural cities that have been influenced most by the Westernisation process.

<sup>4</sup> *‘Alim* is an Arabic word that basically means ‘religious scholar’. In Islamic tradition, it refers to a scholar who is simultaneously well versed in several fields of Islamic sciences as well as in some other disciplines. *‘Alim* is moreover regarded as an intellectual and spiritual leader exemplifying how Islam ought to be lived in a given context. For more on Gülen and the *‘alim* tradition, see Enes Ergene, *Tradition Witnessing the Modern Age: An Analysis of the Gülen Movement* (New Jersey: Tughra, 2008); Ali Bulaç, “The Most Recent Reviver in the “*‘Ulama Tradition: Intellectual ‘Alim Fethullah Gülen*” in Robert A. Hunt and Yuksel A. Aslandoğan, *Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Among the Western authors and philosophers whose ideas and writings are addressed and reflected in Gülen’s writings are Shakespeare, Balzac, Zola,

Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Pushkin, Voltaire, Kant, Descartes, Rousseau, Russell, Camus and Sartre.

<sup>6</sup> His most recent speeches are broadcast on the website [www.herkul.org](http://www.herkul.org).

<sup>7</sup> Ergün Çapan (ed.), *Terrorism: An Islamic Perspective* (Istanbul: Işık Yayınları, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> F. Gülen, “Interview with Nuriye Akman,” *Zaman*, March 22-April 1, 2004

<sup>9</sup> Ihsan Yılmaz, “*‘Ijtihad and Tajdid by Conduct*” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, edited by Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), p.224.

<sup>10</sup> F. Gülen, “Interview with Leonid Sykiainen” in *Diyalog Avrasya*, No.28 (May, 2009), p.71.

<sup>11</sup> Alphonse Williams and Ali Ünal, *Advocate of Dialogue* (Virginia: The Fountain, 2000), p.151.

<sup>12</sup> “*An Icon of Universal Peace*” in *Weekly Cutting Edge*, June 21, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Michel, Foreword to *Love and Tolerance by Fethullah Gülen* (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2004).

<sup>14</sup> “*An Icon of Universal Peace*” in *Weekly Cutting Edge*, June 21, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Frances Sleaf and Omer Sener, *Gülen on Dialogue* (London: Centre for Hizmet Studies, 2014), p.20; Paul Weller, “*Fethullah Gülen: An Islamic Sign of Hope for an Inclusive Europe*” in *Today’s Zaman*, February 20, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> For an analysis of schools, for instance, in the Philippines see Thomas Michel, “*Fethullah Gülen as Educator*” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, 69–84; in Northern Iraq see Harun Akyol (2008) “*The Role of Turkish Schools in Building Trusting Cross-Ethnic Relationships in Northern Iraq*” in *Islam and Peacebuilding: Gülen Movement Initiatives*, edited by J. Esposito and I. Yılmaz (New York: Blue Dome Press, 2010), 289–316; and in Pakistan see Sabrina Tavernise, “*Turkish Schools Offer Pakistan a Gentler Vision of Islam*” in *The New York Times*, May 4, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Early Sufis represent the non-institutionalized form of Islamic spirituality that effectively seeks the internalisation of Islam through an ascetic and simple life style.

<sup>18</sup> “Gülen has carefully remained distanced from all financial involvements and instead has encouraged those who sponsor projects to oversee the use of their contributions. This stance has built trust and confidence in Gülen’s honesty and integrity” Yuksel A. Aslandoğan and M. Cetin, “Gülen’s Educational Paradigm in Thought and Practice” in *Muslim Citizens of Globalized World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* edited by R.A. Hunt And Y.A. Aslandoğan (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2007), p.47. In addition to never having any personal wealth, he strongly warns his relatives to remain poor so as not to raise any suspicions of their gaining from his influence.

<sup>19</sup> For more on the structure of these circles and their

financial function for the movement, please see Helen R. Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of A Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> See again Ebaugh’s *The Gülen Movement* (2010) for an explanation of these practices and concepts and how they are re-interpreted within the movement.

## Further Reading (chronological)

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## Further Information

**Fethullah Gülen's Official Website** — [www.fgulen.com](http://www.fgulen.com)

**Dialogue Platform, Brussels** — [www.dialogueplatform.eu](http://www.dialogueplatform.eu)

**Alliance for Shared Values, New York** — [www.afsv.org](http://www.afsv.org)

**The Journalists and Writers Foundation, Istanbul** — [www.gyv.org.tr](http://www.gyv.org.tr)

**Stiftung Dialog und Bildung, Germany** — [www.dialog-und-bildung.de](http://www.dialog-und-bildung.de)

**Dialogue Society, UK** — [www.dialoguesociety.org](http://www.dialoguesociety.org)

**Plateforme de Paris, France** — [www.platformedeparis.fr](http://www.platformedeparis.fr)

**Platform INS, The Netherlands**— [www.platformins.nl](http://www.platformins.nl)

**Dialog Forum, Denmark** — [www.dialogin.dk](http://www.dialogin.dk)

**Gülen Chair for Intercultural Studies at University of Leuven (KU Leuven)** — [www.gulenchair.com](http://www.gulenchair.com)

**Centre for Hizmet Studies** — [www.hizmetstudies.org](http://www.hizmetstudies.org)



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