Turkey's foreign policy focuses on the whole region rather than just looking at one country. (Davutoğlu 2001). According to Ibrahim Kalin, a chief policy adviser to the prime minister and director of the office of public diplomacy in 2011–2012,

> Turkey operates from a broad foreign policy perspective that combines elements of constructivist and realist approaches to global politics and international relations. Turkey projects its sense of identity and history into its regional and global engagements, seeks to pursue a value-based and principled foreign policy, and responds to the hard realities of power struggles and national interest. (Kalin 2012, p. 9)

As a result, Turkey's strategic position is reinforced by historical and cultural ties with its neighbours. Under the AKP government, we saw Turkey's gradual activation in regional politics in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus.

Kalin describes three principles of contemporary Turkish foreign policy: political and economic justice, the balance between security and freedom, and trade and economic development (Kalin 2012, p. 14). All three, to various extents, are related to soft power and can serve either as a source or an instrument thereof. These principles resonate with three dimensions of the AKP government's political strategy, highlighted by the political scientist Dietrich Jung (2012): adopting the discourse of human rights and democracy, abandoning Islamist rhetoric to mobilize broad political support for democratic legitimacy, and reaching out to liberal groups in order to achieve popular recognition (although recently there has been less emphasis on the last point).

The AKP government itself stresses four distinct foreign policy instruments: (a) engaging all political (including non-state) actors; (b) supporting democratic processes; (c) expanding economic integration; (d) increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communications (Kalin 2012, p. 17). All these instruments entail elements of soft power, and are implemented by government agencies as well as NGOs and business communities, actively involving non-state actors. During the last decade, Turkey has become a major soft power actor in the region that 'derives its strength from a young population, long historical ties, deep cultural relations, and a growing economy' and is 'grounded in the larger concepts of cultural affinity, historical companionship, geographical proximity, social imagery and how they create a sense of belonging' (ibid., p. 19). It is not surprising that Turkey has ranked in various soft power indices in recent years (e.g. Monocle, Portland), although it didn't make the most recent one, Portland's Soft Power 30 for 2016.[2]

As a soft power tool, religion has been an important part of the AKP's foreign policy strategy, which implied a more active role for Turkey in the Middle East and Muslim Eurasia. The regular use of Islamic symbols and slogans in foreign policies, as well as the open piousness of key AKP policymakers, is not a new phenomenon in the political history of republican Turkey.

Previous secular governments, even when attacking religion domestically, utilized Islamic symbols for their policies, with Sunni Islam being a central reference and an ideological resource (Jung 2012). Furthermore, despite all the de-Islamization and secularization policies of Atatürk, Article 2 of the first constitution retained Islam as the state religion until 1928. The end of one-party (Kemalist CHP) rule in 1950 and the following decade of Democratic Party rule was accompanied by a departure from some of the strict secularist policies of the previous decades and an increased role for Islam in Turkey that Jung called the 'post-Second World War Islamic revival' (Jung 2012, p. 32). This change was also evident in Turkey's foreign policy, which became more active in cooperating with Muslim countries while remaining a strong supporter and promoter of the interests of its Western partners (Sever 1998). For instance, Turkey played a prominent role in concluding the Baghdad pact between Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey in 1955. This same pattern of Islamization spurred by domestic interests combined with pro-Western foreign policies was continued by later governments as well, whether it was Kenan Evren or Turgut Özal.

The AKP government has continued and even strengthened this tradition of using Islamic symbols when needed. Some experts tie the new Turkish foreign policy to the Islamist nature of the government (Mufti 2011). Indeed, the AKP leadership came out of Erbakan's National Outlook, which is an Islamist movement (Bayat 2013), although it is obvious that the party's success is closely related to its departure from Islamism (Groc 2000). Only after partially adopting post-Islamist ideology and a political platform supported by the growing and institutionalized business community of Anatolia could the AKP turn into a mainstream political actor and gain national success as a centre-right Muslim conservative political party (Dagi 2013).

Although the AKP's foreign policy has been slightly more active with regard to the Middle East and has actively involved Islamic rhetoric and symbols, it has never really emphasized a solely Islamic identity in order to not compromise its partnership with the EU and the USA. As Jung aptly remarks on the domestic policy: 'Islam plays an important role in the party's domestic strategy to gain votes but it's not the party's only motivating factor' (Jung 2012, p. 36).

Having outlined the general aspects of Turkish foreign policy, we can more precisely examine Turkey's soft power policy towards Azerbaijan, which has involved non-state religious actors. Various Turkish organizations and movements have operated in Azerbaijan, with sometimes unclear relationships to the Turkish government.

Of Turkey's four major declared foreign policy instruments (Kalin 2012), we observe that three of them—(a) engaging all political (including non-state) actors, (c) expanding economic integration, and (d) increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communications—have been employed in the case of Azerbaijan. Only one, (b) supporting democratic processes, has not been observed. Thus, the Turkish governments have used soft power tools extensively for years.

Turkey has generally preferred to stay out of domestic democracy-related issues in Azerbaijan. Though some political leaders expressed concerns about the level of democratization in the country, Turkey did not strongly engage in the local discourse on democracy and never intervened in any form in the process of democracy-building. These matters have not been seriously included in any Turkish government's foreign policy agenda in Azerbaijan.

As far as engagement of all political actors is concerned, this may hold true for Turkish non-state actors, but the Turkish governments have avoided working directly with Azerbaijani political parties and NGOs, preferring to deal with the government or semi-government institutions. Turkish governments could, however, utilize Turkish movements and NGOs, including faith-based ones, to promote issues on their foreign policy agendas (e.g. Osman Nuri Topbaş, Mahmut Ziya Hudayi Foundation, Gülen movement). For example, followers of the Gülen movement used their connections in Azerbaijan to organize the visit of Prime Minister Erdoğan in 2003 and promote the AKP government. All the Turkish non-state actors cooperated with the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), when needed, to promote the Turkish version of Islam in Azerbaijan by holding joint events and coordinating their activities.

Expanding economic integration and increasing sociocultural and interpersonal communications can be considered the most important instruments of Turkish soft power. Trade between the two countries has been expanding, making Turkey Azerbaijan's second biggest importer and Azerbaijan one of Turkey's most important oil and natural gas providers (Kartaş and Macit 2015). Azerbaijan is also the second largest recipient of Turkish foreign direct investments, with Turkey being the largest investor in the non-energy sector (Yavan 2012, Kartaş and Macit 2015). In the meantime, Azerbaijan's national oil company, SOCAR, has emerged as a significant foreign direct investor in Turkey and is currently implementing several important investment projects there (Kartaş and Macit 2015).

Sociocultural connections and public diplomacy are effective and widely used tools of Turkish soft power in Azerbaijan. This was stressed by absolutely all the experts interviewed. Turkey has strongly utilized the linguistic and ethnic commonalities of both nations based on their shared Turkic Oghuz roots. These sentiments of "Turkic brotherhood" were more compelling than those of "Muslim brotherhood", due to the highly secularized nature of Azerbaijani society and sectarian differences (the majority of Azerbaijanis are Shi'as). Despite the religious cleavage between Azerbaijani Shi'a and Turkish Sunni Muslims, the Turkish government often makes reference to this sense of "brotherhood".

Turkish religious actors in Azerbaijan

Turkish religious influence, represented by state and non-state religious organizations headquartered in Turkey, has always been manifold in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. It has also played a crucial role in the revival of Sunni Islam in

religious influence has been more powerful in Azerbaijan than in other post-Soviet countries due to their historical, geographic, linguistic and cultural closeness.

The following paragraphs will describe the most relevant actors in order of importance. The most effective and successful was the Gülen movement, of Nurcu origin, which advanced Turkey's soft power globally for decades until the split and power struggle with the AKP government in 2013. There will also be an examination of the State Board for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (Diyanet), which has representation in Azerbaijan. Finally, the analysis will turn to other Turkish movements and communities such as the Mahmut Ziya Hudayi Foundation, Süleymancılar, the Osman Nuri Topbaş community, etc.

So-called Nurcular, the disciples of Said Nursi (1876–1960), were among the first to enter the religious field of post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Said Nursi had a strong influence on religious affairs in secularist Turkey, with his philosophy and teaching collected in a book called *Risale-i-Nur*. Opposing secularism and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's policies, he was arrested in 1935 and imprisoned for 11 years (Balci 2003, Şık 2011). Nursi's movement was a semi-secret, highly conspiratorial network of obedient followers and thus has often been considered a threat by the Turkish governments. Today, the Nurcular movement is divided into different groups. Most of them are involved in business, education and faith-based activism.

In practical terms, regarding Nurcular movements, the movement of Fethullah Gülen is the most powerful, elaborate and widespread group. Gülen managed to create a strong, vertically structured organization of devoted followers, focused on the legacy of Nursi as well as Gülen's own written works (Aliyev 2015). There are a number of characteristics that make it different from other followers of Nursi (e.g. Mustafa Sungur's group): a clear hierarchy, strict discipline, the presence of secret statutes and a focus on the media and business institutions rather than on religion (Balci 2003, Şık 2011, Keskin 2012, Aliyev 2012, 2015). For instance, the structure of the typical Turkish city-level cell usually consists of the following levels: *shagirdlar* (students), *uy* imams (five students and their leader), *semt* imams (association of *uy* imams based on urban district or educational institution), and *bolge* imams (head of district level). Students are recruited and controlled on the local level by *abiler* (brothers) or *ablalar* (sisters). According to the experts interviewed, the confidentiality of the network is crucial and must be maintained. The movement has huge financial resources feeding its social activities and political power both in Turkey and abroad (Aliyev 2015). It is the largest religious movement in Turkey apart from the Alevis, representatives of the largest religious minority (Alekperov 2012).

The presence of the Gülen movement in Azerbaijan goes back to the early 1990s when the movement opened schools and took a significant role in the social and educational life of the country. It was never directly involved in openly religious activities, and dissemination of Gülen–Nursi ideas only occurred implicitly through contact between students and instructors as

well as businesses (Aliyev 2015). Gaining influence with local elites helped the movement promote its values and more importantly obtain business and political support.

The Gülen schools did not have any serious problems with the Azerbaijani government until 2014, when they were shut down—presumably as a result of requests from the AKP government in Ankara, which was combating Gülen followers by all means and wherever possible (Balci 2014a). However, the AKP government has not been as successful as it may seem in its efforts to eliminate the Gülen schools, which can be considered the cornerstone of its expansion and influence. Azerbaijani journalist Mr. Aqil Alesger recently reported that the Gülen-related schools are still operating under new names and with new, supposedly local, founders. The Araz Courses have been reincarnated into multiple university preparation courses under different names, all related to the newly established Güven Printing House (which serves as the sole training material provider and testing centre for all of them). In addition, the staff of the shut-down *Çağ Oyretim* high schools are now involved in managing and teaching at the newly established *Istek Lyceum* network (Alesger 2016).

The Gülen movement is believed to have long-term goals, investing in its future by working with the younger generation. They offer solutions for absolutely all the problems their devout students may face—from education to employment and accommodation. Upon completion of studies, Gülen followers can get a job in the companies which are linked to the overall structure.

The Gülen movement can be organized into different circles, corresponding to different degrees of institutional commitment and adhesion to the values of Fethullah Gülen (Hendrick 2013). As illustrated by Angey-Sentuc (2015, p. 7) in Figure 6.1, the central circle is the *cemaat* at the core of the hierarchy.

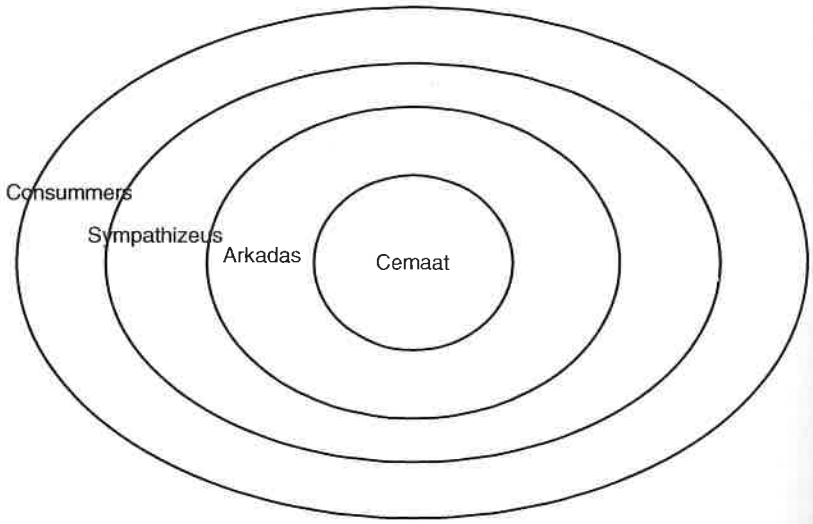

Figure 6.1 Different degrees of commitment and adhesion in the Gülen movement as presented by Joshua Hendrick (Angey-Sentuc 2015, p. 7)

The second consists of *arkadaşlar*, a large network of devout persons living according to Gülen's teachings. The third circle comprises sympathizers, including those who support the actions of the movement and participate occasionally in the movement's activities, but are mainly unaware of Gülen and his teachings. Finally, there are consumers who just buy products affiliated with the movement (e.g. education, business) for their consumer characteristics in a competitive marketplace. Thus, the Gülen movement, unlike all the others, has achieved a more sophisticated and not entirely identifiable network of support.

The late Mustafa Sungur, another famous Turkish Nurcu leader, also gained a significant following in Azerbaijan. His followers are students who get informal lessons on Said Nursi's works in private apartments in Baku and the regions of Azerbaijan, with some distinguished students and followers then sent to Turkey to continue their religious studies (Yunusov 2012). They run so-called *işık evleri* (light houses), where religious gatherings and discussions are held for existing and potential followers. However, this group has remained small with only limited influence.

The second most important organization active in Azerbaijan is directly related to the government of the Republic of Turkey. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has been extremely active in Central Asia, Georgia and particularly in Azerbaijan. It is a huge organization with the mandate to 'operate affairs relating the beliefs, worship, and moral principles of Islamic Religion under the law no. 633 of 1965' (Yildirim 2011). Operating under the Prime Minister's Office, and with a president appointed by the prime minister, the Diyanet has five main departments: Education Department, including Qur'an courses for children and adults; Religious Services, including family, discipleship, ritual, social and cultural services with religious content; Publications Department; Public Relations Department; and the Higher Committee for Religious Affairs, an advisory council (Diyanet n.d.). In Turkey, its functions are carried out by muftis and religious personnel, while abroad they are carried out by the special Diyanet religious counsellors, diplomatic attaches and other personnel.

It is not a surprise that since the conservative AKP came to power in 2002, the number of Diyanet personnel has increased from 74,000 to 117,541 and its budget has significantly increased (Yildirim 2011). Turkey has developed a special policy to foster Turkish-style Sunni Islam in the post-Soviet republics, especially Azerbaijan and other nations with a Turkic ethnic background. The AKP government has used the Diyanet as an instrument to increase its Islamic presence in the region (Raufoglu 2012). Like in many other countries, the Diyanet has been massively involved in the construction of mosques. It also publishes and disseminates large amounts of literature, funds the Theology Department at Baku State University and contributes to various other educational projects.

There are other Turkish movements active in Azerbaijan besides the Gülen movement and the Diyanet. Like the Nurcular movements, they are

sometimes Turkish nationality. The Mahmut Ziya Hudayi Foundation was established in the tradition of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. This foundation started its operations as early as in 1992, running half a dozen madrasas for high school kids in Azerbaijan. Another non-state actor is the network of disciples of Süleyman Tunahan (Süleymancılar) running informal Qur'an courses (Balci and Goyushev 2012). The community of Osman Nuri Topbaş of the Naqshbandi brotherhood runs Qur'an learning courses and a vocational school in Sheki, and a madrasa in Ağdaş. There are also some smaller Turkish movements present in Azerbaijan, like the disciples and supporters of the controversial and extravagant preacher Adnan Oktar or the religious scholar Mustafa İslamoğlu.

Regarding the integration of these actors in Azerbaijan, there is another important issue: their relationship with the Caucasus Muslim Board led by Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, which is the official Islamic representative and administrative institution in the country. This institution is not governmental but has been the agency to oversee Islamic affairs since Soviet times. The Sheikh ul-Islam represents the Shi'a majority while his deputy is Sunni. Certainly, the spread of Turkish Sunni Islam through both state (Diyanet) and especially non-state (Gülen movement *et al.*) channels has not been welcomed by the board. Over several years, Paşazadə repeatedly made public mention of some "Nurcu threat" alongside the "Wahhabi threat" (525-ci Qəzet 2014). Thus, while allowing cooperation with the Diyanet and some Turkish preachers in the field of religious education, mainly in the northern Sunni-dominated regions of Azerbaijan, the Shi'a-dominated Caucasus Muslim Board has always been sensitive about the threat of imported Turkish Sunni Islam to their form of religious practice.

The chart in Table 6.1 provides an overview of the Turkish religious groups active in Azerbaijan:

Table 6.1 Overview of active Turkish religious groups in Azerbaijan

Actor	*Capacity to deliver attractive messages to target audiences*	*Ability to adapt to local conditions*
Gülen movement	Given the secularized nature of Azerbaijan and cautious attitudes towards independent and foreign religious activism, the Gülen movement's secular humanitarian and educational messages worked well with the general public and the government. Its capitalist pragmatism and business activities on all levels helped to position itself not only as a friend of the nation, but also of the ruling elite.	Gülen integrated into the local conditions, avoiding all links to religious activism and operating purely as an educational, humanitarian and business network. It is playing by the established rules and has never challenged the status quo or criticized the government.
Diyanet	The Diyanet is an official Turkish state institution and has formal capacities to deliver its messages. Its target audience is limited to practicing Sunni Muslims.	The Diyanet integrated into the existing religious structures, cooperating with Baku State University and the official Islamic body, the Caucasus Muslim Board.
Süleymancilar	The capacities of the Süleymancilar comprise a limited number of training courses targeting mainly Sunni Muslims, especially in the northern regions.	The Süleymancilar could mainly adapt to local conditions by cooperating with formal and semi-formal institutions. There was some cooperation with the Caucasus Muslim Board in the northern regions of Azerbaijan.
Mahmut Ziya Hudayi Foundation	The foundation has a lesser capacity for influence, limited to a network of madrasas and humanitarian activities targeting the youth and more general Sunni audience.	The foundation could mainly adapt to the local conditions by cooperating with formal public institutions within the existing framework.
Mustafa Sungur community	The Mustafa Sungur community is limited to targeting young people through informal networks.	The community could not fully adapt to local conditions, operating mainly based on purely religious proselytism and subject to government interventions.

Regarding the capacity to deliver attractive messages to target audiences and the ability to adapt to local conditions, the Gülen movement and to a lesser extent the Diyanet could be considered the most effective transnational actors among the Turkish movements. While the Diyanet has been involved in more direct missionary activities, the Gülen movement has focused on education and business, promoting their version of Islam indirectly and informally through personal communications and networking. The key to this faith-based movement's global success is its seemingly secular positioning. The Gülen movement is the only faith-based movement that could have created its own educational and business empire, and run TV, radio and press institutions in Azerbaijan, where no other Turkish group has achieved so much influence.

The Gülen movement's successfully integrative strategy is aptly described by Turkish researcher Bayram Balci (2014b):

> [T]he movement adopted a unique action plan that largely surpassed the religious sphere to which previous organizations had limited themselves

> It opted to tailor its strategy to the customs, needs, and expectations of its host countries, determining references to religion and Turkishness on a case-by-case basis according to local sensibilities, the social and ideological environment, and the degree of openness and acceptance encountered on the ground, which may vary within the same country. As a result, unlike other Turkish Islamic movements, the Gülenists have never sought to build mosques and Islamic schools or to openly preach on Fridays. The Gülen movement refrains from such overtly religious pursuits even in Muslim countries in Central Asia and Africa, and in Europe and the United States its religious nature is almost totally obscured.

Until recently, most of the Turkish religious actors had cooperated with each other despite their differences and disagreements at home. However, the split between the government and the Gülen movement since 2013 has dramatically changed this status quo. The movement's deteriorated relations with its home country have negatively affected its relations with the host country and significantly undermined its success there. All the experts interviewed unanimously argued that the heyday of the Gülen movement is now history.

Turkey's changing soft power and the Gülen movement in Azerbaijan

Given the analyzes in previous sections of this chapter, I can summarize that the Gülen movement has been the most efficient Turkish religious actor in Azerbaijan, contributing the most to Turkey's soft power there. In the following section, I will concentrate on the changing situation for the Gülen movement as the most important Turkish religious group and soft power actor in Azerbaijan.

In looking back at some of the major Turkish foreign policy instruments formulated by Kalin (2012), such as expanding economic integration and increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communications, it is clear that the Gülen movement was a central pillar of this policy in Azerbaijan.

As far as economic integration is concerned, Keskin has labelled the Gülen movement as 'market-oriented post-Islamist' (Keskin 2012). Hundreds of different Turkish and local business enterprises are part of the network, either as active members and donors or as sympathizers. For example, the Azerbaijan International Society of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (TUSIAB) has been operational since 1994 as an umbrella organization for the movement's related businesses. However, not all members of this organization are related to the network. Due to pressure from the Turkish government after 2013, the organization has systematically fired Gülen's supporters.

The Gülen movement is also the most obvious example of the active and successful utilization of sociocultural connections and ethnic–linguistic kinship in Azerbaijan by a faith-based network. Its focus on education and humanitarian projects made it easy for two decades of Turkish governments

to gain from the positive image the movement created of a reliable, helpful and caring (Turkic/Muslim) presence in Azerbaijan. This fact was mentioned by all the experts interviewed during field work for this research.

The AKP government, like its more secularist predecessors, recognized the global influence of the Gülen movement and its beneficial role in enhancing Turkish soft power (Balci 2014b). The Gülen movement initially cooperated closely with the AKP, based on their common Islamic roots. For instance, the visit by Prime Minister Erdoğan to Baku in January 2003 was actually organized by a businessman linked to this community (Rohozifski 2016). The AKP and the Gülen movement shared the same social base and had similar ideas and objectives for years.

The activities of the Gülen movement were the most effective element of Turkey's soft power in Azerbaijan and globally, but suited the AKP only as long as the friendship between Gülen and Erdoğan lasted. Gülen followers in the Turkish security forces are believed to have played a crucial role in the so-called Ergenekon and Sledgehammer cases in 2008, when many Turkish army officers were arrested and the army was purged of Kemalist opposition (Rodrik 2016). While their common tactical interests made them both forget about their differences for some time, gradually the rift became more tangible and evident. As Balci argues,

> [T]he real reasons for the split are still unclear, but it seems that the Gülen movement increased its distance to the Turkish Prime Minister in order not to be compromised by his increasing authoritarianism, and even went on to criticize him. In turn, Erdoğan has accused the Gülen movement of posing an obstacle to his "reign" as its members became a political force in the country. This disjunction looks like a natural and inevitable separation between two groups that were unified through their opposition to a common enemy: the Kemalist establishment and its supporters in the Turkish military. (Balci 2014b).

After Erdoğan's campaign against Gülen's school network in Turkey, his followers from the security forces and judiciary effectively sought to undermine his government in late 2013, with charges of corruption against members of his family and his inner circle (Dorsey 2016). Erdoğan pushed back by firing thousands of judiciary personnel and police officers or moving them to other jobs, shutting down the investigation and increasing pressure on Gülen's religious, educational and commercial network (ibid.). This war between former allies reached its peak and possible denouement following the July 2016 unsuccessful coup attempt that was immediately implicitly associated with Gülen. Erdoğan used this opportunity to intensify his purge against supposed followers and sympathizers of his bitter enemy. Since then tens of thousands of people have been fired and arrested.

Although the Gülen movement has historically positioned itself as a social movement that integrates into society (Aliyev 2012, 2015), there has

always been speculation about its hidden agenda, and this speculation has been fuelled by the recent developments in Turkey. These developments—an attempted military coup for which the AKP government blames Gülen, as well as previous attempts by security and law-enforcement representatives to reveal corruption and misconduct in Erdoğan's inner circle—have demonstrated how deeply the movement penetrated the system of public administration, law enforcement and even the judiciary. The AKP government accuses the movement of attempts to build a "parallel state" in Turkey, and all of the experts interviewed for this research noted that a similar claim can be made for Azerbaijan.

The movement is somewhat reformist in nature, and there are some signs of it being partly elite-based and quite hierarchical (Aliyev 2012, 2015). Some experts actually claimed during interviews that the whole point of the group's activity is 'participation in the hope of controlling the state or shaping policies' with the goal to 'accommodate' and not 'integrate' in the long run. All the experts interviewed conceded to various extents that the Gülen movement could be practicing *taqiyya* (dissimulation of religious belief under threat, persecution or compulsion, permissible in Islam) in its operations. According to one expert, Dr. Ibrahim Ahmadov, the Gülen movement has managed to create a kind of society within society in Azerbaijan, which recalls President Erdoğan's rhetoric about the political and economic abilities of and related threats posed by Gülen's network.

The power struggle between Gülen and Erdoğan moved beyond Turkey into Azerbaijan in 2014, following the 2013 divorce between the movement and the AKP government and resulting in a weakened Gülen network. As described by Balci (2014b):

> Turning talk into action, the Prime Minister paid a visit to Azerbaijan less than one week after the Turkish local elections won by his party, and started his attack on the Gülen movement. Thanks not only to his pressure but also because Azerbaijani authorities had their own interest in doing so, the schools were placed under the control of SOCAR, the Azerbaijani State Oil Company. At the same time, some important movement figures were deported from Azerbaijan to Turkey.

Later these schools were disbanded and absorbed by the state *Zarifa Aliyeva* Lyceum network (Turan 2014).

In light of ongoing controversies in state–religion relations in Azerbaijan, with the threat of expanding Wahhabi terrorism and perceptions of Iranian religious influence, the Gülen movement had been positioning itself as the face of moderate, "politically acceptable" Islam. After the recent developments in Turkey, it is going to be hard for the movement to continue to claim apolitical intentions. The July 2016 attempted military coup accompanied by accusations against Gülen and the unprecedented purge of his alleged followers and supporters, as well as the Azerbaijani government's full support of

President Erdoğan in these activities, have buried all hopes and chances for the movement in Azerbaijan. Connecting Fethullah Gülen to terrorism and inventing a new label for the movement—FETÖ (*Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü*, Fethullah-followers Terrorist Organization)—pushed the hostility between the two former allies past the point of no return.

In the aftermath of the failed coup, Azerbaijan's private TV and radio company, ANS, had its license cancelled after announcing an interview with Fethullah Gülen, Qafqaz University was closed by its founders (affiliated with Gülen's network) and the newspaper *Zaman* was shut down.[3] Qafqaz University was later placed under the management of Baku Higher Oil School.[4] The new management fired about 50 Turkish professors and deans.[5] The Prosecutor General's Office also opened a criminal case against FETÖ in Azerbaijan in August 2016.[6] These developments demonstrate that Azerbaijan has decided to fully cooperate with the Turkish government in its fight against the now so-called FETÖ. This political decision is going to mark the end of the Gülen era in the country.

In general, religious affairs in post-Soviet Azerbaijan are still marked by the state's aspirations to control religious activity directly and absolutely. Islam is a part of the country's security discourse and can serve as an organizational framework for social mobilization, as was demonstrated by researcher Sophie Bedford with examples from Shi'a and Salafi movements (Bedford 2009). Our analysis has shown that this holds true for the Gülen movement as well (Aliyev 2015). Thus, the active operation of transnational, non-state and/or informal religious actors raises a red flag for the state, which is cautious of any alien and uncontrolled Islamic activism capable of mobilizing the masses. Since the Turkish case also demonstrated that the Gülen movement had infiltrated state structures, creating a "parallel state" capable of undermining the ruling government, the authorities in Azerbaijan could not help but have suspicions about Gülen's followers.

As a natural result of these developments in Turkey and Azerbaijan in the context of the Erdoğan–Gülen war, Turkish religious soft power, and consequently Turkish soft power in general, has been on the wane in Azerbaijan ever since. Thus, not only has the Gülen movement suffered by facing purges and losing support from official Turkish institutions and diplomacy, but Turkish foreign power has also lost one of its most important and effective channels.

Conclusion

The case of Turkish religious actors in Azerbaijan has demonstrated that transnational non-state religious actors operating across state boundaries can be a successful complementary soft power tool. While ethnic solidarity has been a much more important element for advancing Turkish soft power, Islamic rhetoric has also contributed to the more general messages of brotherhood.

Another important finding is the impact of domestic politics on the transnational non-state religious actors' operations in the host states. The example of the Gülen movement's weakening in Azerbaijan as a result of its conflict with the current Turkish government demonstrates the power of the political bilateral relationship over the religious connection. Otherwise successful Gülen followers could achieve public acceptance, and more importantly the acceptance of the ruling elite, by delivering an attractive message and adapting to the local conditions, compromising on many crucial items of the Islamist and even post-Islamist agenda. Other non-state religious actors from Turkey and even the state institution, the Diyanet, have not been able to achieve such success and expansion.

If checked against Turkey's declared foreign policy instruments (engaging all political actors, supporting democratic processes, expanding economic integration and increasing sociocultural relations and interpersonal communication), the Gülen movement has been active in all of them except supporting democratic processes, which was never really on the Turkish foreign policy agenda in Azerbaijan anyway.

The Gülen-affiliated organizations were active members of the civil society in Azerbaijan in terms of humanitarian projects and especially education. The Gülen movement contributed to the mutual economic relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, having the most significant presence among Turkish businesses in the country. Moreover, Turkish and local business enterprises are a part of the network either as active members and donors or as sympathizers under the TUSIAB umbrella. The Gülen movement was also an example of active and successful use of sociocultural connections and ethnic-linguistic kinship for Turkish soft power in Azerbaijan.

Finally, it should be noted that while the Gülen movement has suffered from losing the support of official Turkish institutions and diplomacy, and the heyday of the Gülen movement is now over, the loss has been mutual. Obviously, with the weakened position of Gülen's followers in Azerbaijan, Turkish foreign power lacks one of its most important and effective non-state channels. Given the importance of transnational non-state religious actors in pursuing effective soft power, this development can limit Turkey's soft power capabilities in Azerbaijan as well as in other countries where the AKP government might neutralize its former transnational ally. Turkey's soft power potential is currently in decline and it needs an alternative transnational non-state (or state) actor to replace the embattled Gülen movement.

Notes

1 The interviewees are the following persons: the Director of the Eurasian Center for Islamic Cooperation Organization Youth Forum; the former Deputy Chair of the State Committee for Work with the Religious Organizations, Dr. Elchin Asgerov; an independent researcher, Dr. Ibrahim Ahmadov; a Gülen school alumnus and journalist, Mr. Mammad Gulmammadov; a Gülen school alumnus and social activist Elchin Hasan; and a journalist on religious issues, Mr. Hilal Ali. Other interviewees preferred to main anonymous.
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