

NON-STATE AGENTS IN CONTENTIOUS POLITICS: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS OF SOROS' OPEN SOCIETY AND GULEN'S HIZMET MOVEMENT

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Introduction

International politics in the last three decades have witnessed a tremendous transformation in terms of multiplicity of agents and rigidity of structures in the international system. The aim of this paper is to review the impact of transnationally operating non-state agents (Gulen's Hizmet Movement and Soros' Open Society) on domestic political structures and social change in two countries (Turkey and Hungary) and discuss why in some cases contentious politics (tension and hostility of relations between these non-state agents and national governments) occur on what could be described as "authority challenge". Challenging official authority and power usually occurs when non-state agents are engaged with promoting agenda and/ or policy initiatives that run counter to state government policies. In such circumstances non-state actors can perform as opposition alternative, reaching the public and influencing its opinion. On grounds of protecting national security, governments counteract by initiating alleged prosecution against non-state actors' representatives, followers and supporters accusing them of state subversion activities and calling the public for unanimous support for the government against the "existential threat".

Illustrating this argument, the paper draws on empirical evidence presenting a comparative analysis of two cases that highlight specific features of confrontation and tensions between governments and transnational non-state actors. The cases refer to Hungary and Turkey and the confrontation in recent years between Orban's government in Hungary and Soros' Open Society, on one hand, and between Turkish President Erdogan and Gulen's Hizmet movement, on the other.

Conceptual framework

Ongoing globalization and the allocation of power to non-state actors such as the civil society or economic actors increasingly undermine national governments. Non-state actors have gained progressively more influence and even begin to

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supersede the state in some aspects of public life. In some cases, non-state actors offer policy entrepreneurship, brokerage or public watch-dog activities that national governments are often not willing or able to provide. (Geissel, 2006)

The debate on transnational politics has taken several stages. Keohane and Nye narrowed the concept of transnationalism to the international activities of nongovernmental actors directing attention to "the tremendous increase in the number and significance of private international interactions in recent decades and the much larger and diverse number of private individuals and groups engaging in such interactions". (Tarrow, 2005)

In the following sections I will first define the terms 'transnational social movement' and 'transnational network' and give an overview of the body of literature. Second, the two case studies will be described; and third, I will analyze the case studies according to the conceptual framework. Finally, I will summarize the findings and discuss whether transnational non-state actors could be efficient bulwark against government policies. My approach to studying transnational activism and social movements as non-state agents is theoretically grounded in the school of social constructivism.

Transnational Social Movements

Sydney Tarrow defines social movements not in terms of their "social change" goals, which they share with many non-social movements, but in terms of the kinds of actions in which they routinely engage – contentious politics, which can be defined as episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants. (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015)

Transnational social movements are socially mobilized groups engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders in which at least one actor is either a target or a participant. To be transnational, a social movement ought to have social and political bases outside its target state or society; but to be a social movement, it ought to be clearly rooted within social networks in more than one state and engage in contentious politics in which at least one state is a party to the interaction. This produces a definition of transnational social movements as "Socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interaction with powerholders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution, or a multinational economic actor". (Tarrow, 2005)

Networks are commonly "characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange" (Keck, Sikkink, 1999, p. 91). Transnational networks, in particular, are defined as being organized by civil

society and other non-state actors, in contrast to international networks which are comprised of state agencies. Transnational networks are often referred to as 'transnational advocacy networks' to reflect their specific composition as well as their issue-driven and value-driven objectives. Transnational networks – i.e., networks of non-state actors – engage in different kinds of activities such as lobbying or political mobilization. (Geissel, 2006)

Transnational Activist/ Advocacy Networks

As Keck and Sikkink define it, "A transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services". (Keck, Sikkink, 1998, p. 2, cited in Tarrow, 2005)

Transnational activist networks can reach into societies to intervene in their relations with their governments, international institutions, and multinational economic actors; the influence of TANs on these societies is hypothesized as encouraging domestic groups to adopt the norms, model their behaviors, and frame their claims around issues that are domesticated from international politics (Jacobson, 2000, p. 156, cited in Tarrow, 2005).

An institutional approach to transnational contention suggests several mechanisms through which domestic activists can find one another, gain legitimation, form collective identities, and go back to their countries empowered with alliances, common programs and new repertoires of collective action. We can identify at least four such mechanisms: brokerage, certification, modeling, and institutional appropriation. (Tarrow, 2005)

- **Brokerage:** making connections between otherwise unconnected domestic actors in a way that produces at least a temporary political identity that did not exist before;

- **Certification:** recognition of the identities and legitimate public activity of either new actors or actors new to a particular site of activity;

- **Modeling:** adoption of norms, forms of collective action or organization in one venue that have been demonstrated in another;

- **Institutional appropriation:** use of an institution's resources or reputation to serve the purposes of affiliated groups. (Tarrow, 2005)

Case Study: Contentious relations between President Erdogan and Gulen's Hizmet Movement in Turkey

Modern Turkish history is full of interwoven, stratified contradictions and controversies. Until recent times, the tension between the religious segments of society, which have had a different visibility and discourse within itself, and

the rigid secularism, which had long dominated Turkey, has had a long-lasting impact on Turkey's socio-political agenda. Outsiders were able to see the main and perhaps the only tension in Turkey through the contradictions between the religious and secularist segments of society. Having a deep-rooted history, this socio-political polarisation has prevented people from seeing the intra-group tensions, contradictions and controversies. (Kenes, 2018) One of these contentions develop within the so-called religious, or Islamic, segment of Turkish society, where Islamic values come into interplay with Islamist politics, and Fethullah Gulen Movement and President Erdogan's AK Party is a good example.

The **Fethullah Gulen movement** is a transnational Islamic social movement that professes the values of universal access to education, civil society, and peace, inspired by the religious teachings of Fethullah Gulen, a Turkish preacher who has been living in exile in the United States since 1999. The movement has no official name and is often referred to by participants as *Hizmet* (Turkish: "Service") or the *hizmet hareketi* ("service movement") or as a Sufism-inspired *cemaat* ("congregation", "community", or "assembly"). The movement's largest body is the Alliance for Shared Values. The movement has attracted supporters and critics in Turkey, Central Asia, and other parts of the world. It is active in education with private schools and universities in over 180 countries. It has initiated forums for interfaith dialogue. It has substantial investments in media, finance, and for-profit health clinics.

There are many contentious views on the Gulen movement. Despite its teachings that are considered conservative even in Turkey, some have praised the movement as a pacifist, modern-oriented version of Islam, and as an alternative to more extreme schools of Islam such as Salafism. But it has also been accused of having "global, apocalyptic ambition", a "cultish hierarchy"-and of being a secretive Islamic sect. Critics claim that it has cult-like structures and is pursuing a secret agenda, only pretending to be an open-minded education initiative with a moderate take on Islam.

Operating under the motto "build schools, not mosques", Gulen enjoyed the active support of Turkey's secular governments between 1986 and 1997. Tutoring centres, dormitories and universities sprang up, becoming the financial basis of the movement. The finances were managed by Kaynak Holding. Media companies, clinics and a bank – Bank Asya – were added as well. At the same time, wealthy business people opened more than 1,000 schools in 160 countries in the former Soviet republics, particularly in the Caucasus and the Balkans (Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia), as well as in Africa and Central Asia. These institutions offer a modern, secular education. Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported their construction, and the degrees were recognised by the Ministry of National Education. (Tinc, 2018)

Around the world, the Gulen movement functions as a global representative of conservative Islamic values and Turkishness. "Its goal is to spread the Turkish language and culture around the world," says Bayram Balci, a political scientist from the French institute Sciences Po. Its foundations, educational and cultural institutions in other countries are not only concerned with reaching the Turkish diaspora, but also cater to members of the host community. These people often have no connection to Turkey or the Islamic religion. In Western Europe and the USA, the movement focuses on the social advancement of disadvantaged people and interfaith dialogue with Christians and Jews, Balci reports. In the Caucasus and in Africa, Gulen supporters have founded businesses and taken part in economic cooperation. The AKP has also made use of these contacts. Between 2002 and 2013, the number of Turkish embassies in Africa grew from 19 to 34. "Gulen supporters were the vanguard of Turkey's soft-power offensive," Balci explains. (Tinc, 2018)

The Gulen movement is a former ally of the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP). When the AKP came to power in 2002 the two formed, despite their differences, a tactical alliance against military tutelage and the secular elite. It was through this alliance that the AKP had accomplished an unprecedented feat in Turkish republican history by securing national electoral victories sufficient to form three consecutive majority governments in 2002, 2007, and 2011. The Gulen movement gained influence on the Turkish police force and the judiciary during its alliance with conservative President Erdogan, which saw hundreds of Gulen supporters appointed to positions within the Turkish government. Once the old establishment was defeated around 2010 to 2011 disagreements emerged between the AKP and the Gulen movement.

The first breaking point was the so-called "MIT crisis" of February 2012. MIT is the Turkish Intelligence Organization, and the crisis of 2012 was interpreted as a power struggle between pro-Gulen police and judiciary and the AKP. Erdogan was reported to have meddling in internal affairs of the countries affected by the Arab spring after 2011. He used proxy organisations to influence political groups in those countries in order to carry out his interventions in the internal affairs of the countries he targeted. If there was no such organisation in the targeted countries, he formed brand new ones. As in the case of Syria, since he could not afford the cost of these illegitimate and illegal activities, which are solidly international crime, with legitimate money, he embarked on both national and international black money and bribery operations including laundering black money from the illegal oil trade conducted by Iran, which was under UN and US sanctions. (Kenes, 2018)

These illicit foreign operations of Erdogan were revealed, but he expected all segments of Turkish society, including the Gulen movement, to support these illegitimate initiatives. Finally, part of Erdogan's international dirty business

was exposed by the corruption and bribery scandal that became public on December 17-25, 2013 and by the apprehension of Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) trucks carrying weapons and ammunition to radical Islamist terrorist organisations in Syria in early 2014. (Kenes, 2018)

Being aware that the Gulen movement – where 10% to 15% of Turkey's population might belong to – gained too much power, Erdogan announced in November 2013 that he was closing the movement's tutoring centres. Just one month later, on 17 December 2013, the public prosecutor's office, which had close ties to Gulen, started a comprehensive corruption investigation against Erdogan and his associates. Shortly after, President Erdogan renamed the movement the Fethullahist Terror Organisation and declared that Gulen was the public enemy number one. (Tinc, 2018)

The Gulen movement started to distance itself from Erdogan and his AKP, which gave signals of returning to his political Islamist roots after the 2011 elections and of acting in line with the objectives of political Islamism both at home and abroad. This distance increased, as much as the AKP and Erdogan deviated from democracy and moved towards political Islamism. Because of this divergence, Erdogan launched a witch-hunt to annihilate the Gulen movement and halt the educational activities of the movement, which is widely known as a global educational movement. Erdogan has argued that the corruption operations of December 17-25, 2013 were a "coup" to topple his government despite the abundance of evidence related to corruption and bribery. He claimed the graft and bribery operations were carried out by police, prosecutors and judges who were close to the Gulen movement, and he embarked on the demolition of state mechanisms and the judiciary. (Kenes, 2018)

After the 2013 corruption investigations in Turkey into alleged corrupt practices by several bureaucrats, ministers, mayors, and family members of the ruling AKP of Turkey was uncovered, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan blamed the movement for initiating the investigations as a result of a break in previously friendly relations. President Erdogan accused Gulen of attempting to overthrow the Turkish government through a judicial coup by the use of corruption investigations and seized the group-owned newspaper Zaman (one of the most circulated newspapers in Turkey before seizure) and several companies that have ties with the group.

The process of democratization in Turkey, fully supported by the Gulen movement in 2003-2012, raised the prestige and credibility of Turkey in the world. However, developments in Turkey after 2013 Gezi Park protests and corruption scandal in 2013-2014 had ruined all democratic accomplishments.

Case Study: Contentious relations between Viktor Orban's government and Open Society in Hungary

The clash between Orban and Soros operates on many levels. It's about power and ideas and is driven by a strong personal enmity, one that even looks mildly Freudian given that Orban, once an idealistic hero of the anti-Soviet student-resistance movement in Hungary, attended Oxford University on a scholarship with support from the Open Society Foundations. (Herszenhorn, 2017)

Open Society Foundations (OSF), formerly the **Open Society Institute**, is an international grantmaking network founded by business magnate George Soros. Open Society Foundations financially support civil society groups around the world, with a stated aim of advancing justice, education, public health and independent media. The group's name is inspired by Karl Popper's 1945 book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.

The OSF has branches in 37 countries, encompassing a group of country and regional foundations, such as the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa; its headquarters are in New York City, US. In 2018 OSF announced closing its Europe office in Budapest and moving to Berlin, in response to legislation passed by the Hungarian Government targeting the foundations' activities. Since its establishment in 1993, OSF has reported expenditures of more than USD 11 billion mostly in grants towards NGOs, aligned with the organisations mission. (OSF, 2018)

Soros has promoted liberalism since before the 1989 fall of communism, funding education, scholarship and political movements. The incumbent ruling party in Hungary – Fidesz – of Viktor Orban also benefited and received support from Soros in the past. Under Orban however the party has abandoned its liberal origins, and eventually this led to animosity and breaking relations with Soros. Today Open Society Foundation funds independent journalism and supports NGOs combating corruption and discrimination, spending USD 3.6 million in Hungary in 2016. (Dunai, 2018)

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and his right-wing Fidesz party have for years been waging an escalating war against Soros and his Open Society Foundation. The Hungarian American billionaire financier and philanthropist and his foundation has been funding civil society initiatives in Hungary and across Eastern Europe since before the end of the Cold War, as well as programs in Hungary and across Europe aimed at supporting immigrants, minorities, democratic and inclusive politics. Orban and Soros have clashed over the 2015 European migration crisis. Ever since the migration crisis of 2015, Fidesz has been depicting the nation and Europe as besieged by foreigners (Donadio, 2018). Orban says Soros is out to undermine Europe's cultural identity while the billionaire has accused him of running a mafia state. (Dunai, 2018)

Orban has never revealed why he turned against Soros but the financier provides a convenient external threat against which Fidesz can try to mobilise its electorate. One theory is Orban was annoyed that Soros was partly funding groups that alleged Fidesz of corruption. Soros acknowledges that he took the "mafia state" label from the title of a book by Balint Magyar, a former education minister from a rival liberal party. Magyar argues that, while Fidesz hardly invented corruption in Hungary, the party has taken it to a different level, carrying out a form of "state capture". (Buckley & Byrne, FT.COM, 25.01.2018)

In late 1980s Soros was Orban's political mentor of sorts. As a liberal democratic crusader against communism and the Soviet Union, Orban, the future prime minister, attended Oxford on a Soros-financed scholarship. Soros was a major financial backer of Fidesz (the name stands for the Alliance for Young Democrats), which Orban founded with other pro-democracy student leaders in 1988. Soros even provided financing for a group called Black Box that made the documentary about Orban, which was part of a series on current affairs.

Their once common path split sharply when Orban transformed Fidesz into a center-right conservative party in the mid-1990s, a move that helped catapult him into the prime minister's office for the first time in 1998. He was forced out by subsequent electoral defeats only to win back the job in 2010. Since then, he has maintained a tight grip on power by shifting even harder to the right, in part to prevent being outflanked by the radical nationalist Jobbik party. Soros and other supporters of liberal democratic political causes have watched with dismay as Orban has adopted increasingly nationalist policies, particularly by putting up fences to keep out unwanted refugees and bitterly opposing the EU's efforts to resettle migrants across the continent.

The immediate issue is that Orban has vowed to pass so-called "Stop Soros" laws, which would require any groups working with migrants to get security clearance from the Interior Ministry before operating in Hungary, and would also put a 25-percent tax on any groups with foreign contributions. Under these circumstances, Open Society Foundation announced it's moving its headquarters from Budapest to Berlin. The foundation said it would still continue to operate in Hungary, although it's moving its administrative staff to Berlin. The fate of the Soros-funded Central European University, in Budapest, also remains unclear. (Donadio, 2018)

Charles Gati, senior research professor of European and Eurasian studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, said Orban's vilification of Soros fits a lifelong pattern of rebelling against authority figures: his own father and the Soviets, while growing up in the town of Felcsut in the communist era, and later against Washington and Brussels. (Dunai, 2018)

Comparative Table

Features	Open Society	Hizmet Movement
Leadership	George Soros, an 87-year old Hungarian-American billionaire businessman, liberal activist and philanthropist who funds civil society initiatives around the world	Fethullah Gulen, a 77-year old Muslim cleric and theologian
Mission and values	Supporting transition to democratic politics, liberal social transformations and civil society Creating elites to lead states	Promoting a reviewed version of Turkish Sunni Islam, non-antagonizing with the non-Muslim West; Professing Inter-faith tolerance and dialogue between civilizations; Creating elites to lead states
Education	Central European University (Budapest)	Fatih University (Istanbul); Network of tutoring centers, preparatory and boarding schools in Turkey and abroad
Media	No specific media outlet, supportive liberal media	Zaman Newspaper Samanyolu TV
Social activities	Open Society Foundation; Scholarships; Funding for NGO and civil society projects	Scholarships; Alliance for Shared Values; Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute; Journalists and Writers' Foundation; Intercultural Dialogue Institute; Kim Se Yok Mu Association
Supportive businesses/ Social base	Educated pro-Western liberal elitist groups and civil society organizations	Network of businesses providing regular financial contributions (TUSKON); Practicing Muslims, receptive of modern education and technologies
Involvement in contentious politics	Contending authoritarian and illiberal trends of Viktor Orban's government in Hungary	Contending unrestrained power of President Erdogan in Turkey

Government reaction	Hungarian Government restrictions on Central European University; taxation on contributions/ grants from foreign NGOs; restrictions on NGOs working with migrants; Claims for Soros-funded "plot" to bring down Hungarian government; Widespread resistance against Soros agenda; Playing the blame-game – Soros as a convenient "threat" to Hungary	Purge against Gulenist followers in Turkey after the alleged involvement of movement members in the attempted July coup in 2016; Nurturing widespread resistance against Gulen's supporters; Playing the blame-game – Gulen as a convenient "threat" to Turkey
Impact	Public influence; Negative international exposure of Orban's government	Public influence; Negative international exposure of Erdogan's regime
International backing	Open Society headquarters are based in the US	Gulen is kept in a "safe-heaven" in the US

Analysis of results

Both cases are exemplary for contentious politics. Gulen movement and Open Society are non-state actors which operate as transnational networks, promoting their values and establishing structures of opportunity and relations with state authorities and political forces in countries of operation. When there is a commonality of interests both non-state actors sided with and cooperated effectively with governments of Turkey and Hungary, respectively. However, non-state actors' authority rises domestically, and they maintain a wide range of social infrastructure and supporters beyond government control. Thus, national governments, suspecting them of having a secretive agenda of state take-over, start perceiving them as power-claimants and contenders and initiate repressive measures against them. Gulen movement and Open Society place a special emphasis on education, civil society and social activities, and in both Turkey and Hungary are accused of undermining government politics. In Turkey, Gulen movement was even alleged for running parallel-state structures. It is no surprise then that Erdogan views Gulen just as Orban views Soros as public enemy number one, fearing about one's power integrity. It is because Open Society headquarters and Gulen's present exile are in the US, both networks are suspected for being American proxies, acting under US patronage and pursuing US foreign policy goals. However, besides mere conspiracy theory speculations, there is no convincing evidence for that.

Yet, the two organizations differ a lot in terms of their social base, promoted values and channels for communication with the public at large. While Open Society Foundation is a liberal grantmaking platform for supporting civil society activities of various types with rather loose affiliation, it is reported that Gulen movement is a hierarchical network of strong allegiance and obedience, with business entities involved as well, supporting schools, media and community work with an outlook to conservative social values based on Islamic tradition.

Despite the differences of their profiles and mission, Gulen movement and Open Society are exemplary cases for contentious politics as they appear as challengers to state political structures and government authority and legitimacy.

Conclusion

Comparing the cases of Soros' Open Society controversy with Orban's government in Hungary and Gulen's Hizmet movement enmity with President Erdogan in Turkey illustrates the widening debate on agents and structures in international politics. Whereas governments as major actors and national political structures are still taken for granted, they start experiencing influences and pressures from non-state actors that perform in most of the cases as "agents of change" developing their own network structures. It is not that states functions and capabilities will diminish any time soon, but they will increasingly be nominal actors and will have to literally compete for public approval of their authority and legitimacy.

The two examined cases show that non-state agents can perform as bulwark against government policies by challenging government authority and power and questioning its legitimacy. By spanning network structures in areas like education and social and community service, transnational non-state actors will irreversibly gain credibility and authority and will thus persist contending governments in what they do in their policy agenda. It is exactly what non-state agents can achieve by claiming space for policy deliberations and civil society involvement in politics and policy-making.

Transnational activism of non-state agents brings governments out of their zone of comfort and undermines in various ways governments' efforts for overwhelming control on politics and societies by challenging their authority, legitimacy and power structures.

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Abstract

Although governments as major actors and national political structures are still taken for granted, they start experiencing influences and pressures from non-state actors that perform as "agents of change" developing their own network structures. It is not that states functions and capabilities will diminish soon, but they will have to live up with agents and structures that will persistently question and challenge their authority and legitimacy.

The aim of this paper is to review the impact of transnationally operating non-state agents (Gulen's Hizmet Movement and Soros' Open Society) on domestic political structures and social change in two countries (Turkey and Hungary) and discuss why in some cases contentious politics (tension and hostility of relations between these non-state agents and national governments) occur on what could be described as "authority challenge".

Challenging official authority and power usually occurs when non-state agents are engaged with promoting agenda and/ or policy initiatives that run counter to state government policies. In such circumstances non-state actors can perform as opposition alternative, reaching the public and influencing its opinion. On grounds of protecting national security, governments counteract by initiating alleged prosecution against non-state actors' representatives, followers and supporters accusing them of state subversion activities and calling the public for unanimous support for the government against the "existential threat".

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Key words: Non-state actors, transnational networks, contentious politics, Open Society, Gulen Movement.

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