



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The UK's Relations with Turkey](#), HC 615

Tuesday 15 November 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 15 November 2016.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Mr Mark Hendrick; Mr Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski, Ian Murray; Andrew Rosindell.

Questions 43-130

Witnesses

I: Dr Yüksel Alp Aslandoğan, Executive Director, Alliance for Shared Values, and Mr Özcan Keleş, Chair, the Dialogue Society.

II: Mr Ertuğrul Kürkçü, Honorary President of and MP for the HDP.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Yüksel Alp Aslandoğan and Mr Özcan Keleş.

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and to our inquiry on British-Turkish relations. Gentlemen, thank you very much indeed for making yourselves available to give us evidence today; particular thanks to Dr Aslandoğan for coming in from the United States to be with us. Could you both formally introduce yourselves for the record?

Dr Aslandoğan: My name is Yüksel Alp Aslandoğan. I am the executive director of the Alliance for Shared Values, which is a non-profit based in New York, with six regional local affiliates.

Mr Keleş: My name is Özcan Keleş. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Sussex, in human rights. I am a non-practising barrister, and I am the chairperson of the Dialogue Society. Mr Chairman, would I be permitted to make some perambular points in quick succession before we begin?

Chair: It depends how quick.

Mr Keleş: I can be super quick. I just wanted to thank the Committee for inviting us here, and to have it on record that we did not lobby the Committee to attend, but rather are responding to the request to be here. We are under considerable pressure, both as a movement and individually. We offer this evidence under that pressure, so if there is any incoherence, please press us, cognisant of that fact. We do not speak on behalf of Gülen, but we do believe that our evidence—both that provided in writing and, hopefully, oral—reflects the common Hizmet perspective.

Q43 **Chair:** Thank you. Obviously, we have received a significant submission that is associated with your position, but if at the end of today's session there are more things you wish to say, and there are things that have not been got across properly, I will give you the opportunity to submit more written evidence to us. There will be a Division at some time in our proceedings, which I anticipate will interrupt us for 10 to 15 minutes.

The Gülenists have suddenly appeared on the world's agenda. I suspect it was a movement not terribly well understood by anybody outside Turkey, and it might not be terribly well understood inside Turkey, either. I wonder if you could simply begin by giving us a sense of the organisation, and then say how the organisation relates to the wider movement of people who might be identified as more widely associated with the Gülenists.

Mr Keleş: We refer to it as Hizmet; Hizmet and the Gülen movement really mean the same thing. Hizmet is a Turkish word that means "service". Hizmet is an Islamically-inspired social movement. That is what we believe it is. It began in the 1960s in Turkey as a religious



HOUSE OF COMMONS

congregation in İzmir. By the 1990s, it had evolved into a nationwide educational movement in Turkey. From 2000 onwards, it had become a transnational civil society movement. Its main focus is on education, dialogue and relief work.

In terms of education, the movement has founded over 2,000 schools in over 160 countries and more Dialogue organisations. The genius of Hizmet is that it is faith-inspired in its motivation, but it is faith-neutral in its manifestation. In other words, it takes people who are religiously inspired, and channels that towards inclusive projects that do not target on the basis of ethnicity or religion, but target on the basis of wider society's needs. Its aim is to answer the central question: what does it mean to be a Muslim in the 21st century? How can we express our faith, which is true to the dynamics, core values and basic principles of our faith, but at the same time is cognisant of contemporary culture: democracy, human rights and secularism? Hizmet aims to provide a road map that allows us to be good Muslims, but at the same time good citizens, and to understand that these are mutually reinforcing. That is what the movement is, and you will have people within this movement who are core participants, who are inspired by it.

Q44 **Chair:** What is a core participant?

Mr Keleş: Somebody who is inspired and moved by it and believes that they should positively contribute to it in a way that they can. It is somebody who typically will give some time if they have it, or if they can't give time, they might support it financially. If they can't do that, they may do it through expertise. It is a very personal matter. Social movements are usually matters of personal affiliation. It is not a membership, a party, or a corporation, where you have clear membership. You don't have that. It is free entry and free exit. People who feel positively moved by it and want to support it will do, and people who don't, won't, and that is perfectly okay.

Q45 **Chair:** Dr Aslandoğan, you have acted as Fethullah Gülen's spokesman on occasion in the United States.

Dr Aslandoğan: That is an inaccurate specification.

Q46 **Chair:** Would you enlighten us as to what the accurate specification is?

Dr Aslandoğan: We call our organisation an authentic voice from within the Hizmet movement. Fethullah Gülen does not have a spokesperson. He speaks when he is able to and when he wants to. He regularly gives short talks that are published on the internet.

Q47 **Chair:** Perhaps I can move on to one of those talks. You have explained about the degree of anxiety that you feel in coming to give evidence. In those circumstances, you feel under pressure. You will obviously now get some questions that reflect that pressure. You have an opportunity to give some answers.

We had an explanation of your organisation sent to us in the wake of the events of 15 July from our opposite numbers in the Turkish Parliament.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

They wrote to us about your organisation. On the schools that you referred to, they said, "These schools have been the backbone of their recruitment although other qualified recruits were allowed in after a strict observation, adaptation, and dedication period. It has been illegally nested within state institutions by the human capital raised in their own schools and other educational institutions, where the network members were placed...via nepotist schemes. Thus, it managed to penetrate into state institutions through their disciples who were subject to religious and ideological teaching from the very early years of their education in cell-like formations. The disciples were raised as soldiers, police, prosecutors, judges, intelligence officers and teachers by illegally obtaining questions, answers-provided, before taking the specific 'entrance exams' to qualify for degree-specific University/College/Academy programs or before taking the specific selection/placement exams' for employment in state and public institutions. In this way, the Gülenists have been eagerly organized within politics, judiciary, education, bureaucracy, media, and business, whichever are relevant in the countries where they are active, without ever forgetting their loyalty to their roots and the spiritual leader Fethullah Gülen".

I want to juxtapose that evidence, which we received from the Turkish foreign affairs committee, with what I understand is an account of one of the messages from Mr Gülen himself. In one of his famous sermons in the late 1990s, he advised his followers to continue living incognito inside the veins of the state until enough power had been amassed. He said: "You must move in the veins of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centres...You must wait until such time as you have gotten all the state power, until you have brought to your side all the power of the constitutional institutions in Turkey...Until that time, any step taken would be too early, like breaking an egg without waiting the full 40 days for it to hatch." I am sure you are inordinately familiar with that quote, but possibly not quite so familiar with the challenge that has been made by our opposite numbers in Turkey, who invite you both to comment on the charge.

Mr Keleş: I will try to explain this as quickly as possible. The first part of what you read is the infiltration and parallel state argument, which is what the Government makes. When we hear the term "infiltration", we ask ourselves, "Why not the word 'integration'?" These words are very loaded and are used for a particular purpose. In fact, the words were used against our current President, Erdoğan, to keep him out of politics, by the previous regime, so it is important that we understand what the terms mean.

When you have 800 of the best schools in the country, as the movement had, and the rest of the education system is not so great, it is a statistical inevitability that you will have a disproportionate number of your alumni in the private and public sectors. That is just numbers. In this country, 57% of permanent secretaries are Oxbridge graduates. Are we suggesting that Oxbridge has created a parallel state here? The Turkish Government is taking something that is plausible—presence—because of the quality of the schools and the number of them, and conflating that with something else,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

called “parallel”. That is the huge problem, and there is no evidence to back it up.

Q48 **Chair:** Yes, but the problem is that it is juxtaposed with the statement of Mr Gülen in the 1990s, which gives the accusation legs, because what you are presenting is what he suggested people should do 20 years ago.

Mr Keleş: That is absolutely right, but I imagine that if I asked you—I wouldn’t—to read the paragraph above or below that extract, you would be unable to do so, and that is no offence to you, Sir—

Chair: No, sure. I confess I only read part of it.

Mr Keleş: Because the extract is completely decontextualised. There is no paragraph before or paragraph after. The extract is also made out of four sentences. Each of them was, perhaps, uttered by Gülen, but there will be dots in-between. They were put together; we don’t know what he said in-between. Fethullah Gülen was tried on the basis of the extract that you read, in a case that lasted from 2000 to 2006, by the staunchly secular judiciary in Turkey, and he was acquitted. Fethullah Gülen’s legal team asked the prosecutor for the extract to be expertly analysed. That was denied. Fethullah Gülen’s legal team asked for the context from which the extract was taken, and that was not provided. To this day, we do not have it; it is not available.

That is the case on which Gülen has been acquitted. The extract is decontextualised, and we know how decontextualised texts can be completely misrepresented. What does he mean by “you”? Who is he referring to? Who does he mean by “us”? What does he mean in-between those sentences? It is completely out of context.

As I said, the movement has 2,000 schools. They suggest that there are hundreds of these schools in the United States. If this movement was a nefarious, fundamentalist, infiltrating organisation, I don’t believe that the United States of America, with the greatest intelligence capacity in the world, would allow the movement to have schools there, as there are in other parts of the world.

Q49 **Chair:** Is there a full text that we can have?

Mr Keleş: There isn’t; we don’t have it.

Dr Aslandoğan: May I add a couple of things? First, within the movement, we prefer not to use, and actually dislike, the term “Gülenist”, because, first, it puts too much emphasis on one person. Secondly, we perceive the movement as a movement of values. Certainly that was my personal experience—it is the way I was attracted to the movement and became a participant—and for other people I know, it is the case that this movement stands for values, not one person. That person is very old now. He is going to pass away—maybe soon. But the movement will still be there to represent the same values.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

With regard to the excerpt, that has been brought to our attention many times before. Unfortunately, what is forgotten is that Mr Gülen faced questions about the excerpt in the past and he answered them, but nobody quotes his answers. In one of his interviews with, I believe, Mehmet Gündem of *Milliyet* daily many years ago—in the mid or early 2000s—he said clearly that he never had the purpose of taking over the state or changing the nature of the Turkish state and turning it into some other form of state. That was never his intention, and his comments were taken out of context. If I remember correctly, he was addressing a group of members of the judiciary who were suffering under a Minister who publicly declared discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. This group of members of the judiciary were planning some kind of an uprising—either violent or otherwise vocal rejection of the Minister. These comments were given in that context and were combined with other comments made in other circumstances.

When the video was first aired in Turkey—I believe in '98 or '99—two additional video segments were added to the excerpt you just read. One was a comment separately about the oratorical power of Atatürk, where Gülen was criticising Atatürk's oratorical skills. The segment at the end was about his experience as a child; one of his relatives was a midwife and he was talking about the difficulty of giving birth to a child. These three segments were patched together and aired on Turkish TV to give the impression that he is criticising Atatürk and then talking about painful birth; therefore, he is after taking over the state. That was clearly a doctored video and it was rejected by the courts. Again, for the record, Mr Gülen acknowledged Atatürk as a military and political genius in other talks.

Mr Gülen responded to those allegations and made it clear that he has never opposed a moderate form of secularism or democracy, or the republican form of Government.

Q50 Chair: What is confusing is that in 2006 the Gülenist movement—I use the word "Gülenist" rather than Hizmet or FETO, because "Gülenist" is at least neutral in the context in which you are under examination, with serious charges coming from Turkey about association with the events of 15 July. The infiltration into the judiciary would suggest that Mr Gülen was probably in quite good shape in front of the judiciary in 2006. The extent of infiltration into Turkish society, which ran alongside at that stage and was complementary to the objectives of the AKP—*[Interruption.]* I will have to hold it there while we go and do our democratic duty. Can colleagues be back for 3.30 pm, please?

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.



On resuming—

Q51 **Chair:** We are quorate; there are three of us. We will drift back in. It's 3.30 pm, so we will start again. Dr Aslandoğan, the point I was going to put to you and Mr Keleş is on this much-debated infiltrationist text, if I can put it like that, from Mr Gülen. When it was tried in 2006, it would have been the moment when the movement and the then ruling AKP were in lockstep. You might then suggest that the judiciary would have been rather unlikely to come with a negative verdict toward Mr Gülen at the time. Of course, what's happened is the breakdown of that relationship between the Gülen movement, or whatever name one chooses to give it, and the ruling party. That has obviously accelerated over the past three years or so, and I want to come back to that at the end of our session. I just want to put one more question to you: would the primary loyalty of people associated with that movement be to the movement or to the state?

Mr Keleş: On the comment that you made about the so-called alliance and how the judiciary perhaps let him off at the time, the case was from 2000 to 2006, so it was quite some time; it was not just within one year. The case was appealed and went to the highest court in the land, and Gülen's acquittal was upheld by the highest court in the land. That narrative of projected thinking would require Hizmet-inspired people, or the AKP people, to have then infiltrated the court of appeal—the highest court there—which clearly they did not. In 2008—

Q52 **Chair:** They might have known what side their bread was buttered; judges are not immune from influence.

Mr Keleş: Of course they are not—absolutely. What demonstrates that is that, in 2008, the judiciary in Turkey launched a case against the AKP to ban it, close the party and ban 70 of its leading members, including our current President and most of the Cabinet. If the AKP, or Hizmet people, were influential in the judiciary at the time, it is extremely unlikely that they would have initiated a case to ban themselves.

Q53 **Chair:** In the last question I put before I turn to Mike Gapes, perhaps I should be slightly more specific. If you are a civil servant and you are a Gülenist or Hizmet member or supporter, where is your first loyalty?

Dr Aslandoğan: As I mentioned in my first comments, the Hizmet movement is centred on certain values, including upholding the rule of law, patriotism and commitment to your country. Sympathy or support for the movement is not necessarily contradicting that; on the contrary, it is actually supportive of citizenship and being loyal to your Government. Therefore, if somebody shares those values—

Q54 **Chair:** Is loyalty to your country loyalty to your Government?

Dr Aslandoğan: Loyal to your country and loyal to your Government. Both of them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Keleş: If you are in a state position, or if you are a member of the judiciary, your loyalty is to the constitution and to the state, of course, due to the separation of powers.

Q55 **Mike Gapes:** First, following on from the answer you have just given, are members of your movement active in political parties across the spectrum in Turkey?

Dr Aslandoğan: To my knowledge, there are movement participants in almost every party. I am not able to say in every single party, but I know people who are affiliated with the major opposition parties in Turkey.

Q56 **Mike Gapes:** You mean the CHP—the Republican People’s Party?

Dr Aslandoğan: Yes. Not in great numbers, but—

Q57 **Mike Gapes:** And the nationalist MHP? Would they also be members of that?

Dr Aslandoğan: I know people who are sympathetic to Hizmet and also affiliated with the opposition parties.

Mr Keleş: May I just add to that quickly?

Q58 **Mike Gapes:** Before you do, what about the Kurdish party, the HDP?

Dr Aslandoğan: I know people who are sympathetic to Hizmet who voted for the HDP in the last election.

Q59 **Mike Gapes:** I was not asking about voting; I was asking about being members of the party.

Dr Aslandoğan: I have no knowledge of that.

Q60 **Mike Gapes:** I was told—I don’t know whether it’s true—that your movement was very hostile to the idea of the Kurdish identity and Kurdish rights. Is that true?

Dr Aslandoğan: There is an important question there. Religious questions have come up many times against Mr Gülen and other participants. The movement represents a microcosm of Turkish society. About 15% of the Turkish population are Kurds, and within the movement, approximately the same ratio of Kurdish citizens are participants. Therefore the Gülen movement has always supported the culture and rights of Kurdish citizens. In an interview with the BBC in 2014, Mr Gülen said that he was not against the peace process, or meeting people who needed to be met to resolve the terrorism problem.

Mr Keleş: Just very briefly, problems occur when we understand affiliation to the movement as membership. I understand why people might think that. It is a matter of sympathy. People will have sympathy with the movement—

Q61 **Mike Gapes:** So is it an ideology? If we were to say that it is not a party, but an ideology, would that be too crude a description?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Keleş: It is about values and an idea. It is about upward social mobility. It is about marrying religion with modernity. My point is that people can have sympathy with that. I know people who are Alawites who are Hizmet participants. I know people who are agnostic who have sympathy with Hizmet.

Q62 **Mike Gapes:** Okay. You referred to this in your earlier remarks, but the written submissions we have seen refer to the fact that the movement has extensive operations around the world, including in areas such as education and health projects. What relationship do you have with the UK and the UK Government? I must declare an interest, in the sense that I have met members of the Dialogue Society here, including in my constituency. I know that among the people of Turkish origin in London there are people who support the Dialogue Society. How extensive is the contact with the UK Government and UK institutions?

Mr Keleş: The movement in the UK is very small. As far as I know, there are about 15 organisations and charities that are associated with the movement in the UK. In 2013, we created a Hizmet consortium called VoicesinBritain.org. It has six members, and the Dialogue Society is one of them. There is one independent school founded by Hizmet-inspired people in the UK.

Q63 **Mike Gapes:** Where is that?

Mr Keleş: If you would permit me, I would rather provide that in private. The movement is small here, and our engagement with Members of Parliament is very limited, but whatever engagement we do have—when Members of Parliament speak at our events, and we have had Ministers speak at our events—has been on our website.

Q64 **Mike Gapes:** Do you have any relationship with any Government Departments?

Mr Keleş: No. We received funding, and I am just trying to think what that was. We received DCLG funding in 2009 and 2010 for a number of projects that we did. One of those was to look at dialogue in Islam from a theological perspective, and we published that. We have not received central Government funding or local government funding other than that. We do try to be as transparent and open as we can, but there is no other tangible link that I can think of.

Q65 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that in the United States, the Gülen movement has a huge network in education, particularly with the charter schools. You have not got the same relationship with free schools in this country.

Mr Keleş: No, we do not. There is no free school that I know of that has any affiliation or association with the movement.

Q66 **Mike Gapes:** How many schools does the movement have in the United States?

Dr Aslandoğan: To answer that question properly, we need to understand why people in the movement get involved in education and in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

what forms. Gülen's advocacy from the start has been about investing in education in different forms. For young people, it is about choosing careers and education. For wealthy people—

Q67 **Mike Gapes:** I understand that. Could you tell me how many?

Dr Aslandoğan: That results in multiple forms of engagement. It has been talked about in various circles that there are over 100 campuses that were founded by people sympathetic to the movement.

Q68 **Mike Gapes:** A hundred schools in the US?

Dr Aslandoğan: Campuses. Not necessarily different school systems or different institutions, but—

Q69 **Mike Gapes:** So there will be many more schools than 100.

Dr Aslandoğan: There are different categories of education institutions. There are several private schools that were founded by Hizmet-sympathetic people, and there are other people who have gone forward to be involved in the charter school movement.

Q70 **Mike Gapes:** So this will be a significant proportion of the US education system?

Dr Aslandoğan: By no means.

Q71 **Mike Gapes:** Give me a rough estimate.

Dr Aslandoğan: I have seen various media reports that talk about over 100 campuses, but that is by no means a significant proportion of the charter school movement. It is an important—maybe significant—but small element of the movement.

Q72 **Mike Gapes:** Okay. And in the US, is education the main focus of your operation?

Dr Aslandoğan: In the US, education is maybe the first priority. It is one of our three priorities, along with inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue and humanitarian relief. There is a relief foundation called Embrace Relief based in New Jersey. It was started only a few years ago, and it recently reached remarkable levels of support based on—

Q73 **Mike Gapes:** So that relief—you are raising funds in the US for spending in other parts of the world. Is that right?

Dr Aslandoğan: Yes, they are collecting funds from the US and spending those funds on projects like the Michigan water problem, the Houston flooding, a medical centre in Haiti and wells in Africa.

Q74 **Mike Gapes:** Okay. Is your work in Africa mainly focused, again, on education and health?

Dr Aslandoğan: Education and humanitarian relief, including health, but it is not limited to medical care; it is also about digging and maintaining wells and training professionals. There are various elements of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

humanitarian assistance. Some of them are more permanent; some of them are project-based and temporary.

Q75 Mr Holloway: You have this huge range of operations going on. How do you raise all this cash, and how much do you reckon you raise and spend a year?

Dr Aslandoğan: To answer that question, the general workings—the organisational structure—of the movement need to be looked at. Dr Elisabeth Özdalga, who was the director of the Swedish Institute in Istanbul some years ago, likened the movement to a collection of business, cultural and educational networks. We are literally talking about hundreds of NGOs. They have their own governance boards and their own fundraising meetings. There have been various estimates made, but I do not find those estimates meaningful.

Q76 Mr Holloway: It has to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, hasn't it?

Dr Aslandoğan: That would be a reasonable estimate.

Q77 Mr Holloway: How is the money raised?

Mr Keleş: Every year, there will be an event called a himmet, which is a fundraising event. Business people, professionals, teachers—whoever they may be—who feel positively inclined will come to this fundraising event, where the projects will be discussed and people will pledge whatever support they think they may be able to give throughout the year. This is usually organised once a year for each organisation.

Q78 Mr Holloway: And then you commit to regular giving. Is that right?

Mr Keleş: The people will commit if they want to, yes. It will usually be a regular donation to the relevant charity.

Dr Aslandoğan: It is usually an annual commitment. It is a promise to donate a certain amount of money within a year.

Q79 Mr Holloway: So what would the average be for a regular follower, as it were?

Dr Aslandoğan: Dr Helen Rose Ebaugh from the University of Houston did a study that looked into this. She is a sociologist who is well respected in her field. She travelled around Turkey and interviewed over 100 individuals, from blue-collar workers to middle-scale business people to wealthy business people, and she found that the range—the proportion or ratio—of donations varied widely. There is a culture of giving that everyone gives something, but in her case, for instance, three blue-collar workers came together to support one student with a scholarship, and she also met a wealthy businessman who was actually building a school by himself. It is a very wide range of donations.

Mr Keleş: But this is also predicated on the idea in Islam of charitable giving—zakat and sadaqah—so it is a part of the culture; it is not something that is foreign and new.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q80 **Mr Holloway:** Finally, do you have any well-known large backers?

Dr Aslandoğan: You mean corporate backers?

Q81 **Mr Holloway:** Yes, corporate, individuals or whatever.

Dr Aslandoğan: The largest corporate backers of Hizmet were large corporations in Turkey, including the largest manufacturer of furniture in Turkey, whose family members are now in jail. All of the assets of one of the mining and media companies were confiscated. They are estimated to be worth billions of dollars. He is in the UK and his assets have been confiscated, so the corporate donors are either at large, out of the country or in jail right now.

Mr Keleş: No longer corporate, basically.

Q82 **Ann Clwyd:** Your submission described an informal, loose network, but that does not really square with the organisation you are describing that is associated with dozens of schools, lots of media outlets, a large number of companies and billions of dollars in assets. Is there not a contradiction between those two things?

Mr Keleş: I believe, from recollection of what we wrote, that we described it as de-centralised. We would stand by that. It is not a hierarchical pyramid structure that you would find in a large corporation or a political party in that sense. On how the movement works and manages this, I have already mentioned inspiration. That is the engine that really gets people working, donating, supporting and helping.

There are also the teachings, which are not esoteric; they are actually quite practical. They will say things such as “open schools and dialogue”, and will say how one should do things. “Local decision making”, for example, would be one example. “Try to avoid confrontation and be conciliatory” would be another. It tells you what to do and how to do it, and that gives you a road map.

Then there are networks. Networks are operational in most social movements. These are basically informal social networks, which criss-cross the entire movement in various sizes and shapes, that the participants in the movements will tap into. We all have such networks as individuals, but these networks are a bit more instructive in the context of social movements. It is how information is shared, resources are discussed and best practice is shared among the participants.

Within the UK—to solidify the example—I mentioned Voices in Britain. There is also the Dialogue Society and Axis. There are various organisations. These are charities. The only organisation or element that is not there is the informal grassroots activism. That is an informal thing and you cannot see it, but that is because social movements are based on informal activism. Having said that, we have discussed this with colleagues here, and we are encouraging them to establish an organisation called sohbet society, so that they can be seen and be more visible.



Each of these organisations have their own hierarchies. As the chairperson of the Dialogue Society, I have a hierarchy in the Dialogue and Society, but none of those organisational hierarchies trumps the other. It is about discussing and working. That is why the movement becomes widespread—because it avoids the problems of bureaucracy. Anyone who wants to do something can find a place to do it, and that enables it to be expansive. But it is also why making decisions and getting everyone on board with things takes far longer.

Dr Aslandoğan: May I make a clarifying comment? When media reporters or analysts make estimates of how many donations are involved or how much money is managed by the NGOs within the movement, they confuse two kinds of financial assets. There are the assets of the NGOs, which are managed and owned by their boards, and could be considered legitimately as belonging to the movement. Then there are the business people, such as the manufacturer I mentioned, or the mining company owners. Those are their own private assets. They chose to support the movement, but they became wealthy by themselves, without the movement's involvement. They are just business people who chose to donate to the movement. Their personal or company assets should not be considered as part of the movement. That would be inaccurate.

Q83 **Ann Clwyd:** And you have, I think you said, 2,000 schools all over the world.

Mr Keleş: Approximately.

Dr Aslandoğan: Prior to the shutdown in Turkey. There were 1,000 in Turkey, but they are all shut down right now. Only half of them remain outside Turkey.

Q84 **Ann Clwyd:** Doesn't that need a great deal of organisation?

Mr Keleş: If we think in the ways that corporations and companies usually work, yes, but some companies work in latticed, flat-based ways. Social movements are actually based on that and that's where their strength comes from. But that doesn't mean that there are no organisations in the movement; there are. That doesn't mean that there is no co-ordination in the movement; there is. That also doesn't mean that there is no hierarchy in the movement; there is. The point is that there is no single structure that connects all the elements and creates a top-down, centralised—that is the wording I use—system. That is what there isn't.

Dr Aslandoğan: Let's think about the schools in Turkey. We talk about, and the media talks about, 1,000 schools. They are not really 1,000 separate, independent schools. In some cases, there is a single foundation that owns, let's say, 50 campuses, so there are not that many NGOs managing those institutions. All the schools used to belong to either a foundation or a private company. Their operations were as transparent as any other school in Turkey.



Mr Keleş: On that point, the schools will network among themselves. I am chairperson of Dialogue, so I will be networked with other Dialogue organisations that are Hizmet-inspired around the world. I will share. If by organisation, we mean co-ordination and discussions, there is that. What there is not is something that encapsulates everything and leads all the way up-down. That is what is not there.

Q85 **Ann Clwyd:** So, who is ultimately responsible for all these activities? Is it Gülen himself?

Mr Keleş: Gülen provided the motivation for it in the 1960s and '70s through his sermons, when he said we have enough mosques—we need schools and we need non-denominational schools. If we want to credit somebody for the idea, we credit Gülen for that. On Dialogue, he said in the 1990s that we need to engage in dialogue at an organisational level, people need to get involved, and that needs to be long-lasting, not just a one-off ad hoc project. So if we want to credit him for those things—in terms of being the brainchild—then perhaps we might. But Gülen consciously avoids becoming a CEO of an organisation where he is the one who pulls the strings, because it is not possible. We are talking 160 countries with thousands of these various organisations. It's like the United Nations—having that much reach and power. It is not possible. The people who found the organisations—the trustees, whoever they are, of the Dialogue Society or the Axis Trust—are the ones who are responsible, and then the CEO of those organisations. That's how it is.

Q86 **Ann Clwyd:** So who is the senior co-ordinator of the activities in the US and the UK?

Mr Keleş: That is what we are saying: there is no single person.

The UK example for me is clearer. We have VOICES in Britain. We declare who these organisations are. These organisations meet once a week or once every fortnight. All the organisations are there; the major London organisations are there. What isn't there, as I mentioned, is the informal grassroots activity. That is not represented on paper. But a person from within that realm of work attends.

What does that person do? That person does something called bölgecilik, which means community grassroots outreach. He or she does sohbet, which means religious circles and religious counselling. That is what these people do. The grassroots activism is a way of creating support for the other organisations—some of the people that they meet with will support the Dialogue Society—so it is an important part of what we do, but social movements are predicated on informality. The moment you formalise everything and the moment you have the power to formalise everything, it is no longer really a social movement, so it hasn't been formalised in that sense. Also, in Turkey, being a member of a religious organisation is still illegal, so there is a double incentive there not to go down that route.

Given the pressures and given the need to change somehow what we are, to make it clearer to people, we have been pressing on those who do this grassroots activism to formalise themselves into an organisation. People



HOUSE OF COMMONS

will look at something and they will often look at the thing that they think is less clear. The critics will often go to that department and say, "Ah. This is what it is all about." Actually, sohbet society has its hierarchy within itself, but it doesn't have hierarchy over us or over one another. There is no single senior person.

I know that that makes it difficult because of how we know things work, but really there are different ways of working. That is why this is called a social movement and why sociology has created this branch called social movements.

Q87 Daniel Kawczynski: If this organisation is a charity, why is it actively seeking members from the highest levels of Turkish civil society and military structures?

Dr Aslandoğan: I can give a historical background. For those who are familiar with the history of Turkey, Turkey has an official ideology, which is enshrined in its constitution, and for decades citizens who do not publicly embrace that ideology have been seen as suspects and discriminated against in hiring and promotion practices. This continued during the early years of Mr Gülen's advocacy for education. His point was that, as a religiously observant citizen of the country, it is also our constitutional right to be present in the Government institutions of our country. But unless we have our children, our youth, qualifying for those positions, we will never get that chance. This was the initial motivation: the representation and presence of a large segment of the society in the Government institutions.

Accompanying this advocacy of presence and proportional representation was upholding the rule of law, upholding the constitution and upholding the rules and regulations of the country. He was always clear in saying that, "If somebody is sympathetic to my views, if they disobey their superiors or in any way violate the laws or act in an unethical way, that is in contradiction to what this movement stands for."

Mr Keleş: It is about upward social mobility, as I have mentioned. It is important to understand the context in which Gülen was born and raised. In the 1950s and 1960s when Gülen began to preach, there were glass ceilings not just above you but to the side of you, where pious Muslims were encapsulated within certain professions and vocations, and Gülen's point was that as a citizen you have a right to be in other places. You cannot be just a patient who gets treated at the hospital; you can also be the doctor who does the treating at the hospital. You cannot be just the witness who comes to the court of law and is cross-examined; you can be the judge or the lawyer who does the cross-examining. Gülen's message there is all about upward social mobility and breaking—

Q88 Daniel Kawczynski: But you have to be a citizen of your country and respect the laws of that—

Mr Keleş: These people are. There is no law even now, today, and even in Turkey, that says that somebody who is a Gülenist cannot be a judge or a



lawyer. I must impress this upon the Committee. The term FETO is defamatory and unlawful, even in Turkey.

- Q89 **Daniel Kawczynski:** Let me take you back to the question the Chairman asked about loyalty, which is a very important issue. You are speaking in a very confident way, Mr Keleş, but when you have this huge organisation spanning so many countries around the world, crossing jurisdictions and trying to spread its influence and ideology in other areas, can you not see that some people might feel somewhat concerned or disturbed about that influence and how it might impact on some of the things the local Government is trying to do in terms of teaching children, educating them and all the other things they feel they have a responsibility to do as the democratically elected institutions?

Mr Keleş: I can see a problem there.

Daniel Kawczynski: You can?

Mr Keleş: Yes. But the problem with that is it goes both ways. The way to overcome that is full transparency and accountability, and to have transparency and accountability you need to have a stable civil society where discrimination profiling and controlling people do not happen. Where you have in Turkey the powers of profiling discrimination that are going on, you will have people who are reticent and worried about disclosing their identity. So, for example, the Alevi Turks: in the state structure, does an Alevi judge say, "I'm an Alevi judge"? Does the Süleymani, which is a different religious group that has participants, declare it? Armenian Turks: are they comfortable saying who they are? Jewish Turks: do they do it? Ultra-nationalists that have an ideology: do they? None. Why? Because the powers of profiling, control and discrimination persist. It is like Ahmadinejad, who said, "We have no homosexuals in Iran." Can we then blame a homosexual who applies for an office in the Foreign Office in Iran for not declaring his homosexuality? We can't, because the powers of profiling persist, and this causes a problem for us.

The movement tried to counter this. In 2012, it created a trade union for teachers and educators, called Aktif Sen. It said to public and private teachers and educators, "You can become members," and 36,000 people became members of this trade union within six or seven months. I imagine that that is something the Turkish Government would have encouraged, because there you have transparency—now you know. The Government forced the closure of the trade union in 2013, and now membership of it is used as self-incriminating guilt. So we cannot get to the bottom of it—this issue of ambiguity exists in Turkish civil society and the Turkish state structure because of these powers of control, the profiling and discrimination.

Dr Aslandoğan: If I may add just a little to your question, it is definitely considerable whether certain Governments might be concerned about such concerns as you have expressed, but I should remind the Committee that Hizmet movement has been around for almost 50 years now, and



educational institutions outside Turkey started to be established in the early 1990s—so in some countries they have been around for at least 25 years—and it is conceivable that they have been monitored by the intelligence services and law-enforcement agencies, but to our knowledge, no school or educational institution has been shut down for the kind of allegations that are now raised against the movement in Turkey.

Q90 Daniel Kawczynski: In many countries around the world you operate with no problems, but you can acknowledge that there is a particular problem in Turkey at the moment. Has Mr Gülen, to your knowledge, publicly dissociated himself from the attempted coup in Turkey? Would you encourage him to be more vocal about his condemnation of it?

Mr Keleş: Fethullah Gülen? Yes, he has. On the night of the coup, a statement put out by the Alliance for Shared Values quoted Gülen condemning it. Within a few hours, another condemnation was issued by Fethullah Gülen. So Fethullah Gülen has condemned the coup and denied his involvement. Over the following three days, on 16, 17 and 18 July, Fethullah Gülen gave three press conferences for the world's media where he answered over 40 questions put to him about the coup, and he denied it over and over again. In the following weeks, he issued further condemnation. So Gülen has said, "I have nothing to do with it," and "I have been persecuted by coup,"—the statement that the Chair read was used against Gülen by the post-modern coup plotters in 1997. Gülen himself has said that in the 1970s he was jailed following the coup, when so many people were put behind bars. So Gülen has said that he has suffered from coups, he was absolutely against this coup, he condemns it, he denies it and he called for an "international commission to investigate" this. He said that if they find "my involvement" or any involvement of the movement as an entity, he would not wait for extradition, but would buy his own ticket and fly out there himself.

Q91 Daniel Kawczynski: So my last question is, why is it that so many Turkish compatriots—and, actually, independent witnesses from the United Kingdom whom we have already witnessed here—and other people feel that this movement has been involved in a coup?

Mr Keleş: We have become, sadly, a convenient scapegoat. This is, sadly, how our Turkish Government operate. During the summer 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey, as I think you will recall, when there were nationwide protests that started after the removal of a piece of parkland in central Istanbul, the President, who was then the Prime Minister, said that they were the result of the planning and masterminding of the international "interest-rate lobby", which is a euphemism for the Jewish lobby. He said that the domestic partners of this international interest-rate lobby were the Koç conglomerate—the Koç conglomerate produces the Beko washing machines that Boris Johnson, our Foreign Minister, loves so much, and which are in fact a good product. The Prime Minister said that the Koç conglomerate was the domestic partner. Within Turkey, the Turkish Islamists believe the Koç family to be of Jewish descent—that is rumoured among the Islamists there—so he is creating this narrative to be able to undertake draconian measures. This is how it operates.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

So now we have become the favoured scapegoat. There are a number of reasons for that, one of which is that the movement, a bit like the HDP, refused to support the President's bid for an executive presidency when he was putting that out there. Secondly, the movement became increasingly critical of President Erdoğan and the Government from 2010 onwards, and Erdoğan wants to silence critics, as we see happening today in Turkey. We then have political Islam versus civil Islam. Erdoğan has reverted back to this instrumentalisation of religion in politics and, in his view, he has to monopolise and colonise—that is how he has constructed political Islam—and as a credible alternative voice that provides a different world view on these matters, we become a group that needs to be silenced and removed.

Also, one of the reasons is that we fulfil the "everywhere effect" illusion so well—I mean, we are so good for that. What I mean is that on the night of the coup, organised by members of the military, within six hours 2,750 members of the judiciary were removed. How did he do that? He did that by using us as the scapegoat. Before the purge, we had so many schools around the place and there were so many TV networks, so the idea that the movement was everywhere was a plausible illusion. He would go from one sector to another sector, and we would allow him to do that because of the impression that we had given prior to this purge. So there is that, and of course he genuinely does believe—I believe—that the corruption scandals that broke out in 2013 were—

Chair: We should try to get this session finished before we have another division.

Q92 **Mr Hendrick:** Were Gülenist prosecutors involved in helping the AKP to remove hostile figures in the military and the judiciary after the AKP first came to power?

Dr Aslandoğan: I will give an initial answer. During the trials, following 2008, of military officers, there were different perspectives on those trials in Turkish society and within the movement as well. As far as I and my friends in the movement were concerned, we supported those trials on the principle that there had been military coups in Turkey and there had been disappearances and torture cases—Diyarbakır prison, and there is one prison in Ankara where leftists were allegedly tortured. There were such cases and disappearances, but despite these coups and all the human rights abuses not a single officer faced a civilian court. Our support was based on the principle that if there are these allegations and accusations, the alleged officers should at least face the court. That was the principle; however, in the execution of the trials, apparently there were violations of individuals' rights. At that time, some of my friends in the media and intellectual circles objected to those, but unfortunately there was not an outcry within the movement against those excesses of the trials. That is what I can say.

Q93 **Mr Hendrick:** So it is a yes. Did Gülenist prosecutors target the AKP with corruption allegations in 2013? Also, did the prosecutors attempt to have Turkey's intelligence chief arrested in 2013?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Keleş: The—

Chair: Let us—Dr Aslandoğan, if you could.

Dr Aslandoğan: Unfortunately it is not possible to answer those questions right now, especially the first one, because those cases were closed down. The prosecutors in charge of the probes were first removed from the probes, then removed from their offices and then jailed. The whole process was shut down. Many other judges, prosecutors, police officers and detectives were imprisoned. That whole process was shut down, so we will never know the answer, unless—

Q94 **Mr Hendrick:** You might not know the facts, but what is your belief? What do you believe?

Dr Aslandoğan: I have not seen evidence of those processes going beyond the rule of law by the international standards.

Mr Keleş: Also, some of these cases were backdated two years. The narrative that has been created is that there was something that was going well and then it broke down, the AKP moved against the movement and the movement then initiated these corruption investigations. Well, they started two years ago; we found about it—collectively, as the world—in December 2013, but they did not begin in December 2013.

There is also a memo that was issued by the national intelligence services to the President, who was then the Prime Minister, to say, "There is a certain individual with whom your Ministers have unhealthy relationships. This will cause a headache for you." The Government have inadvertently admitted to the authenticity of this document by now trying the journalist that leaked it for leaking state secrets. The fact that there was corruption—this document by the national intelligence services was sent to the Prime Minister eight months before this. Furthermore, Reza Zarrab, the gentlemen around whom most of these corruption investigations circulate, is now being tried, on the very basis of these corruption investigations, by the United States Attorney.

With projective thinking, when we go back and try to look and project the movement on to this, anything can be projected on to it, but we have to then look at it independently and say what the evidence is. The Government would have us believe that in 2009-10 the movement arrested 1,000 Kurdish Union politicians to prevent the peace process from going on. That is what the narrative was. We now know, don't we, that that is impossible because President Erdoğan micromanages and is a very strong leader. Do you think the movement's police officers could arrest over 1,000 Kurdish politicians associated with the KCK?

Q95 **Chair:** I wonder whether you could get to the question Mr Hendrick asked, which is quite narrow. Did Gülenist prosecutors target the AKP with corruption allegations in 2013? Yes or no.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dr Aslandoğan: This is a question about the intentions of the prosecutors. We cannot say anything about their intentions. We have to look at their actions.

Q96 **Mr Hendrick:** Were they supporters or sympathisers?

Mr Keleş: If you are asking, Mr Chairman, whether it is possible, of course it is possible.

Q97 **Mr Hendrick:** No, I am asking whether you believe that is the case. Were they Gülenist supporters?

Mr Keleş: No. I do not believe that because that buys into the narrative that the Gülenist people have infiltrated the police, the judiciary, the political establishment to a degree, and the media so that they can pull something like this off. I don't find that plausible at all. It is likely this was investigated by a group of people who had begun this from before, not knowing how far it would go, and found them where they were. Saying yes to that question accepts the narrative, and I find the narrative to be not plausible.

Q98 **Chair:** Let's finish with a narrative and see what your comments on it are. It is fairly plain that from 2010 onwards what had previously been a close relationship between the AKP and the movement began to collapse and the narrative would be that in the attempts of Gülenist-minded prosecutors to go after the intelligence chief in 2012, followed by going after the AKP itself for corruption within the judiciary—

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: Let's resume the session. These are the final questions to the witnesses from me. I was putting to you the narrative—I invite you to see how far you go with me on it—that the relationship between the AKP and the movement was pretty positive and co-operative pretty much up until 2010. There was an alignment of interests, particularly about the potential threat by Kemalists, who are being brought to justice in the trial, as you mentioned. That would have been supported by both the movement and the AKP itself. Are you with me so far? Is that a reasonable proposition?

Dr Aslandoğan: I do have my comments on those premises.

Q99 **Chair:** But it is broadly the case?

Dr Aslandoğan: I would like to say that the reason the AKP received the movement's support was the premises in their party programme when they first ran for election: extending human rights and freedoms, stopping Government profiling of citizens and moving in the direction of the European Union.

Q100 **Chair:** But I think you said that from 2010 onwards their positions began to diverge, and quite seriously so in 2012 and 2013. Mr Hendrick put questions about the association of the Gülenists with the prosecution of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the cases against people close to Mr Erdoğan in the AKP for corruption and, of course, the attempt to prosecute the intelligence chief. At that point, relations became entirely fractured between the movement and the Administration. That is when the Administration began to go after the movement quite heavily. Is that a reasonable description?

Dr Aslandoğan: I think it is partially true and partially inaccurate. You have to remember that the movement dates back to the '60s, and multiple political parties received the support of movement participants before the AKP was formed. They received the support of movement participants for the same reason, by and large: they promised to further democratise Turkey, expand human rights and freedoms and move Turkey in the direction of the European Union, which is seen as a guarantee of the consolidation of Turkish democracy. In the early years of the AKP, the reason for the support was the same, and when the movement split with the AKP, the reason was also the same. AKP policies eventually culminated in a sharp U-turn. They began to diverge from the original premises and they culminated in a U-turn from their initial premises. The insistence on the Executive presidency was a milestone event. That was not known publicly until it was mentioned publicly, but it was going on behind the scenes.

Q101 **Chair:** So the movement has broken with the AKP and has organised itself as a kind of secret society, for the reasons you explained about the nature of Turkish society. People are not entitled to be religious. It is important to have a religious affiliation, but that would be career limiting, to put it mildly. Over the period that the movement has been around, it has over-compensated, in terms of keeping its identity secret and the lack of transparency about who belongs to it, particularly in the military and the senior ranks of the civil services and the judiciary. There was then a culture of promoting people within the movement into key positions. The movement then came under critical pressure in 2013, 2014 and 2015, with the rhetoric being wound up by the Administration against the movement. That finally led to the movement deciding to roll the dice, and you rolled the dice on 15 July.

Mr Keleş: I understand the premise—

Dr Aslandoğan: We do not accept this premise.

Q102 **Chair:** I didn't think you were going to sign up to it. I am inviting you to tell us what is wrong with that.

Mr Keleş: Did the movement support—was there an ideological alliance? No there was not. The movement's position on the EU, freedom, human rights, democracy and whatnot has always been clear, and it has always opposed identity politics and political Islam. That is from very early on. The movement has always been of that view. The movement did not come closer to the AKP; the AKP was formed on the rejection of identity politics and political Islam and came closer to the movement. That is point one.

Point two is that the AKP came into power in 2001 of their own volition, out of the political dynamics that were prevailing at the time. Most of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

mainstream parties could not get into the Parliament. They got the vote. It had nothing to do with the movement's support whatsoever. The movement then supported them for the first two terms; that is correct. It supported them through their media—through Zaman and through the TV—and most of the participants would have gone along and supported that as a result of the kind of coverage they saw in the media associated with the movement. That is correct. But that is also the time when the religious minorities in Turkey were supporting them, when some of the liberals were supporting them and when the EU and the US were endorsing them. That is the point.

The movement then realised that our President had particular ambitions, disagreed with him on that and said, "We're not in favour of this"—not necessarily in a literal way, but none the less that point was made on the issue of the Executive presidency. Our former Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, has seen what happens when you don't fully 100% support the Executive presidency: you are removed. The HDP party, about whom I think you will be hearing later on, were engaged in a peace process with the AKP—a very important and good peace process—and has found itself now with its leaders in jail because it has opposed predominantly this Executive presidency. So the movement's position there, for the reasons I explained earlier, has diverged. It was against the authoritarianism.

Q103 **Chair:** But you are then under the cosh of an increasingly authoritarian Government. Your people are being identified. You talked about the education trade union that people had joined.

Mr Keleş: Correct.

Chair: And then there is obviously a certain amount of discomfort among Kemalists—

Mr Keleş: And others.

Q104 **Chair:** And others, about the direction Turkey is taking, which is very controversial. This Committee was very critical of the direction of Turkish policy when we published a report in February this year. What then happened was that on 15 July, the movement, with any other allies it could find, rolled the dice in a last-ditch effort to rescue itself and, in its own eyes, Turkey from this Administration.

Mr Keleş: The problem with that—

Chair: Let Dr Aslandoğan answer.

Dr Aslandoğan: Our organisation actually prepared a document, sharing perspectives of either observers or intellectuals on what happened during the coup in Turkey. We do not have the full knowledge of what really happened that night. There are certain objective things, like our condemnation and denial of involvement, consciously, by Mr Gülen and his associates. But the exact nature of what happened and who was involved is not clear to anybody besides people who are keeping—



Q105 **Chair:** Who do you think it was? That is my final question, because we need to get on.

Dr Aslandoğan: We have shared the perspectives that we find reasonable in our document. These are independent experts based in the UK and the United States, and it talks about the possible groups and possible segments of the military who might have been involved. We shared those perspectives in our document, based on the expertise of those individuals. We find that reasonable.

Chair: Thank you both very much indeed for coming to answer the Committee's questions today. We are very grateful for the trouble Dr Aslandoğan took to come from the United States, and Mr Keleş, thank you very much for your evidence.

Examination of witness

Witness: Mr Ertuğrul Kürkçü.

In the absence of the Chair, Ms Clwyd was called to the Chair.

Chair: Mr Kürkçü, hello and welcome. I invite my colleague Mr Hendrick to put the first question.

Q106 **Mr Hendrick:** Will your party's recent decision to withdraw from parliamentary politics after the arrest of many of your colleagues serve the national interest?

Mr Kürkçü: That information is not correct, because we have not withdrawn from parliamentary politics. What we have said is that we have suspended our work in the Parliamentary Assembly and with the commissioners. We have not withdrawn from our work as deputies or from other parliamentary work, but because of the unacceptable violation of the right of parliamentarians to speak—through their arrest—we have reacted by suspending our work in the Assembly. Therefore, that information should be corrected.

Q107 **Mr Hendrick:** By "suspending your work in the Assembly", do you mean not taking part in debates or asking questions of the Government?

Mr Kürkçü: Yes, because in our opinion—and in actual fact—parliamentary work does not only mean working in a law-making factory; it also means conveying people's sentiments and ideas to Parliament. Therefore, we have carried on our work among the masses—that is our major work—but this is temporary; we are going to decide with the people how to progress from here.

Q108 **Mr Hendrick:** I agree with you, and it is the same for British MPs: our work goes on outside Parliament and the Chamber. What do you think the HDP's next move will be? Where will it go from here, particularly if your organisation has any more people arrested?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Kürkçü: I would like to answer your question in this direction: we are not living under normal or usual conditions. A parliamentarian in jail is an oxymoron. Parliamentarians cannot be in jail, and the parliamentarians of a whole party cannot be in jail. This is not something that we should have to fight against on our own; this should be a major issue, both domestically and internationally, which is why I am here, and why I chose to respond to your questions. I wish for the democratic community of the globe and the democrats of Europe and elsewhere to stand by us, so that we can overcome this unacceptable, unlawful, illegitimate, unconstitutional crackdown on our party, which is without any level of justification.

Q109 **Mr Hendrick:** We are of course very glad that you are here to give evidence to us. I am sure that you and your colleagues will make as much noise as possible about this outside Turkey. We are obviously concerned about whether the Government in Turkey have an effective Opposition. How effective can you be if you are not speaking in Parliament and in the public eye?

Mr Kürkçü: In terms of both Government and the Opposition, I will repeat what I said previously: we are in an extraordinary, unusual and abnormal situation. In theory, a political Opposition party criticises the Government, observes its actions and takes political opposition, but now in Turkey we have an abnormal situation in which three parties have come together to form an inner Parliament, in order to exclude HDP from inter-party relations. The main Opposition is part of this tripartite inter-parliamentary regrouping in the Turkish Parliament. One of the parties in the Parliament, which had 6 million votes in the 7 June elections and is the sole representative of Turkey's oppressed Kurdish community, is sidelined, and the main Opposition party comprises one of the members of this extraordinary, unusual and illegitimate inner Parliament. What is missing in Turkey is not good rulers, but a good Opposition. Rulers can be bad. Rulers can violate laws and democratic principles, but the security bulb for the public is a good Opposition rising to its feet to defend people's rights. Unfortunately, other than the HDP, the other Opposition groups in the Parliament are not acting in that direction.

Q110 **Mr Hendrick:** You have obviously suspended your activities in Parliament, but are you getting any recognition or traction with the Turkish media to get your case across?

Mr Kürkçü: This is the second set of problems. Actually, we have one Turkish media, with hundreds of TV channels and hundreds of newspapers and printing houses. For all of those, the head writer is Tayyip Erdoğan, the anchorman is Tayyip Erdoğan, and the senior columnist is Tayyip Erdoğan. The Turkish media is under the total control of the Turkish Government. The basic agreement is that the HDP is going to be made unseen, unheard and unfavourable. If HDP is in the papers or on the TV screen, it is just to belittle or defame it. No objective reflection of any policies or politics of HDP is covered by the Turkish media. The Turkish media are now part of the Turkish Executive branch. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: I am sorry, but we have to stop for a Division. Some of my



HOUSE OF COMMONS

colleagues may wish to vote.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: We will press on. Sorry for the interruption.

Q111 **Mr Hendrick:** We were interrupted by the bell; I apologise for the interruption. Just a final question: how do you see the future? I know it is very difficult, and you are in difficult circumstances—probably circumstances your country has not seen before, or for quite some time. Are you optimistic?

Mr Kürkçü: It seems very difficult, not only because we have a very tough struggle to get on, but also because the rules of the struggle have been unpredictable and are changing every day. What we are passing through is not an emergency case only; the projection by the Turkish ruling elites is to build up an emergency-case republic. This is the most difficult issue to overcome. Let us say there is, in inverted commas, a “normal” country, with a Government inclined to be totalitarian, but the people and institutions are so solid that sometimes it can be corrected by the checks and balances of the system itself, but now the first thing that has been ruined in Turkey is the checks and balances mechanism. The judiciary is in disarray. The Executive has taken control of every institution, including the academy, the banks, the media—even sports organisations. All that is public is now centrally commanded.

Of course, under these circumstances, you cannot make easy predictions. Our President has a proverb of his own, that the world is bigger than five—criticising the UN Security Council. We say that the world is bigger than one, so that international solidarity and the dedicated struggle for democracy will somehow balance this situation; but for this we need a very open and clear-cut analysis of the situation, not only domestically but internationally. Therefore, if the international community does not barter democracy for profits and benefits, we can do our job inside; but not if strategy concerns—the concerns of energy, roads or waterways—overcome the concerns for human rights, the rights of oppressed peoples, the right to determine the future of the people, and the right to self-determination of nations. The hierarchy of those values starts from human rights, not from the right to profit. Then, inside Turkey, in the mid-term projection, we can correct the situation in a democratic manner.

We try to refrain from a pessimistic perspective, but we should admit that the situation is tough.

Q112 **Mike Gapes:** Mr Kürkçü, I want to go back to before the coup and ask you about what happened during the election campaigns of 2015. Your party suffered some very serious attacks on its offices, there was violence against your party members and there were lots of terrible things done at that time, including bombings of rallies and other activities. Who do you hold responsible for those attacks? Who do you think was responsible for the attacks on your party?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Kürkçü: I am sure that our party is not, because we have pursued a peaceful, democratic, inclusive and participatory line from the start. We have approached all the grassroots of the political parties equally. We have addressed them as friends. We have not incited hatred among people. We have not encouraged violence as such, either for legitimate or illegitimate purposes—I make no distinction between them. But it started, and the root cause was the overthrowing of the negotiations table. If there are no negotiations, you open up space for fighting, and you cannot determine from the start who is going to fight or how.

Q113 **Mike Gapes:** Who do you think actually carried out the attacks? Which group or groups were responsible for the attacks on your party?

Mr Kürkçü: Those attacks were perpetrated by mobs mobilised by Government agencies.

Q114 **Mike Gapes:** So you think it was planned and organised by the Government?

Mr Kürkçü: Yes. They were not spontaneous. The basic evidence is that they started at a certain moment one night and they simultaneously ended two days later, leaving behind 400 premises and branch offices ruined. It is obvious that without the support of nationwide mobilisation such a mob campaign could not have been pursued.

Q115 **Mike Gapes:** Were some of the attacks organised by Daesh?

Mr Kürkçü: Daesh attacks are of a different type. We were targeted in an attack by Daesh in three instances. The first was two days before the 7 July elections in Diyarbakır, the second was on 24 July in the Suruç district of Şanlıurfa and the third was the Ankara attack. All of them were committed by suicide bombers and were obviously related to IS. The Government prosecution has already brought up abundant evidence that those who committed these attacks were under police surveillance. They were followed by police—they were known persons. That is another question. Yes, those who blasted themselves—the suicide bombers—were IS people, so why were they not prevented if they were being followed?

Q116 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask you about the policy and the aspiration of the HDP? What do you want for the Kurdish community—the Kurdish minority? Do you wish to have an independent state, or are you simply arguing for an autonomous region within Turkey? Linked to that, do you have aspirations for a pan-Kurdish federation or some association of the Kurds in Turkey with the Kurds in Syria, the Kurds in Iraq and the Kurds in Iran?

Mr Kürkçü: I should go step by step. The first thing is that our party is a joint party of the Kurdish liberation movement and Turkey's left and democratic forces. Our party pursues a policy for all citizens of Turkey.

Q117 **Mike Gapes:** Not just Kurds?

Mr Kürkçü: Not just Kurds, but Kurds are the biggest group. They have been denied identity rights in Turkey, and therefore our party is gathering



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the majority of its political energy from the Kurdish struggle. There is no doubt about that, but what we are demanding for Kurds we are also demanding for other nationalities and other parts of Turkey. We are demanding democratic autonomy for the provinces and a democratic republic for the nation.

What does it look like? I would cite your own example of Britain. What the Kurds demand, theoretically, is no more than what the Scots are demanding for themselves or what the Welsh and Irish are demanding.

Q118 **Mike Gapes:** Sorry, what the Scots are demanding or what the Scots have? Scotland has devolution, but there are many Scots who demand something more than that.

Mr Kürkçü: You and I know that they continue demanding. However, an independent state for the Kurds of Turkey is not in our programme and is not in the programme of the Kurdish movement. We have a very open, transparent programme, and therefore we are not dealing with the other parts of Kurdistan. Yes, we know that Kurdistan is divided into four. There are other parts of Kurdistan, but we are responsible for the part within Turkey's territory. We demand democratic, autonomous administration for that territorial area and self-government for every province, including the provinces of the Kurdish people and the provinces inhabited by the Kurdish people.

Q119 **Mike Gapes:** Thank you. Some members of your party and one of your joint leaders have relatives who are linked to, or are members of, the PKK. What is the relationship between the HDP and the PKK?

Mr Kürkçü: This question is very easy to answer, and it is also difficult. Both the PKK and the HDP derive their energy and popular support from the Kurdish people. I underline that if we do not analyse the Kurdish insurgency correctly, we could arrive at weird conclusions. To make a long story short, the Kurdish people who vote for the HDP may have daughters and sons fighting in the mountains. It is not rare for large Kurdish families to have every sort of political tendency among them. Therefore, yes, it may be the reality that the brother of our political leader, Demirtaş, may be in the mountains, but that does not determine the direction of our politics. Some brothers make different choices. Some of my brothers do not follow me.

Q120 **Mike Gapes:** Okay. Taking that a step further, the British Government produced a document a few months ago that says that the HDP and the PKK are separate organisations with different goals. But we've had in our own history a relationship in Ireland between the IRA and Sinn Fein, who were "inextricably linked"—that was a phrase used at one time—and one was perceived to be a political wing of another organisation, which was involved in armed struggle, as they defined it. Is that the same kind of relationship that the HDP and the PKK have?

Mr Kürkçü: No, the historical context is totally different. The HDP is the outcome of the relatively democratised conditions, particularly between 2011 and 2015, but the PKK was there since 1984, so the HDP's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

complexion is very much different from the Sinn Fein/IRA relations. Those were purely Irish organisations, but ours is very much different. Those with conflicting or different interests cannot be commanded from a totally military perspective.

Q121 Mike Gapes: Do you as an organisation—as the HDP—condemn or condone the PKK's current armed campaign?

Mr Kürkçü: We do not take this dilemma, as such. We analyse the situation as a historical insurgency with historical roots. And during this insurgency, the PKK might have committed violent acts. They have resorted to violent tactics, etc. And condoning or condemning these does not make any difference in the context of the struggle. Our particularity is that we could have an equal distance, both to the Government and to the PKK, and if we had resorted to the police officer's language, we could never do that.

Q122 Mike Gapes: So I take it that you are not prepared to condemn the PKK. Is that because, as you've said, you come from the community that also has people who are fighting with the PKK and therefore you are unable to, or is it because you don't wish to for political reasons?

Mr Kürkçü: No, this is not the situation. It's not that simple, because I'm not Kurdish. No one in my family is—

Mike Gapes: No, not you personally; I'm talking about your party.

Mr Kürkçü: Yes, our party is also based on a multi-ethnic background, so this is not the major issue. The major issue is this: is the insurgency rising out of historical conditions, or is this the violence of an isolated group? When we look at Turkish history, it has a history of successive Kurdish insurgencies. Therefore, there is a very deep root cause, like in the heartland of Kurdistan. This is the crux of the matter. We cannot concentrate on discussing the matter of the insurgency.

The second question is this: what are the channels, other than violence, for the Kurdish people? Since 1 November 2015, all of the channels for democratic opposition have once again been closed down. We spoke about our party situation. If you jail the members of a political party in prison, the others will think that there is no political way out. We should discuss it in a historical context.

Q123 Mike Gapes: I understand. I have one final question. If we go back to 2015, your party did well in the June elections. Then the ceasefire ended, the PKK returned to violence and you did less well in November elections, and the AK party—Erdoğan—got their majority back again. Is it not clear that the action that the PKK took at that time was damaging to the peaceful political side? Should they not therefore be criticised for that, because that was one of the main factors in where we are today?

Mr Kürkçü: We can criticise everybody, but we will first start from the Government itself.

Q124 Mike Gapes: I accept the Government may be criticised. My question is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

specifically about the tactics and how you go forward. If the return to violence by the PKK has actually damaged your political alliance and the political process, surely you have to recognise that and say it has?

Mr Kürkçü: I will give you some other figures to make for a better analysis. Since 1 November 2015, the political, voter support for HDP has not changed, and it has even increased in the last month. It is never less than 11%. If we could relate everything with what the PKK was doing, we should have already lost ground.

Q125 **Mike Gapes:** But you were at 13% in June, and then in November you lost support.

Mr Kürkçü: No, what happened is this: people deserted the AKP ranks and came to the HDP, particularly among the Kurdish public, who are not staunch HDP followers. Under pressure from the Government, they changed their attitude and believed that, if they voted for a stronger Government, their situation could be changed in a positive way. Tayyip Erdoğan's policy was to threaten the public with instability. Therefore, factors other than the PKK violence were decisive in this manner. That might also have affected it, but it is not the major issue. I would not say that it doesn't make any difference; it affects people. When people die—when they are killed; when they are carried in coffins back to the villages where they were born—you lose the hearts of people. We don't want that. We wished, we asked and we urged for a truce, but it was only for a short period of time. Of course, fighting, killing and violence detracts people from open politics.

Mike Gapes: Okay, thank you.

Q126 **Chair:** Mr Kürkçü, there are various stories about why the ceasefire collapsed at that time. What is your version of it?

Mr Kürkçü: My version, which is also our party's version, is that, actually, the only political force that directly benefited from the negotiations process was the people. Both Turkish and Kurdish people benefited very deeply from the truce and the ceasefire, and that was the happiest period in the past 30 years. Everything flourished politically and economically in the Kurdish area. But those whose lives changed positively did not thank Tayyip Erdoğan for this; they cast their votes for the HDP. This made the negotiation process a very costly process for the Government; it was even considered in Government circles that making peace was much more costly than making war. In a very unprecedented manner, one day we heard that the negotiation period was over. Why? Because there is no Kurdish question as such. This is how it happened.

Just one month after the declaration of mutual understanding and the deepening of negotiations on 10 points proposed by Öcalan, the negotiation process was overcome. We now understand that this idea of throwing over the negotiating table had been in the minds of Turkey's military and political rulers since 2014. We understand from a leaked report from the public security Department that the Government and military circles had already laid out a crackdown plan, in the spirit of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sri Lankan counter-insurgency strategy, for the negotiations to be stopped and the Kurdish dissent and their strongholds to be liquidated by sheer force. What we have witnessed since 1 November strictly fits this scheme, and we are still witnessing the unfolding of this plan.

Therefore, I would like to say that for Turkey's establishment, for the Kurdish issue to be solved with Turks and Kurds on an equal footing cannot be accepted. This was not how the framework was constructed. Equal rights and equal relations with the Kurdish people and sharing power with the Kurds on a national scale was not accepted. But the Kurds would not accept less, because they have made a lot of strides—a lot of gains—that they would like to keep. The municipalities have already become strongholds where the Kurdish will has been expressed. I believe this situation forced the Turkish establishment to quell the Kurdish progress in a brutal manner and deny the Kurds all the rights that they had gained, de facto or in law, so that they would never raise the issue of equal opportunities in the future. That is how I interpret the situation.

Q127 **Chair:** Can I ask you whether you feel that you could or would play a role in reviving the peace process?

Mr Kürkçü: This is a difficult question to answer, because the HDP is demonised and stigmatised so much by the totally controlled media and the Government agencies. Maybe in the hearts of the Kurdish public and our own voters, the prestige of the HDP is what it was one year ago, but among the western public—people living in big cities, towns and metropolitan areas in Turkey—question marks might arise in the minds of people, and we have to remove them. Without having equal opportunities and a better democratic situation, we cannot speak about peace. The first step is to improve the democratic situation. The second step is to derive lessons from the mistakes we might have made. We are aware that we are not angels. Of course we might have committed some mistakes, but we still do not have an advantageous situation to make cool-headed decisions. I hope we can. Looking at the situation mathematically, without taking the HDP back into consideration, we cannot make any parliamentary or democratic change in Turkey. Either you get rid of HDP, or HDP gets rid of undemocratic practices. This is shown by history.

Q128 **Chair:** You yourself are an elected MP. How many of your Members of Parliament are in jail or likely to be in jail in the near future?

Mr Kürkçü: Actually, 59 of our Deputies are facing the threat of being jailed. We cannot say that those who have been jailed have been jailed under just trial conditions, therefore any one of us can be in this position. Already, 12 Deputies are in jail. There were 15 under detention on 4 November. Three of them were released. The remaining 12 are in prison, and the appeal for release was rejected yesterday¹. So they are going to be in prison at least under pre-trial detention until the day of the trial.

¹ Correction by the witness: Already, 10 Deputies are in jail. There were 13 under detention on 4 November. Three of them were released. The remaining 10 are in prison, and the appeal for release was rejected yesterday.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I would like to say to all of you and, over your heads, to the international public that all the charges directed against our Deputies and comrades are because of some statements, speeches and addresses that they have made—no acts, as such, and no act of violence or contribution to violence could be raised. That is partly because of Turkey's vague anti-terror laws. Those vaguely worded, written and constructed laws give the prosecutors and the rulers every chance to broaden their charges, starting from a single word. If you say that Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK who is now in jail, is a very good analyst and has a lot of potential to contribute to Turkey's democratic development, that can be evaluated as praising a terrorist leader or making so-called propaganda for terrorism; that is seven years. Many of us are charged under such indictments, therefore anyone can be in jail at any time. There is no condition of just trial in Turkey for the time being.

Q129 **Chair:** Would you say there is a climate of fear in Turkey presently?

Mr Kürkçü: People fear, yes, and that will continue until they feel free from fear. People are frightened—that's correct—but there is still opposition going on everywhere under very disadvantageous conditions. When looking to Europe—maybe you saw that last weekend in London very big crowds were protesting against the pressure, but you can imagine that, in the hearts of the people in Turkey, the marches are made in their houses. If they are not on the streets, it does not mean that they are not protesting against the existing situation. The human rights violations are so cruel that people think twice before taking action.

Q130 **Chair:** Are you concerned that the conflict involving the Kurds could spread into south-west Turkey?

Mr Kürkçü: You know, violence is epidemic. Yes, it can, but it mustn't. I fear that the situation is becoming fragile. Not only the Kurds, but the Turks as such, who have different aspirations than the Turkish rulers, are in such a difficult situation that presently they are choosing to emigrate from Turkey. Many educated professionals, academics, lawyers and white-collar workers have been seeking asylum across Europe and the United States, not because they have any criminal conflict with the Government, but because the promise of the present Government in Turkey is to set up a nation that is not bound by universal principles but is narrow and strictly bound up with past values, without any future for those with a dissenting opinion.

When all those issues start to ferment, there can be any sort of struggle anywhere. That is what the Government fears. That is why the Government does not want to lift the emergency case rule. It was declared for three months, and a second three-month period is now in progress. When asked when it is going to be lifted, the President says, "Why should we lift it? It is working very nicely." That makes the emergency case an ordinary case, and no one wants to live in an emergency case in public.

Chair: Mr Kürkçü, thank you very much for coming to see us today. I'm sorry for all the interruptions. We have no control over them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr K rk : It's no problem. Thank you very much for inviting us and making our stay short. As I told you during the presentation, I wish that the European public—European societies—will show solidarity with the people of Turkey, but do not look at history from a business angle. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.