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SUBJECT: RALLYING SUPPORT FOR THE HOCA

Classified By: Acting Consul General Stuart Smith. Reasons 1.4 (b)

and (d). This message was coordinated with Embassy Ankara.

1. (C) Summary: In a farewell luncheon for Consul General, Istanbul Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva noted that he is wrestling with a difficult request from a local foundation for a letter in support of Fethullah Gulen, the Turkish-Muslim spiritual leader of a major Islamist lodge who is currently residing in the United States. Haleva said that those who approached him indicated that Gulen will soon seek to adjust his immigration status in the United States, and needs the testimonial to address the belief in parts of the U.S. government that he is a "radical Islamist" whose moderate message cloaks a more sinister and radical agenda. This concern apparently stems in part from FBI documents that Gulen supporters received through a recent FOIA request in the U.S.. Separately, business contacts with links to Gulen confirmed the fact that they are soliciting such testimonials at Gulen's personal request, while Istanbul Legat was also approached by police contacts with Gulenist links who asked that the bureau provide a "clean bill of health" for Gulen. End Summary.



2. (C) Foundation Approach: In his luncheon with the Consul General, Haleva emphasized the quandary the Foundation request had created for him. While he did not wish to provide an open-ended "to whom it may concern" testimonial that could be used broadly (text of the foundation's proposed letter is in para 6), given his own lack of certainty of Gulen's ultimate intentions, he also could not simply turn the request aside, given the assistance Gulen has provided to Turkey's Jewish Community in the past. While no final decision has been made, Haleva indicated he is leaning towards providing a more limited letter, addressed to U.S. immigration officials (he asked that we provide the name of an appropriate addressee), and limited to the community's specific interactions with Gulen and his movement. Subsequently, after learning that the Ecumenical Patriarch and Armenian Patriarch had been similarly approached, but had demurred, Haleva told Consul General that he was rethinking whether even a limited letter is appropriate.

3. (C) Encomiums: Haleva's and his Orthodox and Armenian colleagues' wary attitude is similar to that of much of Turkish officialdom and of our best contacts among conservative Turks with a deep knowledge of Islam and of Turkish brotherhoods/lodges, but contrasts with the praise Gulen has received in other quarters. Most notably, the Vatican Nuncio surprised a visiting Congressional delegation during a recent breakfast meeting here by not just enthusiastically praising Gulen, but also presenting the delegation's chairman with a book about him. (Gulen's meeting with Pope John Paul II several years ago excited much controversy in Turkey, with some rival brotherhoods/lodges accusing Gulen of selling out while other pious Turks who have been among our best contacts assessed the move as the ultimate in hypocrisy.) Gulen has also attracted steady interest among commentators. Some writers, mainly those who write for the Gulenist daily "Zaman" or who teach at the Gulenist Fatih University in Istanbul, or who have otherwise identified themselves with his movement, assert that Gulen's public message of "dialogue" is a more mature expression of Islam. Given the Gulenists' penetration of the National Police (TNP) and many media outlets and their record of going after anyone who criticizes Gulen, others who are skeptical about Gulen's intentions feel intimidated from expressing their views publicly. Privately they note: (1) Gulen's sharply radical past as a fiery Islamist preacher in the 1970's-1980's; (2) his ruthlessness in banishing people from his more inner circles (Gulenists have admitted to us that they are petrified of making a "mistake"); (3) his and his inner circles' insistence that followers of Gulen mediate their study of Islam totally through his writings, i.e. no tolerance of dissent or critical thinking; and (4) the cult-like obedience and conformity that he and the layers of his movement insist on in his global network of schools, his media outlets, and his business associations.



4. (C) Confirmation: The specific Gulenist concern about negative U.S. attitudes towards Gulen apparently stems in part from a November 2004 FBI report that Gulen's lawyer obtained through a FOIA request. Three ranking Turkish National Police contacts recently raised the issue in a meeting with Istanbul legat, in which they also provided material on Gulen and asked if the FBI could provide some sort of "clean bill of health" for him. (Note: Legat demurred, given the apparent intention to mount a public relations campaign with such material.) In a separate farewell call on the Consul General, Mustafa Gunay, Secretary General of the Gulen-linked Business Life Association (ISHAD) confirmed that a general effort is underway to solicit testimonials attesting to Gulen's good character. He noted that the initiative stems from Gulen himself, who is concerned that some in the U.S. may doubt his good faith, given a decision by U.S. immigration authorities this year that for the first time denied him the right to travel outside of the country.

5. (C) Comment: Given Gulen's public message of tolerance and "dialogue," and his parallel effort to reconcile Islam and science and modernity, a number of Western observers have latched on to him as a Muslim teacher (or "hoca") who they prefer to see as a voice of "moderate Islam." He has spoken frequently against terrorism (although he is careful not to explore the link between some readings of the Koran and terrorist violence in the name of Islam). He has also acted in ways which the Jewish community interprets as supportive of its existence.

6. (C) Deep and widespread doubts remain, however, about his movement's ultimate intentions. We have anecdotal evidence of the pressure that the various circles of his movement put on people they have drawn in, for instance severe pressure on businessmen to continue to give money to support Gulenist schools or other activities. We have multiple reliable reports that the Gulenists use their school network (including dozens of schools in the U.S.) to cherry-pick students they think are susceptible to being molded as proselytizers and we have steadily heard reports about how the schools indoctrinate boarding students.

7. (S) These facts, when coupled with the Gulenists' penetration of state institutions, including the TNP (as reflected in Istanbul legat's meeting-- Ankara septel will address the impact this development has had on police anti-terrorism efforts), hint that a much harder line, a sense of world-wide Islamist proselytizing mission, lies just under the surface. In short, the Gulenists' efforts to mold future generations through their international school network (which exists throughout Turkey, Asia (e.g., Afghanistan and Pakistan), and Africa, in addition to the U.S.) and their documented effort to infiltrate not just Turkish business



circles but governmental institutions as well have raised questions about whether their moderation would continue if they gained a preponderant voice in Turkish Islam. Haleva's caution thus appears well-judged. End Comment.

8. (C) Draft letter text (as proposed by the Gulenist Foundation) but NOT/NOT accepted by the Chief Rabbi:

To Whom It May Concern:

As the world has been suffering from violence, hostility, and tyranny, mankind became painfully aware of an absence of an environment in which people can realize the value of understanding of each other, passion, and generosity.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk with you about Mr. Fethullah Gulen, who is a Turkish-Muslim scholar and a spiritual leader of a global faith-based movement. Mr. Gulen has influenced many people toward creating tolerance and dialogue environment through which we can effectively respond to world's troubles, including violence and tyranny. To my knowledge he is one of the leading figures who can bring people together to achieve what I called "world of peace." Mr. Gulen emphasized the necessity of dialogue among Muslims.

However, Mr. Gulen's ideas about tolerance and dialogue are not restricted to Muslims but also extend to Christians, Jews and members of other faiths. Mr. Gulen maintains that there are more bonds bringing people together, even from different faiths, than separating them. As one of the founding members of the Foundation of Journalists and Writers, a group that promotes dialogue and tolerance among all social strata. Mr. Gulen has received welcome from almost all segments of life. With this perspective of dialogue he has visited and received leading Turkish and international figures including Pope John Paul II, the Vatican Ambassador to Turkey, the Patriarchs of Turkey's Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian community, myself as the Chief Rabbi of Turkey's Jewish community, leading journalists, columnists, television and movie stars, and intellectuals.

I would like to thank you for taking your time to talk to you about the mission of Mr. Gulen who dedicated himself for the good of others regardless of their beliefs and opinions, and embraced them.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I wish God will help us on our mission to create peaceful world.

Respectfully,  
Ishak Haleva  
Chief Rabbi of Jews Community in Turkey

SMITH



