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Dual agent of transition: how Turkey perpetuates and challenges neo-patrimonial patterns in its post-Soviet neighbourhood*

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ABSTRACT

As hybrid regimes persist, we need to better understand their behaviour in international affairs. Concentrating on business actors, we use a qualitative study of Turkey's foreign relations with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the period 2014–2018 to explore how hybrid regimes disseminate regime-related principles. Inspired by the concepts of neo-patrimonialism and limited access orders, we argue that hybrid regimes lack cohesion and cannot compel all relevant actors to disseminate a coherent set of regime-related principles. Depending on their domestic environment, Turkish actors transmit both neo-patrimonial closure and competitive openness, which makes Turkey's hybrid regime a dual agent of transition.

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Introduction

The question what drives stability and change of authoritarian or hybrid regimes that blend elements of democracy and authoritarianism remains prominent three decades after the former Soviet republics and several years after the Middle East experienced a moment of transition. Developments like the democracy reversals in Hungary and Poland or events like the velvet revolution in Armenia 2018 and mass demonstrations for media freedom in Azerbaijan in January 2019 (RFE/RL Azerbaijani Service 2019) still take analysts by surprise. New analytical perspectives that consider the altered international environment are thus needed to better grasp the phenomenon of regime stability and change. We argue that in addition to the existing focus on how democratic and authoritarian regimes promote values of democracy and authoritarianism abroad, studies of regime transition also need to pay attention to the values promoted by hybrid regimes.

As Kneuer and Demmelhuber (2016) note, a sense of growing competition between democracies and authoritarian regimes fuelled by the emergence of economically and militarily powerful authoritarian actors such as Russia and China has shaped recent scholarly output on democratisation. Authors are shifting their research interest to

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resistance to democratic change as promoted by, among others, the European Union (EU) (Gilbert and Mohseni 2018; Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016; Vanderhill 2017) and to the question of if and how authoritarian actors enhance the resilience of regimes that are predominantly or partly structured by authoritarian features (Ambrosio 2010; Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016; Bader 2015; Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017). This strand of research highlights that there is little evidence for autocracy promotion strategies. The undeniable stabilising impact authoritarian powers, such as Russia and China, have on like-minded regimes is instead a function of a pragmatic foreign policy aiming to ensure the authoritarian regimes' own survival (Bader 2015; Bank 2017; Ambrosio 2012; Weyland 2017).

The international environment has, however, not only seen a rise of authoritarian powers but also of regimes that integrate authoritarian and democratic features. The developments in the post-Soviet space and in the Middle East have empirically consolidated Carothers' (2002) hypothesis that such hybrid regimes are a likely and durable outcome of a transition from autocracy. Given their persistence, it is worth studying hybrid regimes not only – as most authors do – as targets of external transformation agendas but also as international players in their own right that possess their own external transformation agenda. This is particularly salient since several hybrid regimes, such as Egypt (El-Labbad 2014), South Africa (Alden and Schoeman 2013), Venezuela (De la Torre 2017) or Turkey (Cohen 2011) seek regional leadership – even if these regimes' ability to realise this ambition is often found wanting. Thus, the puzzle we seek to solve is that if democracies are agents of democratic transition and authoritarian regimes tend to stabilise non-democracies, then what kind of regime-related principles, i.e. principles associated with either democratic openness or authoritarianism, do hybrid regimes disseminate abroad and how do they do so? Exploring this question should enhance the debate on how the international or regional environment interferes in democratisation efforts and how actors, such as the EU, may respond to such interference.

For this purpose, we enhance the concept of hybrid regimes by going beyond the traditional focus on the integration of democratic and authoritarian political institutions (Rutherford 2008; Morgenbesser 2014). Guided by the concepts of neo-patrimonialism (Lemarchand and Eisenstadt 1981) and limited access orders (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2013) we shift attention to the interplay of politics and economics. Our argument is that hybrid regimes lack cohesion in their domestic dominant coalition which limits their ability to project a coherent dissemination strategy in their foreign policy. Moreover, we draw on the co-existence of neo-patrimonial logics, that is the dominance of personal networks, and the logic of impersonal competition as structuring features of hybrid regimes. Analysing the rationale of relevant foreign policy players, including state officials but also non-state actors such as e.g. economic and educational entrepreneurs, and studying their interplay allows us to trace what regime-related principles a hybrid regime's foreign policy is likely to disseminate to its neighbourhood. Crucially, it is notoriously difficult to determine the impact a country's foreign policy has on another country, let alone to establish causal links between individual policies and measures and specific outcomes in the target countries (Clarke 1979). Therefore, we focus on the foreign policy role that actors in a hybrid regime ascribe to themselves as well as their *perception* of how their actions impact the target country.

In this paper, we address the question of hybrid regimes' foreign policy ambitions with empirical evidence from an in-depth study on Turkey. In its domestic setting characterised by a hybrid regime, Turkey is an especially interesting case because the country has since the early 2000s sought to increase its footprint and leverage in its wider neighbourhood which includes the Middle East but also the Western Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Hatipoglu and Palmer 2016; Dal 2016). We therefore ask how Turkey as a hybrid regime promotes democratic openness or authoritarian closure in its neighbourhood. Our argument is that Turkey is a dual agent of transition that perpetuates principles of neo-patrimonial closure and at the same time promotes openness. This two-pronged approach has its origins in Turkey's domestic regime. Domestically, Turkey can be described as a hybrid regime, where some sectors or subsectors are driven by the logic of neo-patrimonialism and some by the logic of impersonal competition. The co-existence of these two features has two implications for its foreign relations. First, the relative strength and divergent interests of other members of the dominant coalition constrain the Turkish state's ability to muster all relevant actors to invest the necessary resources into a coherent foreign policy. Therefore, instead of a coherent transformation policy, the Turkish state has developed a foreign policy framework that encourages but does not enforce engagement in its post-Soviet neighbourhood. Second, the actors who engage in the neighbourhood disseminate those principles that they operate in and are accustomed to from their domestic environment.

The empirical design of our study concentrates on Turkey's post-Soviet neighbourhood. We explore Turkey's foreign policy ambitions towards four countries in which Turkey is perceived as an attractive economic partner and where it has become a visible economic player. These countries are Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Given that the key pillar of Turkey's agenda in the region is the promotion of economic development, our analysis concentrates on Turkish state and business actors. Since the early 2000s when Turkey turned towards a more pro-active foreign policy with a strong emphasis on advancing trade relations (Kirisci 2009), there has been growing academic interest in the relationship between state and business actors in Turkey's foreign policy (Bechev 2012; Cakir and Akdag 2017; Müftüler-Baç 2014). While studies shed a light on the extent to which business actors are able to shape the state's foreign policy (Rumelili and Suleyma-noglu-Kurum 2017; Tsarouhas and Yazgan 2018), there is to date no published research that explores the regime-related principles Turkish businessmen disseminate abroad. This is where our analysis fills a void and seeks to move this developing field forward. From public speeches of Turkish state representatives, foreign policy documents and 96 expert interviews conducted in 2018, we trace how these actors address neo-patrimonial features in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. While we consider key developments in Turkey's foreign policy since 1990, our study concentrates on the period from 2014 to 2018. In the following, we first theorise how hybrid regimes disseminate regime principles abroad and discuss our empirical design. We then highlight the key pillars of Turkey's current hybrid regime. Against this background, we take a closer look at the two sets of actors in focus, state and business actors, and discuss how they respectively perpetuate and challenge principles of neo-patrimonialism. We conclude our analysis by discussing how the insights may inform further research on external transformation ambi-tions and on hybrid regimes.

Conceptualising foreign action of hybrid regimes

In response to the notable limitations of Western democratisation efforts, scholarship on external democracy promotion draws increasing attention to the factors that enable the resilience of non-democratic regimes. Two prominent strands of research drive this debate. The first explores the impact of increasing international and regional competition between democratic and authoritarian regimes (Ambrosio 2009; Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016; Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016; Vanderhill 2017; Gilbert and Mohseni 2018). The second studies the degree of authoritarian diffusion triggered by emerging non-democratic powers including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran (Bank 2017; Bader 2015; Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017; Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz 2017).

While the research on authoritarian diffusion started off from the assumption that international authoritarian players have an explicit authoritarianism promotion strategy (Ambrosio 2010; Tolstrup 2014), both in-depth single case studies and larger quantitative comparative studies show that authoritarian actors' effects on regime stability are not in fact accompanied by the ambition to disseminate authoritarianism abroad (Tansey 2015). Instead, scholars regard the stabilisation of authoritarian tendencies as a function of their pragmatic foreign policy, driven by self-regarding considerations. These considerations include economic growth, establishing regional or international leverage, stabilising the security environment, shielding themselves from external democratisation influences, and building opportunistic alliances to achieve the various goals (Weyland 2017, 1235; Bader 2015, 25; Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016, 776).

It is noteworthy that the mechanisms through which authoritarian regimes promote authoritarianism largely resemble the mechanisms employed for democracy promotion. First, economic cooperation, in particular, if it generates high rents such as energy trade, is a prominent factor through which China, Russia but also the US and the EU stabilise authoritarian regimes (Bader 2015, 23). Secondly, linkages formed by flows beyond the economic sphere are powerful stabilising factors by generating crisis support, reducing the likeliness of sanctions and stimulating elite learning and socialisation (Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz 2017, 1222; Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017, 922). Linkages also allow for reward and punishment strategies (Goodliffe and Hawkins 2017, 909). Even without direct interaction both authoritarian regimes and democracies may influence other states through the demonstration of success or failure (Moller, Skaaning, and Tolstrup 2017; Grimmer-Solem 2015; Kneuer and Demmelhuber 2016, 786). Thus, independently of an explicit promotion strategy, actors disseminate the principles of their political and economic regime abroad through direct interaction and demonstration effects.

So far, the literature has concentrated on the impact of authoritarian and democratic actors, especially that of global powers. While more attention is being paid to hybrid regimes, the literature has primarily discussed them as an outcome of the latest waves of democratisation (Alexander 2008; Levitsky and Way 2010) and has analysed their stability and the various forms hybridity can take (Hale 2011; Bogaards 2009; Cassani 2013). However, given the observation that hybrid regimes are relatively durable and that a growing number of them openly declare the intent to increase their influence in the neighbourhood as we see in the cases of e.g. Egypt, Venezuela, South Africa, and Turkey, it is important to also engage with their outreach abroad. We therefore focus specifically on hybrid regimes that in their foreign policy rhetoric express the ambition

to attain regional influence. For these hybrid regimes we seek to discern the regime-related principles they disseminate in their foreign policy activities and how they go about doing so.

We address the connection between a country's domestic hybridity on the one hand and its dissemination activities on the other hand with reference to two political regime theories, namely neo-patrimonialism (Eisenstadt 1973; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980; Erdmann and Engel 2006) and the work on limited access orders by North, Wallis, and Weingast (2013). Neo-patrimonialism depicts a regime in which informal personal relations between the ruler and ruled and the misuse of state institutions for private networks dominate social organisation (Erdmann and Engel 2006). Limited access orders describe a similar type of regime but emphasise that the ruling elite limits access to resources and to positions that enable economic and political participation to members of the ruling coalition while excluding large parts of the population (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2013). Both concepts disentangle dynamics in regimes that fail to change towards consolidated liberal political and economic systems by looking beyond the formal state (Erdmann and Engel 2006, 18; Englebert 1997, 771; Kelsall 2005, 53). While neo-patrimonialism places explanatory weight on the interplay of the political and the economic system (Médard 1991), North, Wallis, and Weingast (2013, 40) add a focus on other societal systems such as religion and the military. Both concepts emphasise the role of patron-client networks (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Tangri 1999). Compared to the broad concept of limited access orders that covers the majority of countries in the world, including both authoritarian and non-consolidated democracies (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2013, 11), neo-patrimonialism offers a narrower concept, which is more suitable for our study of hybrid regimes. However, with reference to North, Wallis, and Weingast (2013) we develop a more accurate grasp of the interplay of the different societal systems, which helps us to deduce how the dynamics within hybrid regimes may shape action abroad.

In their elaboration on limited access orders North, Wallis, and Weingast (2013) hardly discuss foreign relations at all. Neo-patrimonialism on the other hand frequently refers to the concept of the gatekeeper state (Cooper 2002, 157–159) in which control over the access point to the international sphere is a key part of the neo-patrimonial network of extraction but does not develop a more general concept of the dynamics behind foreign policy. Therefore, in the following, we will discuss what the two concepts imply when viewed through the lens of foreign policy making. To understand how hybrid regimes formulate and implement foreign policy and which regime-related principles they disseminate, we seek to extract assumptions about three actor-related aspects. First, who are the crucial actors in the regime that potentially shape the foreign policy and how do they interact? Second, what type of regime logics of action are actors in hybrid regimes embedded in? Third, which regime-related principles are these actors likely to disseminate?

With regard to actors, our first conceptual interest, neo-patrimonialism, postulates that the driving force of the regime is an elite coalition composed of state and economic actors, which allows the central leaders to accrue rents (Eisenstadt 1973, 15). Combining formal with informal structures

[t]his form of governance rests on well-understood if unequal forms of political reciprocity that link patrons with their clients across vertical social lines. (Chabal 2005, 21; see also Tetzlaff and Jakobeit 2005, 129)

To maintain stability in a neo-patrimonial regime, the elite coalition has to keep its clients satisfied (Taylor and Williams 2008, 139) as the relationship between elite coalition and clients is shaped by mutual dependence rather than by a top-down relationship of command-and-obey (Frahm 2016, 70). Political leaders typically address discontent by using state resources to co-opt opposing actors into the dominant coalition (Boone 2004, 267; Bratton and van de Walle 1997, 75). A broad set of empirical studies confirms that these are also crucial features of hybrid regimes (Way 2004; Levitsky and Way 2010; Hinnebusch 2015). Taken together, this implies that the ruling elite in such regimes is composed of powerful actors from various sectors with a mutual commitment to maintain access to resources. Noteworthy is that state leaders are but one group of the ruling elite. Agency is spread across the elite coalition as no single leader has the means to compel other members of the elite coalition to implement a given policy against their interests.

The accumulation and distribution of rents among elites is the key mechanism that stabilises the ruling coalition. To maintain this rent-seeking pattern, access to valuable resources is limited to elite members and their patron-client networks extending downwards (Eisenstadt 1973, 16; Médard 1982, 180). North, Wallis, and Weingast (2013) enhance this idea by highlighting that it is the ambition to maximise rents that induces the elite coalition to widen the access to resources to larger parts of society. Where innovation is expected to stimulate higher rents, competition based on qualification instead of personal ties regulates access. Opening access in selected spheres while limiting it in others is therefore a means to achieve a balanced distribution of political and economic power (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2013, 20).

Three conclusions can be drawn for our research on hybrid regimes' foreign policy making. First, the state's capacity to enforce a policy, including foreign policy, is limited as the state is not the sole powerful actor and lacks comprehensive control over resources. Unlike in authoritarian regimes, the state does not have the ability to pressure and coerce other relevant actors to implement a certain policy. At the same time, in contrast to democracies, policy formulation is less a consultative process but rather top-down, driven by a narrow circle comprised of the ruling elite. What is more, in contrast to authoritarian regimes, actors in hybrid regimes who stand at a distance to the elite coalition have some influence, but significantly less so than in democracies. Second, following North, Wallis, and Weingast we assume that hybrid regimes are driven by the co-existence of two contradictory regime logics: limitation of access to resources and participation through personal networks on the one and openness based on impersonal competition on the other hand. These logics of action may vary across the economic, political and other societal subsystems. Third, we work with the assumption that non-state actors perpetuate the logic they are embedded in domestically also in their operations in a foreign environment. Hence, we conclude that actors from a hybrid regime disseminate either principles of closure or openness. Principles of closure can be summarised as neo-patrimonial principles which emphasise the predominance of personal relations, informality, rule by law rather than rule of law, insecure property rights, co-optation, lack of accountability (Eisenstadt 1973, 16; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980, 55–59). Principles of openness, in contrast, are impersonal competition, security of property rights and rule of law and innovation as the main source of rent accretion (North, Wallis, and Weingast 2013, 21–25).

Against this background, we specify our research question and ask which principles of regime openness and closure actors from hybrid regimes disseminate abroad and how they disseminate said principles. We hypothesise the following:

First, while the state may be the key author of a country's foreign policy, the lack of cohesion of the dominant coalition in hybrid regimes challenges the state's ability to muster powerful actors' commitment to a policy if the policy does not fit the actor's interests. The closer to and more dependent on the state leaders an actor is, the more likely the actor will commit to the state foreign policy agenda. The less dependent an actor, the more likely the actor is to either withhold commitment or to pursue their own agenda.

Second, the degree to which the state is able to mobilise actors that domestically operate in closed or open societal systems to engage abroad conditions the degree to which the hybrid regime will disseminate principles of neo-patrimonialism or openness abroad. In other words, a hybrid regime's dissemination abroad depends to a significant degree on the composition of the actors present abroad: the more actors from a closed neo-patrimonial background are involved, the more the country disseminates neo-patrimonial closure and vice versa. It is thus likely that a hybrid regime operates as a dual agent of transition.

Tracing dual agency: empirical design and methods

We illustrate these arguments by studying Turkey's engagement in its post-Soviet neighbourhood. As we will argue in detail below, from the 1990s to the present Turkey is classified as a hybrid regime with a turn towards closure that manifested itself already in 2007/08 when Turkey ended its initial Europeanisation process and began to stifle the military with mass trials of generals (Rodrik 2011). This momentum towards a more closed system gained pace after 2013 with the suppression of the popular Gezi Park protests and revelations of widespread corruption by government ministers which led to the first wave of persecution against alleged Gülenists (e.g. Özbudun 2014). Nonetheless, several key pillars of a democratic system remain in place, including the courts, and the spheres of politics, economy and society continue to be heterogenous and ambivalent in their stance towards the AKP government.

Accordingly, we assume that Turkey's foreign policy is not only driven by the state. To adequately grasp Turkey's foreign policy, we therefore need to trace the rhetoric and action of a wider set of actors. Turkey's state foreign policy in recent years prioritised the intensification of economic relations with its neighbourhood. In the pursuit of this goal, Turkey relied on the support of Turkish businesses (Cohen 2016, 527; Yildiz 2016, 336; Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017; Tsarouhas and Yazgan 2018). We therefore take a closer look at Turkish state and business representatives and inquire to what extent they co-ordinate the dissemination of regime-related principles and to what extent they transmit these principles. Our analysis concentrates on the period from 2014 to 2018. These years qualify to give a picture of the most recent period in Turkey's foreign policy, since the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as president in 2014 has triggered changes in both Turkey's political regime and foreign policy outlook.¹

In the last two decades, Turkey has turned into an increasingly pro-active and powerful regional player (Hatipoglu and Palmer 2016, 238) as the country developed an independent, activist and multidimensional regional policy agenda (Cakir and Akdag 2017, 334).

While Turkey initially focused on its northern neighbourhood, including the post-Soviet space, in the early 2000s Turkey reviewed its foreign policy and placed the region lower on its agenda (Hatipoglu and Palmer 2016, 245). In terms of ratified agreements, the post-Soviet space gained some weight in Turkey's foreign policy from 2013 to 2016 but continued to rank low in the geographic prioritisation (Cakir and Akdag 2017, 346). In line with the post-Soviet space's secondary status in Turkey's foreign policy, the Turkish government did not develop a comprehensive policy for this region. Notwithstanding the lack of a comprehensive regional strategy, the Turkish state is present and active in the region through a number of actors and programmes. These programmes are marked by cooperation between state agencies and ministries but also include Turkey's development agency, Yunus Emre institutes that promote Turkish language and culture as well as business associations and businessmen. Studying Turkey's foreign policy towards this region of secondary priority therefore allows us to gain insights into the degree to which the state in a hybrid regime aspires to control and coordinate the activities of all foreign policy actors. In addition, as the state enforces commitment only to a limited degree, it enables us to discern empirically the extent to which the non-state actors are motivated to subordinate their actions to the aims of the state's foreign policy.

Our in-depth empirical material on Turkey's dissemination in the post-Soviet space stems from four qualitative single case studies on Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. These countries stand out as the geographically closest post-Soviet neighbours with whom Turkey actively works to enhance economic relations and where the country has a strong economic presence. For three of the countries, Turkey is a crucial economic player. Azerbaijan relies on Turkey as a corridor for its energy flows to Europe, which generate the country's key source of income. Overall, Turkey has in 2007 grown into Azerbaijan's second-largest single import partner (volume of USD 1,274 million in 2017) and became its second-largest export destination in 2015 (volume of USD 1,394 million in 2017). Turkey has since the early 2000s also been the largest investor in the non-oil sector (Mikail, Atun, and Atun 2019, 516; Mehtiyev 2019) which is reflected in the approximately 3000 companies with Turkish ownership that operate in the country (Gazimova 2019). For Georgia, Turkey became the largest import partner (trade turnover of USD 1373 million in 2017) and the third-largest single export partner (volume of USD 217 million in 2017) in the study period. Official data report that Turkish companies make up 19.6% (1847) of all foreign companies registered in Georgia in 2017.² Turkey ranks third on the list of Ukraine's export partners (volume of USD 2514 million in 2017). Given the size of the Ukrainian market, the 600 Turkish companies that are officially active in Ukraine constitute a comparatively small group.³ While for Moldova Turkey is only trade partner number seven (volume of USD 408 million in 2017),⁴ the free trade agreement between the two parties which came into force in 2016 as well as visa liberalisation show ambitions to intensify economic relations. Moreover, with 300 companies Turkey was in 2018 in the third position among foreign companies operating in Moldova (Dodon 2018). The official data on the Turkish companies operating in the four target countries are certainly imperfect, given amongst others the tendency of Turkish companies – reported for Azerbaijan and Ukraine – to register as local companies with the help of local partners or via third parties. On the other hand data for Azerbaijan are distorted by the fact that it is difficult to close down private companies.⁵ Even considering these limitations, the data highlight that Turkish businesses are strong actors in Azerbaijan,

relatively strong in Georgia and Moldova and the least visible but still present in Ukraine. Our study draws primarily on two sets of original empirical data. First, to trace state foreign policy rhetoric in the period from 2014 to 2018 we analysed the content of the 90 speeches of the Turkish president Erdogan and the respective Turkish foreign minister which mentioned one or several of the four countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan) or the region they belong to (Black Sea, Caucasus).⁶ Additionally, we surveyed selected government documents, considered bilateral agreements signed with Turkey and news reports about bilateral meetings. Second, we gain insights into norms and values disseminated by Turkish businessmen in rhetoric and action by interviews conducted in 2018 with 26 Turkish businessmen who do business in one of the target countries and hold a leading position in the company. In addition, we interviewed ten local businessmen from the target countries who work in a lower management position in a Turkish company based in their home country. Most interviewees have been selected in a snowball process that focused on the interviewees' degree of seniority rather than the specific business sectors they are active in. As a result, the sample includes companies from the construction, textile, logistics, food processing and tourism sector. We also conducted 24 interviews with former or current government officials in the four target countries, in which the officials express their perspective on the principles that Turkish state and business actors disseminate in their interaction with these officials. We triangulated these perspectives with that of 37 senior analysts from Turkey and the four countries.⁷

We have run a reproducible content analysis of these interviews in Atlas TI, in which we filtered out principles related to neo-patrimonial closure and competitive openness respectively that either dominate the actors' narratives or are implicit in the activities they report. To identify whether a Turkish actor has experiences with operating in an environment marked by neo-patrimonial closure or competitive openness in Turkey, we rely primarily on two aspects: one, the degree to which respondents considered relations to the dominant coalition in Turkey relevant for their own businesses and two, neo-patrimonial practices such as giving bribes or doing favours that respondents mentioned when reflecting about their experiences of doing business and politics in Turkey. Reflections in these interviews on how businessmen and state actors relate their actions to the Turkish state's foreign policy are used as indicators for the degree to which the state is able to coordinate Turkish action abroad. To ensure the promised anonymity of the interviewees, the paper presents them as either Turkish or local businessmen, current or former state representatives and analysts. Given that neo-patrimonial patterns persist to a certain degree in all of the target countries, the empirical analysis has highlighted that the social and political environment of the target countries is less decisive for an actor's response to such patterns than their background and their motivation for entering the country. Therefore, we structure the presentation of our empirical findings according to the varying principles disseminated by the varying groups of actors through the use of different strategies. First, however, we operationalise Turkey's hybrid political regime.

Contemporary Turkey's hybrid regime

While Turkey's designation as a hybrid regime had been contested as recently as a decade ago (Öniş 2009), for the period from 2014 to 2018 it is rather uncontroversial (Öktem and Karabekir 2016; Esen and Gumuscu 2016; Öniş 2016). The current regime combines formal

institutions of a liberal democracy and an open market economy with illiberal practices in both politics and the economy.

Since formally democratising with the 1950 elections, Turkey's political system has oscillated between more liberal and more repressive periods. The Turkish military has played a dominant role throughout and ousted civilian governments on four occasions (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997). The prospect of joining the European Union after the start of accession talks in 1999 led to a gradual diffusion and adaption of liberal democracy's core tenets (Müftüler-Baç 2005, 18) which continued in 2002-2007, thus during the early years of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) government (Tocci 2005). Significant legal changes are still being made to accommodate the EU's *acquis communautaire* (Cihangir-Tetik and Müftüler-Baç 2018). Meanwhile, the decision-making and de facto veto power of the Turkish army was curbed by replacing the leadership with officers loyal to the AKP (Rodrik 2011). Although the AKP government in 2010 significantly altered the repressive constitution that had been installed after the military coup of 1980, this reformed constitution nonetheless failed to properly safeguard civil and political rights, which are characteristic of an open access order (Kalaycıoğlu 2012, 6). The period since about 2010 has in fact seen a backsliding towards "electoral authoritarianism" (Kaya 2015, 63). Increasing repression of civil and political dissent came to the fore with the state's crushing response to the Gezi Park protests in 2013 which "had challenged AKP's pursuit of hegemonic grip over Turkish society" (Bashirov and Lancaster 2018, 1220).

Restrictions on press freedom coupled with the consolidation of mass media ownership by pro-government businesses significantly reduced the public space for debate (Akser and Baybars-Hawks 2012). After the failed coup attempt of July 2016, a state of emergency was imposed and followed by mass arrests and purges of political opponents in academia, media and civil society (Kubicek 2018). Moreover, the new presidential system that has been in construction since a referendum in 2017 abolishes many checks and balances on the president's powers and limits access significantly (Esen and Gumuscu 2017; Öniş 2019). Nevertheless, the political regime is still not as closed as in fully authoritarian countries since civil society and political opposition parties remain vibrant. There are still regular competitive elections without large-scale ballot stuffing as evidenced by the fact that the AKP lost the mayoralties of Ankara and Istanbul to opposition candidates in the local elections of March 2019. The latter case illustrates the country's hybridity in that the result of the Istanbul elections was annulled by the courts based on spurious evidence, only for the opposition candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu to decisively win the rerun elections with a much larger margin of victory in June 2019.

Economically, continuous support for liberal free market principles shapes the AKP period (Özbay et al. 2016; Keyman 2010, 216). Turkey advocated for free trade arrangements internationally (Davutoğlu 2013b) to the point that analysts characterised Turkey as a "trading state" (Kirisci 2009). In the course of economic liberalisation which began during the presidency of Turgut Özal (Ozel 2003), many Turkish businesses adopted and espoused liberal "Western" concepts of doing business. While the economic establishment represented by the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD) had been instrumental in bringing down the Islamist Welfare Party's government in 1997 (Mecham 2004, 344), TÜSIAD initially supported the moderate Islamist AKP's programme of democratisation, market liberalisation and integration into the European Union (Ugur and

Yankaya 2008). This change of heart can be traced to the fact that the AKP “adopted the Özalim model of active state-business partnership in foreign economic relations” (Atli 2011, 116).

Parallel to these rather open economic structures, neo-patrimonial forms of doing business persist and have expanded in sectors such as construction as corruption and other illiberal practices increasingly structure Turkey’s economic transformation (Tansel 2018, 205). For example, TOKİ, the state-owned Housing Development Administration, has expanded several-fold during the AKP years as it is exempt from building regulations and functions as both an engine for economic growth and a tool for patronage (Çavuşoğlu and Strutz 2014, 142–144). What has changed is the composition of the group of businesses that are recipients of state support and favours. For example, members of the Independent Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (MÜSIAD) have received preferential treatment in winning public procurement contracts (Çeviker Gürakar 2016, 17). Another example is the massive expansion of private security companies, which due to a mix of formal and informal ties to the police has blurred the lines between public and private security providers (Yardımcı and Alemdar 2010, 44). Overall, the AKP has consistently employed the (neo)liberal policy of deregulation to intervene to the benefit of entrepreneurs with close connections to the government, while using tax inspections to go after companies that oppose the government (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014, 173). Yet, although the AKP’s control over the economy has become more expansive and centralised (Öniş 2019), there are still in almost all sectors of the economy substantial numbers of companies that operate independently and outside of governmental supervision. Juxtaposing the political and economic spheres in the period 2014–2018 shows that their degree of closure does indeed vary. Crucially, we also find parallel spheres of closure and openness within the political and economic subsystems. Thus in spite of the fact that the AKP attempts to control both the political and economic subsystems (Tansel 2018, 200), its success in attaining hegemony varies between and within both subsystems. This has, as we will highlight below, an impact on Turkey’s foreign policy and its dissemination of regime-related principles.

The Turkish state’s foreign policy in its post-Soviet neighbourhood

In the early 1990s, Turkey approached its post-Soviet neighbourhood with the ambitious plan to enhance economic, cultural-ethnic and security relations on the bilateral and multi-lateral level as one key building block in establishing Turkey as a Eurasian power (Bilgin and Bilgic 2011, 186; Ersen 2013, 27). While the emphasis on economic and cultural-ethnic relations continues to shape the relations since the 2000s Turkish regional foreign policy alternates between moderate engagement and relative neglect. Apart from reasons rooted in domestic politics and an economic rationale, a crucial factor for Turkey’s faltering policy towards this region is Turkey’s relationship with Russia. In essence, given that Russia is a key economic partner and a military power with which Turkey seeks to avoid direct confrontation, Turkey’s foreign policy elite has since the 1990s developed a consensus not to provoke clashes with Russia over leadership ambitions in the post-Soviet space (Hale 2012, 207). This rationale contributed to Turkey’s softening of the rhetoric of pan-Turkism and Eurasianism vis-à-vis this region and constrained Turkey’s engagement particularly in the sphere of security. Nevertheless, Turkey continues

to intensify its economic, cultural and political partnership with its post-Soviet neighbours including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. As a result, divergences between Turkey and Russia continue to emerge, e.g. over Russia's aggression in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. After the 2015 crisis triggered by Turkey's downing of a Russian jet-fighter (Yildiz 2016, 16), however, Turkish decision makers have become more pragmatic in dealing with Russia (Kılınç 2016, 84).⁸ The current government not only acknowledges Russia's predominance in this region (Kardaş 2013, 648),⁹ but Turkey's political and economic relations with Russia also take clear precedence over Turkey's relations with other post-Soviet neighbours.¹⁰ While Turkey, for instance, supports Ukraine's territorial integrity, it continued to foster its strategic friendship with Russia even after Russia's annexation of Crimea (Üstün 2016, 7). Thus, Turkey's policy towards the post-Soviet space, which we will detail below, is constrained by but also largely runs in parallel to Turkey's Russia policy.

It is noteworthy that Turkey never developed a coherent policy for the region. Emblematic for the initial period is Prime Minister Demirel's 1992 vision of Turkey as a Eurasian power in a region stretching from the Adriatic Sea to China (Ersen 2013, 27). In the 2000s, Turkey had still sought to be an essential economic and security power in the Caucasus and the Black Sea region (Hale 2012, 219). In recent years, however, the two regions have lost their priority status in Turkey's foreign policy, since the Middle East has become a much more important concern for Turkey (Altunışık and Martin 2011).¹¹ This shift of priority is also reflected in Turkey's foreign policy instruments. The Turkish development agency (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency – TİKA) was in 1992 founded explicitly with a focus on the Turkic countries of the former Soviet Union but has in the last decade concentrated on Africa and the Middle East (Özkan and Demirtepe 2012; TİKA 2016). In the 1990s, Turkey had also jumpstarted regional organisations such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which failed to foment regional cohesion (Bayram and Tüfekçi 2018, 8). Turkey's influence as a regional player is predicated on clear asymmetries. This applies to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and even Ukraine, the four states our study concentrates on. Turkey's population is much larger, its economy is more advanced and as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and long-standing EU candidate Turkey is much more firmly rooted in the West and present in global forums like the G20. Currently, Turkey's relations with the four countries in focus are primarily conducted in a bilateral format. The intensity of Turkey's engagement in these countries varies, from a primary focus on Azerbaijan, key energy partner and "brother nation", to Georgia which as a direct neighbour is a target for economic, migration and security cooperation, to Ukraine which as an economically important partner is also home to the Turkic Crimean Tatars and finally Moldova which for a long time primarily attracted attention because of its Turkic minority, the Gagauz. However, regardless of these varying priorities, these countries have in common that compared to economic interests and domestic political concerns, ideology plays hardly any role in Turkey's foreign policy (Danforth 2008).¹² While the Eurasian faction appears to be on the rise in the traditionally transatlantic Turkish army,¹³ Eurasianism still does not dominate Turkish foreign policy as the Eurasian Turkic republics have little to offer and are too close to Russia.¹⁴ In fact, a Ukrainian diplomat went so far as to consider Turkey's foreign policy the most pragmatic he had encountered.¹⁵ In turn, this means that a transactional view of bilateral relations informs Turkey's relations (Dalacoura 2017, 2) and the

degree of economic interaction and interdependence determines the strength of the bilateral ties.¹⁶

The early period of enthusiasm rooted in a form of pan-Turkic idealism (Sözen 2010) was nonetheless influential in initiating several forms of engagement with the regional countries – from development aid by TİKA to educational cooperation to early business investments – that still resonate today. Educational exchange programmes, in particular, have created a Turkish constituency – above all in Azerbaijan – that in the meantime has risen to positions of influence in the region's countries. Since 1992, one important actor that set up Turkish schools primarily in Azerbaijan and Georgia, but also in Moldova and Ukraine was the Hizmet movement led by the Turkish imam Fetullah Gülen. In the early 1990s and during the AKP period, the Turkish state supported the Gülenist schools. This only changed when in 2012 a rift occurred between Gülen and the AKP and the Turkish government subsequently pressured governments to close schools both before and especially after the foiled coup attempt of 2016 allegedly masterminded by Gülen (Balci 2017; Aliyev 2017). While most schools outside of Azerbaijan remain open in spite of Turkish pressure, business associations linked to Gülen were dissolved in both Georgia and Azerbaijan in 2016. There is also an echo of the early pan-Turkic ambitions in contemporary Turkey's self-appointed status as protector of Turkic minorities, namely the Gagauz in Moldova, the Abkhaz Turks in Georgia and the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine (Erdoğan 2016). This ambition is, however, constrained by the above-mentioned premise of Turkey's current elites not to antagonise Russia with its engagement in the post-Soviet neighbourhood (Bayram and Tüfekçi 2018).¹⁷ Turkey's current priority vis-à-vis its post-Soviet neighbourhood is to create a mutually beneficial bilateral partnership through trade and investments (Göksel 2011, 5) as Turkey aspires to become a regional power without the use or threat of military force.¹⁸ Already during the demise of the Soviet Union, the prospects of business opportunities in the seceding republics strongly motivated Turkey's immediate recognition of their independence.¹⁹ In the 1990s and early 2000s contract work in the post-Soviet space presented an opportunity to earn hard currency and was therefore encouraged by the Turkish state.²⁰ Since then, Turkey has signed free trade agreements with Georgia and Moldova and is in advanced if protracted negotiations with Ukraine and Azerbaijan. The expansion of economic ties is also the primary motivation for the successive visa liberalisations with the region's countries (Davutoğlu 2013a). Turkey today has visa free travel with all four countries and citizens of Georgia and Ukraine can even enter Turkey using only their identity cards. The expansion of flights from Turkey to the post-Soviet neighbourhood is likewise a deliberate policy encouraged by the Turkish state.²¹ Moreover, the Turkish foreign trade promotion organisation DEİK (Foreign Economic Relations Board) fosters Turkish investments in the region. Turkey's ambition in the region is therefore to peacefully extend its sphere of influence and to use this influence to gain a larger role worldwide while supporting Turkey's domestic economic growth.

Turkey's bifurcated approach to neo-patrimonial patterns in its post-Soviet neighbourhood

Since the 1990s Turkey's foreign policy nurtured mainly by the ambition of beneficial economic relations but at times also by the idea of Eurasianism developed a framework

of organisations and agreements to encourage among others Turkish businesses to engage in the post-Soviet space. However, the limited attractiveness of the relatively small and under-developed target markets motivated only selected groups of Turkish economic actors. Since we argue that the domestic environment in which an actor is embedded influences the principles disseminated abroad, we first provide an overview of the five core groups of Turkish business actors that engage in business ventures abroad as well as the degree to which we encountered members of each group in our target countries. First of all, large Turkish companies represented by TÜSIAD mostly refrained from expanding to Moldova, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Georgia. Reportedly, both the narrow profit margins and the neo-patrimonial business environment discourage these companies because they are used to the strict regulatory environment of Western countries.²² Overall, the Turkish government's attempts to nudge these global players towards these foreign policy targets were less successful than similar efforts towards Africa and the Middle East (Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017, 260; Cakir and Akdag 2017, 338). A second and, according to our interviews, rather small group are medium-sized businesses that have gone into business in the target countries fully aware that they are likely to make only very limited profits. In line with Turkey's official pan-Turkism rhetoric representatives of these businesses claim that their primary aim is to foster the economic development of countries with historic links to Turkey. Most companies that invoke this argument are companies in Georgia but also some in Azerbaijan which have links to the Georgian and Azeri diasporas in Turkey. They claim to have limited network ties to Turkey's dominant coalition which indicates that they are less involved in neo-patrimonial networks in Turkey.²³ Most entrepreneurs, however, follow a purely economic rationale. For one, there is the third group of actors, namely larger companies, many with strong ties to the ruling elites in Turkey and thus with experience of operating in an environment of neo-patrimonial closure. They see especially Georgia and Ukraine as emerging markets and expect their investments to yield high returns in the long run. The fourth and largest group in our sample are medium-sized companies that identified profitable niches in trading with these countries and which are linked to the business association MÜSIAD with connections to Turkey's dominant coalition. The fifth set of actors are Turkish business associations based in the target countries with relatively close ties to the Turkish state. They have established themselves as crucial players in lobbying for Turkish business interests in the region.

These five groups of Turkish business actors share one aspect in their approaches to the local business environment, which is marked by strong neo-patrimonial closure in Azerbaijan and a predominance of neo-patrimonial patterns in Ukraine that are also found, if to a lesser degree, in Georgia and Moldova (Ademmer, Langbein, and Börzel 2019). According to their own rhetoric, not only businesses but also Turkish state representatives operate in these countries under the guiding principle that they adjust to a certain degree to what they often frame as the "local culture" of doing business and politics rather than overtly seeking to transform the established way of doing things.²⁴ The absence of openly transformative ambitions as well as their familiarity with operating in a neo-patrimonial environment, gained through direct involvement in or as distant observers of neo-patrimonial patterns in Turkey or abroad, is what most Turkish business actors highlight as their competitive advantage vis-à-vis (Western) European or American companies.²⁵ However, the identified groups of actors diverge in their strategies and the degree to

which they disseminate support for or challenge the neo-patrimonial practices in the target societies depending on their ambitions and the systems they are embedded in Turkey (see Table 1).

Dissemination of neo-patrimonial closure

Interlocutors from the target countries confirmed that most Turkish actors appeared to be willing to accept neo-patrimonial patterns to a certain degree. From their perspective, even popular Turkish soap operas such as “Magnificent Century” (Muhteşem Yüzyıl), “Resurrection: Ertuğrul” (Diriliş: Ertuğrul) and “The Last Emperor” (Payitaht Abdülhamid), which are indeed often discussed as a soft power tool of the AKP government (Çevik 2019, 231), are a vehicle to emphasise the mutual acceptance of neo-patrimonial forms of doing business. In these television series, they argue, Turkey disseminates an image of compatibility with local norms as the shows highlight how clientelism also shaped Turkey’s own historical development.²⁶

When it comes to the content of what Turkish businesses disseminate in the target societies, the interview narratives highlight that Turkish businessmen, sometimes with support of Turkish state representatives, show their acceptance of the existing local order in four strategies which perpetuate neo-patrimonial closure to varying degrees: integration into the informal economy, responsiveness to open bribery, acquiescing to official arbitrariness and operating through personal networks. Outright *integration* into the informal economy is a rare phenomenon. However, interviewees in Ukraine and Georgia knew of medium-sized Turkish firms that exploit the locally established corruption schemes and for example, benefit from false customs declarations or tax evasion.²⁷ Moreover, in the strongly monopolised market of Azerbaijan which is hostile to large foreign economic players (Mehtiyev 2019), the few large Turkish companies are said to survive through their entrenchment in the dominant coalition’s extended network. One such case is a leading food producer in Azerbaijan, a joint venture with the majority share from Turkey, which according to an interviewee is de facto controlled by members of Azerbaijan’s ruling elite.²⁸ At the other end of this spectrum are semi-legal Turkish companies that are said to operate in the more freewheeling environment in Ukraine’s regions to run their businesses outside the purview of the Turkish state.²⁹ Given that our interview sample does not include any of these companies, we can only infer that the fact that these companies were able to successfully integrate into the target country’s informal economy

Table 1. Strategies and actors that perpetuate and challenge neo-patrimonial closure.

	Dissemination strategy	Actors
Perpetuating neo-patrimonial closure	Responsiveness to open bribery	Medium and large companies entrenched in neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey
	Acquiescing to official arbitrariness	Small, medium and large companies with and without entrenchment in neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey
	Operating through personal networks	Medium and large companies with and without entrenchment in neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey
Challenging neo-patrimonial closure	Lobbying for structural change towards openness	Medium and large companies not entrenched in neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey
	Defying neo-patrimonial patterns	Small, medium and large companies not entrenched in neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey
	Promoting merit-based standards	Small, medium and large companies with and without entrenchment in neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey

means that they had already prior experience with informality and access to networks of the dominant coalition. Also, access to the Azerbaijani ruling elite is likely to be facilitated through the close ties between Turkey's and Azerbaijan's elites.³⁰ While such pro-active support of the neo-patrimonial order is a marginal phenomenon, a large number of Turkish business actors show their acceptance of a certain level of neo-patrimonial patterns by tolerating open bribery. Especially large and medium-sized Turkish businesses that know the relevance of mutual favours and personal ties from their experiences in Turkey are not shy to fulfil demands for irregular payments to local collaborators or civil servants. If requested by the local side, large companies with high-level relations also extend their bribery schemes to government officials. A Turkish businessman in Azerbaijan, for instance, openly admitted that he was waiting for a phone call from one of the local ministries to discuss the sum he was willing to contribute to fill a financial gap.³¹ According to our data, this strategy is primarily but not exclusively employed in Azerbaijan and Ukraine, where straightforward corruption patterns shape the business environment.

All types of Turkish actors, including small businesses that barely if at all operated in a neo-patrimonial environment in Turkey, perpetuate neo-patrimonial closure by acquiescing to the official arbitrariness that has replaced open corruption after the thorough anti-corruptions reforms in Georgia (Schueth 2012), Moldova and to some degree also Ukraine. In these countries, Turkish entrepreneurs report that a common scheme is to be approached by state agencies, mainly tax offices, with payment demands for alleged breaches of legal regulations. They interpret these requests as a new form of corruption. According to a Turkish businessperson who operated in several post-Soviet countries, the situation is better in Georgia and Ukraine than in Azerbaijan, where the rules only appear to be clear but they are really not. However, a substantial degree of uncertainty remains also in the countries that have undergone more reforms. Most Turkish businesses do not challenge these generally unsubstantiated allegations for the sake of not endangering the company's economic success.³² A Turkish businessperson in Georgia illustrates this approach with a recent tax audit the company faced. While the tax authorities claimed to have found minor irregularities and imposed a large fine, the company's Georgian accountants considered the fine unjustified and, referring to the improved legal system, recommended to take the case to court. The Turkish entrepreneur, however, accepted to pay the fine, and argued that the local system had indeed changed but that one had to acknowledge that there were still informal financial flows that needed to be satisfied. In this example, the Turkish business in fact counteracts the local struggle for transition to impersonal competition and openness.³³

A final strategy that is available for large and medium-sized businesses but not for small businesses³⁴ is to operate through personal ties to members of the dominant coalition. Businesspersons rely on personal ties to the dominant coalition to gain a strong market position and to resolve bureaucratic challenges of the import and export business. With regard to all four countries, Turkish entrepreneurs report that a sound market analysis is important, but not sufficient. As a Turkish businessperson in Moldova states, besides knowing the market direct support from members of the local business and political elite is crucial to establish a business.³⁵ Both in the relatively open economy of Georgia and in the severely closed economy of Azerbaijan, Turkish businesses state that the easiest way to solve problems caused by formal and informal barriers is through direct ties to medium and high-level government officials. Meanwhile small and medium

actors who lack direct contacts to state officials struggle to get meaningful responses from the ministry when approaching them via official channels. The strategies to establish ties to the target country's dominant coalition vary according to the company's position in Turkey and to its economic weight. With regard to Moldova and Georgia, the two states with the most accessible bureaucracy, investors with economic leverage report that they successfully gained access to relevant ministers and even higher-level officials by formally approaching ministerial departments. Medium-sized companies, however, argue that more direct personal contact, for example by meeting state officials in public events, is still necessary to quickly resolve issues. The owner of a restaurant chain in Georgia argues that the most valuable tools are still the cell phone numbers of high-level state officials.³⁶

Smaller businesses that lack the clout to establish networks to the dominant coalition often seek contacts in the target environment by entering the market through a joint venture with a local entrepreneur. It is worth noting that Turkish entrepreneurs recommend this strategy even though, in the long run, they consider their local partners an impediment to their business's continued growth.³⁷ To establish the necessary contacts, large and medium-sized Turkish businesses that are close to Turkey's dominant coalition also rely on the elite networks between Turkey and the target countries.³⁸ Some companies have in part relied on the support of Turkish diplomats based in the target country. However, the Turkish ambassadors and consuls who provide a helping hand are deemed to do so independently from their official obligations, and are said to be primarily motivated by their own proximity to business or a personal commitment to fostering trade with the region.³⁹ Some of the Turkish business associations, often those with strong ties to the Turkish agency DEİK and to the dominant coalition in Turkey, also help to extend networks in the target countries.⁴⁰ However, while ties to the Turkish dominant coalition can be helpful in solving severe customs-related issues,⁴¹ they do not protect the businesses in all cases. With respect to the Turkish dominant coalition, its networks help to get business abroad off the ground but do not sustain and stabilise it over the long haul.⁴² Turkish businesses were also left frustrated by the local dominant coalition when what they perceived to be playing by the rules of the local limited access order did not result in the desired outcome. Most Turkish businesses in Ukraine, for example, stayed in the country even at the height of the Maidan uprising and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas. Some companies apparently did so on the orders of the Turkish embassy.⁴³ When it came to reviving the economy, however, the Ukrainian government did not repay this trust and showed a preference for EU and other Western companies which had overwhelmingly left the country in 2014.⁴⁴

A specific case that illustrates how Turkish businesses in Georgia and Azerbaijan can also rely on local personal networks is the response to Turkey's request to close down businesses linked to the Gülenist network. In 2016 after the failed coup attempt in Turkey, the government in Baku complied with Turkey's demand and closed down the Azerbaijani-Turkish Business Association (ATIB) which was alleged to have ties to the Gülen movement. Azerbaijani citizens, however, often ensured the survival of Gülen-linked companies by taking over the companies and keeping the former Turkish owners in management. In some cases, this was orchestrated by members of Azerbaijan's elite coalition that held shares in these companies as they were not willing to accept taking

a loss solely for the sake of complying with the Turkish government's wishes.⁴⁵ In Georgia, the Gülen-related business association was also closed down without substantially affecting the Turkish business community in Georgia. To sum up, only few Turkish businesses contribute to the neo-patrimonial closure by integrating into the informal economy, but many of them directly support open and hidden corruption and most Turkish businesses pro-actively seek personal ties to members of the local dominant coalition.

Dissemination of openness in the macroeconomic environment

Despite the strategies outlined above by which Turkish actors directly or indirectly nourish neo-patrimonial practices, many businesses but also state actors from Turkey disapprove of this economic environment as too insecure and fraught with high opportunity costs.⁴⁶ In light of this critical stance towards the local status quo, a number of Turkish actors see their own role as directly or indirectly disseminating ideas and practices of competitive openness. This applies in particular to large companies with some experience of operating in an environment of impersonal competition in Turkey or in other countries and to small companies that lack the resources to engage in neo-patrimonial practices. The prevalent strategies that shine up in the interviews are on the one hand lobbying the state for structural changes at the macro-level, and on the other hand defying participation in neo-patrimonial patterns and promoting merit-based standards at the micro-level.

One group of actors that lobbies for structural changes are leading figures of large Turkish companies with personal networks that reach out to the local dominant coalition and who have some background in the more competitive business environment in Turkey. Both in Moldova and Georgia these businesspersons report that they have employed their personal connections to high and medium-rank state officials not only to solve their own concerns. They also used these channels to collect evidence from other, not necessarily Turkish companies. Based on this evidence they report to have raised awareness of these issues to wider business circles and to have presented best practices from other countries in order to push for broader changes in the host country's customs and tax regulations.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, selected Turkish business associations present themselves as advocating for structural change. This applies in particular to associations with contacts to European or U.S. investors in the region.⁴⁸ Even in Azerbaijan's closed economy, a Turkish business association was said to be in direct talks with Azerbaijani ministries over sensitive issues such as the collection of VAT on re-exported goods.⁴⁹ In Ukraine, the Turkish business association TÜİD lobbied both the Ukrainian and Turkish governments to advance the stalled negotiations over a bilateral free trade agreement which were being held up by both governments' attempts to protect special interests (Hnatyuk 2019). TÜİD deliberately positioned itself as a non-partisan interest group which briefed both sides on its proposals for compromise.⁵⁰ While analysts often regard business associations as close to Turkey's dominant coalition,⁵¹ in the two examples the associations acted without support of the Turkish embassies and in contradiction to Turkey's official policy. As other cases from Moldova and Ukraine indicate, individual Turkish diplomats also acted relatively independently from the official line, since they engage more intensively in supporting businesses in their struggle for access to the rather closed markets and in fighting neo-patrimonial patterns than Turkey's foreign

policy would imply.⁵² These insights thus show that despite the turn towards closure in Turkey's domestic system, Turkey's government still largely abstains from instructing and controlling Turkish actors abroad, at least in a region of secondary importance such as the post-Soviet neighbourhood.

Dissemination of impersonal competition and meritocracy at the micro-level

A simple but highly risky and therefore not necessarily attractive strategy is to defy participation in the neo-patrimonial practices a foreign business is confronted with in its daily routines. In our interview sample, only few small businesses that lack the capacity to operate via networks or informal payments as well as larger companies that have the capacity to absorb additional costs pursue this approach.⁵³ Two examples may illustrate that strategies to evade informal practices can be costly. The first is a small company in Kyiv that refuses to pay bribes to customs officials. According to the owner, the company therefore faces delays of 9–10 days in the customs procedure which they can only stomach because they are trading in non-perishable goods. The second example is a Turkish company in Ukraine that decided to circumvent one of the Ukrainian ports, since they experienced an unacceptable degree of corruption there. Now the goods are shipped at higher costs through a port that they perceive as less corrupt.⁵⁴ Driven primarily by the wish to safeguard themselves from cost-intensive neo-patrimonial practices, other entrepreneurs exert tight control and closely supervise their staff and partners. A manager of a large Turkish company that is set to continue operating in Ukraine despite very limited profit margins and high costs of corruption explains that the company's management controls all deliveries, payments and receipts extremely strictly so that they are less vulnerable to controls from the state. At the same time, these efforts demonstrate the company's reliance on competitive openness to their staff and partners. Another practice which signals that the Turkish partner does not accept the burden caused by corruption or the partial application of the law is to exclusively operate through up-front payment.⁵⁵

The third channel through which Turkish actors disseminate ideas of impersonal competition and standards of transparency are vocational education and training activities. Since Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova imposed legal constraints on the number of foreign staff a foreign investor can employ in the 2000s, the Turkish companies have to rely on local staff. The majority of Turkish entrepreneurs we talked to emphasised that they have to engage in vocational training themselves due to the low quality of vocational training in the countries. Thus, trainings are offered both by actors that operate in Turkey under neo-patrimonial principles and by those who are used to a more competitive environment.

According to the interviews, the training activities promote a number of values related to impersonal competition. The training sets out to convey the idea of meritocracy by linking salary levels and promotions to advanced trainings. What is more, some of the businesspersons claim to promote participatory management not only through trainings but also through their management practices which do not only focus on technical standards but also emphasise transparency and accountability at all levels. By teaching what they call international business standards, these Turkish businessmen ask employees for recommendations and allow them to criticise the management both of which are rather

unusual management practices in the target region. Depending on their size and on whether or not they have a branch in Turkey, the companies developed in-house trainings that bring local staff to Turkey or Turkish instructors to the target countries. Generally, companies prefer to work with local staff trained in Turkey, which is a frequent scheme especially in Azerbaijan. Many businesses complain, however, that this training leads to a quick staff turnover in their companies as better qualified staff often leaves for work in Western countries.⁵⁶ The group of locals who benefit from these measures is thus relatively large. However, it is the companies which collaborate with educational institutes in Turkey and in the target countries that have the widest reach. TÜİB in Azerbaijan, for example, entered into a partnership with a Turkish university and created a long-distance learning programme for 1500 students from Azerbaijan. Azeri students take courses while working in Azerbaijan and do internships with Turkish companies.⁵⁷ A multinational Turkish company in Ukraine established contacts with a local technical university and agreed to offer two to three students per year a one-year fully paid traineeship with the ambition to get the best students from the university, train them and keep them in the long run.⁵⁸ Despite the fact that the companies' educational activities are motivated by economic rationales, we consider it as a process that in the long run challenges neo-patrimonial practices by spreading principles such as meritocracy, transparency and accountability and a focus on high quality that run counter to neo-patrimonial principles.

Conclusion

The study of Turkey's foreign engagement in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine by state and business actors in the period 2014–2018 highlights that hybrid regimes indeed seek to impact the transformation or stabilisation of non-democracies, though they do so in a less straightforward manner than either democratic or authoritarian regimes. Turkey is thus a dual agent of transition as dissemination activities by Turkish actors at the same time aim to perpetuate and challenge the established neo-patrimonial closure in the target countries. These dissemination activities target both the macro-level, for example by lobbying for a new customs regime, and the micro-level where engagement ranges from paying bribes to training local staff. The analysis provides empirical evidence for our theoretical assumption, which is inspired by the concept of neo-patrimonialism and North, Wallis, and Weingast's work on limited access orders, that the hybrid nature of the domestic order affects the kind of regime-related principles a hybrid regime promotes abroad. First, our data shows that Turkey's dominant coalition did not muster all relevant groups of actors to engage in the post-Soviet space in support of the official foreign policy ambitions. While Turkey's primary regional ambition is to establish beneficial economic relations, a significant group of actors, namely the large, globally active companies represented by the business association TÜSIAD, abstained from investing in the region. Turkey's secondary ambition to enhance relations with Turkic minorities or nations in the post-Soviet region also resonates only with a small group of actors that engage in the region. Turkey's official foreign policy thus did not serve as a tool to bundle the key actors' interests and to guide a joint foreign policy by all Turkish actors involved, state or non-state. Despite the turn towards a more closed system in Turkey, most Turkish actors in our study treat government policy as loose guidance rather than as a

command that must be implemented. In some cases, like the business association TÜİD, they use their freedom, for example, to lobby more strongly for economic openness than Turkey's official foreign policy. While it is beyond the scope of our research to establish whether this is caused by a purposeful decision of the government not to put efforts into the implementation of foreign policy, the findings allow us to argue that the selective engagement of Turkish actors impacts the kind of regime-related principles they disseminate. Our empirical data confirm our second argument that the actors disseminate the principles of the domestic environment in which they predominantly operate in. However, except for the large, international companies that refuse to operate in these countries' business environments, all Turkish actors, regardless of their domestic environment to some extent accept the neo-patrimonial nature of social orders. In this regard, they see themselves in stark contrast to business actors from the EU and other Western countries. Beyond this one commonality, however, Turkish actors differed considerably in their activities and in the values they disseminated in the target society. Each actor's background as rooted in a relatively closed or relatively open sphere of Turkey's economy significantly determines the degree to which they perpetuate or challenge the established neo-patrimonial practices in the host countries. The strategies Turkish businesses employ vary from integration into the informal economy to acquiescing to bribery and other informal payments to promoting structural change towards openness and competition with the help of personal networks to the dominant coalition and promoting meritocracy in vocational education and training. It is noteworthy that the same set of actors tends to employ the same strategies regardless of whether they operate in the strongly closed economy of Azerbaijan, or the more open economies of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Hence, it would be fascinating for future research to conduct a similar analysis of Turkish business engagement in other regions of Turkish foreign policy such as the Balkans, the Middle East or Sub-Saharan Africa.

Our results may have two implications for future research on external promotion of regime change or stability by democratising actors such as the EU and authoritarian players such as China or Russia. First, the study confirms that a regional player will attempt to influence a partner country's political and economic regime even if the government has not developed an explicit transformation agenda. Second, we show that hybrid regimes may still be advocates of democratic openness despite growing authoritarian tendencies in some subsystems of the social order. It is therefore crucial to grasp the complexity of hybridity by identifying areas of closure and openness across the societal subsystems including politics, economy or education, but also *within* the individual subsystems. Whether a hybrid regime promotes primarily non-democratic or democratic norms appears to depend on the regime's domestic design. In any case, how far these findings travel needs to be answered by studies on other sectors in Turkey, such as education or culture, and by comparison to other hybrid regimes with regional ambitions such as South Africa, Morocco, Venezuela or Egypt.

Notes

1. Interview with a Turkish expert in Ankara, Turkey on 10 May 2018.
2. Source: data provided on the authors' request in December 2017 by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (www.geostat.ge).

3. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-ukraine.en.mfa>, accessed on 3 December 2019.
4. Source: UN Comtrade Data retrieved through EU-STRAT Database of Interdependencies in the Eastern Partnership Neighbourhood, <http://142.93.104.67/main>, accessed on 18 March 2019.
5. Interview with a former Ukrainian diplomat to Turkey in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April 2018, and interview with an Azerbaijani businessperson in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 January 2018.
6. Presidential speeches can be accessed through the Turkish presidency's website at: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/receptayyiperdogan/konusmalar/>. Speeches by the foreign minister can be accessed through the Turkish Foreign Ministry's website at: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sub.tr.mfa?53e304f9-73af-43b3-83b5-3b43db38d51f>.
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8. Interview with a Turkish analyst in Istanbul, Turkey on 14 May 2018.
9. Interviews with an Azerbaijani analyst in Istanbul, Turkey on 7 May 2018 and with a Ukrainian state official in Kyiv, Ukraine on 19 April 2019.
10. Interview with an Azerbaijani analyst in Baku, Azerbaijan on 31 January 2018 and a Turkish businessperson in Istanbul, Turkey on 16 May 2018.
11. Interview with a Turkish expert and a Turkish businessperson in Istanbul, Turkey on 23 February and 16 May 2018.
12. Interview with two Turkish and one international analysts in Ankara, Turkey on 10 May 2018.
13. Interview with a Turkish analyst in Istanbul, Turkey on 14 May 2018.
14. Interviews with a former Turkish state official in Istanbul, Turkey on 16 May 2018 and with an Azerbaijani analyst in Baku, Azerbaijan on 31 January 2018.
15. Interview with a Ukrainian state official in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April 2018.
16. Interviews with a Ukrainian state official and a Ukrainian analyst in Kyiv, Ukraine on 18 and 23 April 2018.
17. Interview with a Turkish analyst in Ankara, Turkey on 10 May 2018.
18. Interview with a Ukrainian state official in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April.
19. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Istanbul, Turkey on 16 May 2018.
20. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Istanbul, Turkey on 17 May 2018.
21. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Odessa, Ukraine on 27 April 2018.
22. Interviews with analysts in Ankara, Turkey on 10 May 2018 and in Istanbul, Turkey on 16 May 2018.
23. Interviews with former state officials in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April 2018 and in Istanbul, Turkey on 25 October 2018, and with businesspersons in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1 February 2018 and in Tbilisi, Georgia on 22 March and on 2, 20, 23, 27 April 2018.
24. Interviews with former state representative in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April 2018, analysts in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 and 31 January 2018, in Batumi, Georgia on 10 and 11 April 2018, in Comrat, Moldova on 13 February 2018 and Chisinau, Moldova on 15 February 2018, in Ankara, Turkey on 10 May 2018 and in Istanbul, Turkey on 19 February and 15 May 2018 and with businesspersons in Tbilisi, Georgia on 28 February 2018 and in Chisinau, Moldova on 7 February 2018.
25. Interviews with businesspersons from Istanbul, Turkey on 17 May 2018, from Turkey in Tbilisi, Georgia on 28 February 2018, with an analyst in Baku, Azerbaijan on 29 January 2018, in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018, in Comrat, Chisinau on 13 February 2018 with a government official in Chisinau, Moldova on 02 February 2018.
26. Interviews with analysts in Baku, Azerbaijan on 28 January 2018, in Tbilisi, Georgia on 20 November 2017, in Chisinau, Moldova on 02 February 2018, and with a state official in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 January 2018.
27. Interview with businessperson and state official in Tbilisi, Georgia on 12 April and 28 February 2018, and with businessperson in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018.
28. Interview with an analyst in Baku, Azerbaijan on 31 January 2018
29. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018.

30. Interview with an economic analyst in Baku, Azerbaijan on 2 February 2018.
31. Interview with Turkish businesspersons in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018 and in Kyiv, Ukraine on 20 and 24 April and with an analyst in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 January 2018.
32. Interview with Turkish businesspersons in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018, in Tbilisi, Georgia on 22, 27 March and 12 April 2018, in Batumi, Georgia on 13 April 2018, in Chisinau, Moldova on 2 February 2018 and in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1 February 2018.
33. Interview with Turkish businessperson in Tbilisi, Georgia on 28 February 2018.
34. Interview with two Turkish businesspersons in Batumi, Georgia on 11 April 2018, and with an analyst in Chisinau, Moldova on 2 February 2018.
35. Interviews with a Turkish businessperson and an analyst in Chisinau, Moldova on 2 February 2018.
36. Interviews with a Turkish businessperson in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 January and on 2 February 2018, with Turkish businesspersons in Tbilisi on 22 March and 2 April 2018 and in Batumi on 10 April 2018.
37. Interviews with Turkish businesspersons in Batumi, Georgia on 13 April 2018 and on 12 April 2018, in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 January and 1 February 2018 and Kyiv, Ukraine on 20 and 24 April 2018.
38. Interviews with Turkish businesspersons in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1 February 2018 and in Chisinau, Moldova 30 January 2018, and in Batumi, Georgia on 10 April 2018.
39. Interview with a Turkish state official in Istanbul, Turkey on 25 October 2018, Turkish businessperson in Tbilisi, Georgia on 2 April 2018.
40. Interviews with Turkish businesspersons in Istanbul, Turkey on 17 May 2018, in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018 and in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 January and 1 February 2018.
41. Interview with Georgian government official who reported about interventions from the Turkish side in Tbilisi, Georgia on 28 February 2018.
42. Interview with Turkish businesspersons in Istanbul, Turkey on 16 and 17 May 2018, in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018, in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018, in Batumi, Georgia on 12 April 2018 and in Tbilisi, Georgia on 28 February and on 22 March 2018.
43. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Odessa, Ukraine on 27 April 2018.
44. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018.
45. Interviews with two analysts in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 and 31 January 2018.
46. Interviews with Turkish businesspersons in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018, in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018, in Tbilisi, Georgia on 2 April 2018, with analysts in Kyiv, Ukraine on 20 April 2018, in Baku, Azerbaijan on 31 January 2018, and in Istanbul, Turkey on 19 February 2018.
47. Interviews with Turkish businesspersons in Batumi, Georgia on 13 April 2018, Tbilisi, Georgia on 20 April 2018, and in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018.
48. Interviews with Turkish businessperson in Tbilisi, Georgia on 20 April 2018 and on 28 February 2018, with a representative of a Turkish business in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 January 2018 and in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1 February 2018.
49. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1 February 2018.
50. Interviews with two Turkish businesspersons in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 April 2018 and in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018.
51. Interviews with a Turkish businessperson and an international analyst in Kyiv, Ukraine on 24 and 22 April 2018 and with an Azerbaijani businessperson in Baku, Azerbaijan on 30 January 2018.
52. Interview with two Turkish and an international analyst in Ankara, Turkey on 10 May 2018.
53. Interview with Turkish businesspersons in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 and 27 April 2018, in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April and in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 January 2018, and with an analyst in Kyiv, Ukraine on 20 April 2018.
54. Interview with businesspersons in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018, in Kyiv, Ukraine on 23 April and in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 January 2018.
55. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018 and in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 January 2018.

56. Interview with an Azerbaijani expert in Baku, Azerbaijan on 31 January 2018, with a state official in Tbilisi, Georgia on 27 April 2018, and with Turkish businesspersons in Chisinau, Moldova on 30 January 2018, in Tbilisi, Georgia on 22 March 2018.
57. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Baku, Azerbaijan on 1 February 2018.
58. Interview with a Turkish businessperson in Odessa, Ukraine on 26 April 2018.

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