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Turkey and the Eastern Partnership: Turkey's Foreign Policy Towards its Post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood

Ole Frahm, Katharina Hoffmann, Dirk Lehmkuhl

Abstract

This paper discusses the main strands of Turkey's post-Cold War foreign policy in its post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine with a focus on the period of Justice and Development Party rule (2002-2018). Based on the analysis of Turkey's rhetorical stance towards the region's countries and its actual interaction across five sectors – trade, energy, security, education/culture and migration – our findings demonstrate that the foreign policy rhetoric with its strong emphasis on historical ties, economic and energy cooperation and support for regional countries' territorial integrity is not matched by Turkey's observable engagement. An important factor for the mismatch between rhetoric and engagement is that relations with the region are seen at least partly through the prism of Turkey's more salient relations with Russia.

While not a priority region, Turkey's policy towards this space gained momentum after 2002 when the Turkish government increasingly voiced regional ambitions and sought to leverage its neighbourhood for a more prominent global role. Accordingly, Turkey's engagement with the six countries varies depending on cultural proximity, diaspora ties and the country's potential to serve Turkey's regional ambitions. Relations with Azerbaijan are therefore the most intense while those with Belarus the most aloof. In terms of sectoral engagement, economic links but also cultural and educational ties are promoted most actively and consistently. Turkey is more ambiguous with regard to security and pays little attention to migration. A substantial contribution to relations with the post-Soviet neighbourhood is on the other hand made by Turkish non-state actors, especially the business community.

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Contents

1. Introduction	6
2. Foreign Policy: Rhetoric, Behaviour and Actors	7
3. Turkey's Foreign Policy since the End of the Cold War	9
3.1. <i>Turkey's new foreign policy rhetoric and action</i>	9
3.2. <i>The post-Soviet Black Sea neighbours in Turkey's new foreign policy</i>	12
4. Turkey's Engagement in its Post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood	13
4.1. <i>Foreign trade and development policy</i>	13
4.2. <i>Energy policy</i>	16
4.3. <i>Security policy</i>	18
4.4. <i>Educational and cultural policy</i>	20
4.5. <i>Migration flows and policy</i>	22
5. Turkey's Rhetorical Approach to the Post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood	25
5.1. <i>Foreign trade policy rhetoric</i>	25
5.2. <i>Energy policy rhetoric</i>	26
5.3. <i>Security policy rhetoric</i>	26
5.4. <i>Cultural policy rhetoric</i>	28
5.5. <i>Migration policy rhetoric</i>	28
6. Concluding Discussion	29
6.1. <i>Turkey's foreign policy in rhetoric and action</i>	29
6.2. <i>Digging deeper: Turkey's sectoral engagement in the region</i>	31
6.3. <i>Turkey's post-Soviet Black Sea policy in relation to Russia and the EU</i>	32
6.4. <i>What is to be done: Non-state actors – the missing piece of the puzzle?</i>	33
References	34

1. Introduction

The post-Soviet states Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan form a space that throughout the last two decades has been marked by contestation. Different international actors use diverging tools to gain influence on these states' international and domestic conduct, while domestic actors develop varying, often conflicting strategies in response (Delcour 2017). When discussing international impact on this space academic literature and policy-oriented contributions alike tend to focus exclusively on Russia and the European Union (EU), the two most important players (Ademmer 2017; Averre 2009; Dias 2013; Zagorski 2005). The EU has shaped the space by including the six post-Soviet countries in its Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy with the aim of intensifying relations; a step to which Russia reacted harshly, not even refraining from military means.

However, the prevailing focus on Russia and the EU risks underestimating the influence of other actors on the countries of the broader space comprising the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) as well as Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. In particular, Turkey's role in this space is largely understudied considering that the country has become an increasingly active player that receives growing attention not only from the South Caucasus but also from Moldova, Ukraine and even Belarus. At the same time, Turkey finds itself at the intersection of violent regional and international crises while the country's foreign policy has become a lot more volatile of late. Moreover, the member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and EU accession candidate has very complex and frequently contentious relations with the other major external actors in the region, the EU and Russia.

In this paper we therefore aim to add to the research on international relations in this space by providing an analysis of the key strands of Turkey's foreign policy. Our investigation starts with the end of the Cold War and thus with the independence of the countries from the dissolving Soviet Union. However, the primary focus will be on the time period since the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) came to power in 2002, after which Turkey's overall foreign policy experienced significant changes. The choice to focus on the six countries in question and to analyse bilateral relations between Turkey and each of them across a range of sectors – from trade to energy to security and from education and culture to migration – is not the result of a deductive analysis of the empirical situation on the ground but is owed to the preceding collaborative efforts of the EU-STRAT consortium in drawing up a comparative lens on the EaP countries' international relations.

However, by depicting relations between Turkey and the Eastern Partnership in comprehensive form, the objective here is to provide a baseline of the state of relations between Turkey and the region. By establishing the topical and geographical areas that are particularly salient both for Turkey and the six EaP countries, by assessing the discrepancy between rhetoric and action in Turkey's policy towards the region and by touching upon Turkey's interactions with the other external actors in the region, this working paper lays the groundwork for further more focused research on specific aspects of Turkey's regional foreign policy. Despite the fact that Belarus is not a Black Sea country, we frame this space as Turkey's post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood as this best encapsulates what from the perspective of Turkey is in fact not a distinct region but rather a set of countries which are treated with highly differing degrees of attention by Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey's relations with Russia, though connected to the six countries analysed, constitute a separate plane of relations and are conducted in substantially different form from Turkey's relations with the other six countries. Therefore Russia, a post-Soviet Black Sea littoral state, is excluded from the in-depth analysis.

Three key questions structure this paper: *First*, what have been the grand lines of Turkish foreign policy in the AKP period both in general and specifically towards the EaP countries? *Second*, what flows link Turkey to the six countries of its post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood? *Third*, what are the key pillars of Turkey's foreign policy towards the region in both rhetoric and action? In order to get a more precise picture we study questions two and three with particular attention to the following sectors of engagement: trade, energy trade, security, education and culture as well as migration. The analysis operates with a conceptual frame informed by theoretical contributions to the field of foreign policy analysis that allows us to widen the perspective from state foreign policy to non-state actors' contribution to Turkey's foreign relations.

We identify a number of findings. To start with, it is fair to state that the space studied receives significant attention from Turkey even though it is not the key geographic area of Turkey's foreign policy. While it was the target of initiatives already in the late 1980s/90s, Turkey's policy towards this space gained momentum after 2002 when Turkey increasingly voiced regional ambitions, drawing among others on the idea of promoting a 'Turkic world'. According to this idea, Turkey's engagement with the six countries varies depending on the cultural proximity, diaspora ties and the country's potential to serve Turkey's regional ambitions. In consequence, Azerbaijan attracts most and Belarus the least attention. What is more, the degree of activeness and commitment of Turkey's foreign policy varies also across sectors. Economic ties but also cultural and educational ties are promoted most actively and consistently, while Turkey is more ambiguous with regard to security and pays little attention to migration. Finally, we observe that non-state actors, in particular business entrepreneurs, substantially contribute to establishing relations with the countries. This group of actors and their role in Turkey's foreign policy, we argue, therefore deserves more intensive study.

The paper proceeds with a brief discussion of the analytical lenses and methods employed before providing an overview of Turkey's new foreign policy outlook. The subsequent sections aim to address the three guiding questions. Section three provides an overview of the grand lines of Turkey's foreign policy and rhetoric since the Cold War, while section four highlights Turkey's main policies towards and links with the individual countries with regard to the five sectors in focus. This is followed by a closer look into the Turkish government's rhetoric and the way Turkey frames its engagement in this neighbourhood area. Concluding the analysis is a discussion of the relationship between rhetoric and action in Turkey's regional politics, an assessment of the most salient countries and sectors of engagement and some thoughts on the relationship of Turkey's actions in the region to those of the EU and Russia. We end by briefly discussing how these insights shape the agenda of future studies on Turkey's influence on and in this space.

2. Foreign Policy: Rhetoric, Behaviour and Actors

The intention of our research is to gain an innovative perspective on the foreign policy of Turkey as an actor that in the current globalized world is embedded in multiple international flows and driven by multiple groups of actors. To this end our empirical analysis operates with a rather broad definition of the term foreign policy as our object of study. We basically rely on Valerie Hudson's (2005: 2) understanding of foreign policy as "process and resultants of human decision making with reference to or having known consequences for foreign entities". To be applied empirically some further specification is necessary. Hudson limits foreign policy to actions purposefully directed at foreign entities, but does not further specify decisions and actors.

In our understanding foreign policy decisions have two dimensions: rhetoric and action. With reference to role theory we conceive of foreign policy rhetoric as purposeful expressions of concepts of a country's role *vis-à-vis* the target entities (Walker 1981: 272). Action refers to the dimension of foreign policy decisions that ultimately manifests itself in events which allow specification of "who does what to whom, and how" (Carlsnaes 2015: 37). It is noteworthy that the relation and congruence between rhetoric and action is a key question in foreign policy analyses, particularly for role theory scholars (Cuhadar et al. 2017; Thies 2009: 9; Walker 1981: 272). Existing empirical contributions on this matter allow us to conclude that the strength of foreign policy rhetoric *vis-à-vis* action, the degree to which rhetoric is enacted and guides action varies across time, space and actors (Breuning 1995; Holsti 1970: 280). It thus needs to be investigated empirically. When analysing foreign policy rhetoric we will, therefore, trace broad concepts that express self-perception and positioning in the world, long-term purposes articulated for the individual countries but also for specific foreign policy sectors.

The analysis of foreign policy action requires, of course, a definition of actors. Foreign policy analysis has traditionally considered official authorities, thus state actors, as carriers of foreign policy. These, however, may also target non-state actors in foreign entities (Gustavsson 1999: 76) as well as actors that "exist outside traditional state borders" (Kaufman 2009: 9). While we agree with the broad definition of foreign policy target actors, we consider the definition of carriers as too narrow. In times of globalization we can hardly assume that foreign relations are exclusively executed by state authorities. This argument is supported by the concept of soft or smart power which scholars assume to be a component in various countries' foreign policy including Turkey (Rumelili 2011; Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017). These concepts describe foreign policy also as drawing on values and incentives transmitted through cultural, societal and economic cooperation, thus by involving non-state actors (Gallarotti 2015: 250; Nye 2009). Against this background, we will have an eye on the role played by business, cultural, educational, religious, diaspora and other non-governmental actors as potential carriers of Turkey's foreign policy.

Our conceptual foci, foreign policy rhetoric (self-conceptualization, position in the world, long-term purposes) and action (objectives and actors), will guide the analysis of the following original empirical material. We analysed foreign policy statements that referred to at least one of the countries studied which amounted to 81 speeches by the respective presidents of Turkey (Abdullah Gül 2007-14, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan 2014-17) and to 64 speeches by the Turkish foreign minister (Ahmet Davutoğlu 2009-14, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 2014-15; 2015-17). This was out of a total of 1053 presidential speeches (717 by Gül and 336 by Erdoğan) from 2007 to 2017 and 141 speeches by the foreign minister (118 by Davutoğlu and 23 by Çand 23 b) from 2009 to 2017¹. Additionally, we considered policy papers by the Turkish Foreign Ministry's Strategic Research Center (SAM). Beyond this we gained a comprehensive overview of bilateral agreements. We analysed trade, energy, security, migration and remittances linkages based on data provided by the United Nations Comtrade Database (UNCOMTRADE), the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the World Bank and official data provided by the Turkish government.

¹ This refers to speeches from the start of Abdullah Gül's tenure in August 2007 and includes speeches by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan until the end of October 2017. For foreign ministers, the period is from Ahmet Davutoğlu's appointment in May 2009 and includes speeches by Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu until the end of October 2017.

3. Turkey's Foreign Policy since the End of the Cold War

The end of the bipolar competition that shaped the Cold War triggered a drastic change in Turkey's foreign policy outlook. Even without a political regime change, Turkey experienced a radical re-conceptualization of its foreign policy (Martin and Keridis 2004). This section will outline the key developments and conceptual pillars of Turkey's new foreign policy. The idea is to highlight the context in which Turkey's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus is embedded. The excursus will help to place Turkey's foreign policy towards these target countries in the context of Turkey's overall foreign policy.

Ever since the establishment of the Soviet Union, but in particular during the Cold War, Turkish foreign policy lacked genuinely independent foci outside of NATO's strategic remit as a frontier state (Lesser 2007). The only exception was the Cyprus issue when the Turkish army invaded the island in 1974. Accordingly, the Turkish state hardly paid heed to its Black Sea neighbourhood. This changed with the 1980s when Turkey signed a few transport agreements and started to expand its trade with the USSR. However, more significant change was prompted only in the 1990s. The demise of the Warsaw Pact and of the Soviet Union created a radically different environment with newly open borders and newly erupting conflicts in Turkey's immediate vicinity (Hale 2012: 207). In response to the altered regional but also global realities Turkey transformed from a "passive player rather than an initiator of change" (Robins 2003: 6) into an increasingly dynamic and pro-active foreign political actor in the 2000s (Keyman 2010: 320).

The initial impetus for re-orientation was given in the late 1990s by Foreign Minister Ismail Cem (1997-2002). Analysts, however, associate the actual increase of foreign policy activism with the AKP government in 2002 (Cakir and Akdag 2017: 334; Keyman 2010: 317). The foreign policy transformation under AKP leadership can be distinguished into two stages. The first period (2002-2006) was marked by moderate Islamist rule and promoted a policy of liberalization and Europeanization. This orientation was rooted in the prospect of EU membership which suddenly appeared to be within reach after a rapprochement with Greece and the formal start of accession negotiations in 2005 (Öniş 2003; Tocci 2005). In the second phase (2006-today), when EU membership negotiations failed to progress, Turkey began to act more independently and more pronouncedly turned to its neighbourhood (Linden et al. 2011). Turkey's foreign policy outlook took an increasingly ideological and dogmatic tinge when Ahmet Davutoğlu, an academic and long-standing foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Erdoğan, became foreign (2009-14) and later prime minister (2014-16) (Demirtaş 2012). So far his successors as Foreign and Prime Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (since 2015) and Binali Yıldırım (since 2017) respectively, have not developed a new alternative foreign policy paradigm for the Turkish government. In order to sketch the rhetoric dimension of the new paradigm in the following section we will therefore mainly refer to Davutoğlu's foreign policy outlook.

3.1. Turkey's new foreign policy rhetoric and action

The foreign policy outlook promoted by Davutoğlu and widely supported by the AKP government builds on concepts like civilization, geographic determinism, emphasis on the neighbourhood and historical responsibility with reference to the Ottoman past. In his academic work, including the book 'Strategic Depth' published in 2000, as well as in policy papers and speeches, Davutoğlu has integrated these ideas into a comprehensive framework for Turkey's foreign policy (Cohen 2016: 528). Some of the key concepts were, however, introduced already in

the pre-Davutoğlu era. Already Turgut Özal (1983-89 prime minister, 1989-1993 president) emphasized good relations with the neighbourhood. Foreign Minister Ismail Cem introduced the idea of cooperation among civilizations or 'civilizational geography' in the late 1990s (Bilgin and Bilgiç 2011: 191; Yesiltas 2013: 5). In contrast to Davutoğlu, Cem employed these concepts to frame intensified relations with the EU (Bilgin and Bilgiç 2011: 180). Also, the notion of Turkey as a Eurasian power in a region stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China was already voiced in 1992 by then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel (Erşen 2013: 27).

Davutoğlu's foreign policy vision is said to combine a focus on soft power (Benhaim and Öktem 2015) with an emphasis on Turkey's unique geopolitical position (Yesiltas 2013) to develop a new domestic nationalist project (Saracoglu and Demirkol 2015). In Davutoğlu's view restoration and consolidation were the order of the day for Turkey's foreign policy (Davutoğlu 2011b). He framed the changing regional and global post-Cold War environment as providing an opportunity for Turkey to escape from its status as passive actor and cast off the designation as "sick man of the Bosphorus" (Davutoğlu 2010).

The foreign minister's eagerness to coin the image of Turkey as a pro-active power can be illustrated by a speech given in 2012 in which Davutoğlu picks up one of the labels often attributed to Turkey, namely that of a being a bridge between East and West. Davutoğlu (2012b) rejects this label by arguing that "a bridge is passive, a bridge is something that people pass over, that is used by others". More appropriate, he argues in the same speech, is to depict and utilize Turkey's geographical environment as a vital asset serving Turkey's vital interests. In his eyes, none of the neighbours, neither Russia nor the EU nor the Middle East can ignore Turkey (Davutoğlu 2012b). However, relations with the entire neighbourhood are to be conducted amicably as Ankara's "official slogan, which could be called the Davutoğlu doctrine, was 'zero problems with neighbors'" (Cornell 2012: 14).

The new foreign policy outlook also conceives of Turkey as a centre of civilization. The country's identity is described as 'Afro-Eurasian' and thus not at the fringes but the very centre of a vast tri-continental landmass (Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017: 551). This new self-conceptualization resulted in a geographic re-orientation towards new world regions. With Europe increasingly supplanted, Turkey has been striving for a more exalted role in the Middle East (Ertosun 2017). In this regard Turkey has been depicted as a norm-driven protector of regional stability (Köstem 2017: 730) or as a model for secular Islamic democracy (Secor 2011: 159; Tocci 2011: 78). The turn towards the wider, in particular Muslim, neighbourhood has frequently been dubbed Neo-Ottomanism (Murinson 2006) – while others are more critical of the use of the concept (Çağaptay 2009). Davutoğlu, however, has fervently rejected this label, arguing that it could be interpreted as insinuating aggressive policies. Nevertheless, Ibrahim Kalın, who succeeded Davutoğlu as chief foreign policy advisor to Erdoğan, approvingly noted that Turkey was "perceived as a country that is able to fuse traditional Islamic-Ottoman culture with socio-economic modernization" (Kalın 2011: 19).

Davutoğlu tied back Turkey's capacity to implement this foreign policy vision to domestic political stability. In the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), he argued that Turkey initially struggled to benefit from the new opportunities provided by the end of the Cold War due to domestic turmoil and political instability. However, to his mind, Turkey managed to emerge unscathed from the ripple effects of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008 due to the newfound political stability with a democratically elected single-party government and sustained economic growth (Davutoğlu 2012c). Turkey's self-conception in the AKP period finds expression in the expectation to see the imminent end of Western cultural and political predominance and the advent of a genuinely multipolar world order. This new foreign policy vision includes aspirations to become

one of the regional nodes of power. The much-repeated slogan 'the world is larger than five' (Dünya beşten büyük) serves to illustrate this ambition. In 2011 Davutoğlu (2011b) declared more pronouncedly: "Our ultimate goal is this: by 2023 we want Turkey to be a global power whose voice is to be heard everywhere". Later, in a 2012 speech Davutoğlu (2012d) identified Turkey's ambition to become one of the world's ten largest economies as a step on the way towards becoming a global power.

It is beyond the scope of this section to provide a comprehensive picture of how this new vision translated into foreign policy action. It shall suffice to present selective developments. In general, Turkey's opening towards the world has been marked by new diplomatic instruments. One important novel political mechanism, in existence since 2006, are bilateral, high-level strategic cooperation councils (Yüksek Düzeyde Stratejik İşbirliği Konseyleri, YDSK). They are meant to streamline bilateral relations and allow for a quicker and more efficient response to bilateral questions. A new diplomatic instrument is the annual ambassadors' conference, introduced in 2008. Beyond this Turkey opened a large number of new embassies and started engaging in entirely novel regions for Turkey like Africa (Antonopoulos et al. 2017: 234). The geographic re-orientation indeed led to a number of independent and unpredictable initiatives in the Middle East. The most glaring example is the 2010 nuclear deal Turkey brokered with Iran (together with Brazil) which went diametrically against the United States' (US) and Western policy (Öniş 2011). Overall, the dual policy goals of geographically enlarging the sphere of influence while nonetheless having, in Davutoğlu's words, 'zero problems' with an extended neighbourhood initially saw some success (Stein 2014). An example was the temporarily substantially improved relations with Egypt after the Arab Spring.

The early days of the Arab Spring were also evidence of the changing nature of what constituted Turkey as an actor in foreign policy because "as the influence of public opinion on Turkish foreign policy increased, various non-governmental organizations and private sector actors have become more involved in the process of foreign policy making" (Kanat 2014: 67). In fact, the Turkish government is very cognizant of the fact that a wide range of actors beyond the government contribute to Turkish foreign policy. Combined with the spread of communication technology, Turkish foreign policy under the AKP's rule has for the first time sought out and managed to get a larger public in Turkey interested and invested in the country's foreign policy. Foreign minister Çto Turki lists the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), Turkish Airlines, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, the Yunus Emre Institutes, AFAD Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, the Red Crescent and other civil society organizations as key non-state actors (Çavuşoğlu 2015). At the same time, the pro-government think tank SETA pointed out that Turkey in its contemporary foreign policy environment will itself have to increasingly reckon with non-state actors (Ufuk et al. 2017).

However, the situation has changed significantly with an increasing domestic turn towards autocratic behaviour. Not only has the country lost its appeal as a model of moderate political Islam but in the wake of the war in Syria and the ever worsening ties with the EU, Turkey was left with zero neighbours without problems, relative regional isolation (Magued 2016; Öktem 2015) and in the process of de-Europeanization (Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber 2016). This picture of growing ambition that is not necessarily matched with adequate policies and means can also be found in Turkey's foreign policy towards its post-Soviet Black Sea neighbours in the AKP period.

3.2. *The post-Soviet Black Sea neighbours in Turkey's new foreign policy*

As the special focus of this working paper is the relations between Turkey and the six countries that form part of what we term the country's post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood, this section will discuss where Turkey's post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood is positioned in the country's foreign policy outlook. In a speech in 2009 Davutoğlu (2009b) spells out Turkey's geographic foreign policy priorities, which in his view are in line with those of the US "Number one: Iraq, number two: Afghanistan-Pakistan, number three: Middle East, number four: Palestine, Lebanon, number five Caucasia, Armenia, number six Cyprus, etc". Thus, the space we study in this paper is in Turkey's priority focus even though it is not the top priority. It is important, however, to emphasize that the six countries, which in light of the EU and Russia's contestation over the shared neighbourhood appear to evolve into a space, is not perceived as a region in Ankara. Turkey's foreign policy in rhetoric and action addresses either individual countries or refers to them as part of the Caucasus, the Black Sea region as a whole, Eurasia or, simply, the neighbourhood. By framing "this entire geographic region, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia as our friends and brotherly peoples" Davutoğlu (2009b) underlines that Turkey is seeking close relations to the former Eastern Bloc in general.

Some authors perceive Turkey's relations with the space under study as peripheral in Turkish foreign policy with relations being "geared around maximizing mutual economic potential" (Göksel 2011: 5). Others observe tendencies to develop a regional policy *vis-à-vis* the South Caucasus and beyond with the ambition to gain a predominant role in the region (Baudner 2014; Novikova 2015). When it comes to the entire Black Sea region, Turkey's primary interest appears to be maritime security. With regard to the Black Sea region as a whole, however, Turkey is far from conceiving let alone achieving a regional leadership role (Petriashvili 2015). While in the 1990s Turkey was a driving force in the formation of multilateral regional formats, ultimately Turkey appears to have only increased its activism in the Black Sea area once the EU itself started to show a growing interest in the region (Ustun 2010: 238).

The countries in question have to a varying degree become an important pillar in Turkey's efforts to improve its regional role and to become one of the world's leading powers. The issues which receive special attention in Turkey include emerging and protracted crises such as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Russo-Georgian war and Russia's annexation of Crimea. Beyond that, cultural and historical ties bind Turkey particularly closely to some entities, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, the Gagauzi autonomy in Moldova, the *de facto* state Abkhazia and the autonomous region of Adjara in Georgia as well as Crimea in Ukraine. In a speech held in Ukraine in 2012 Davutoğlu (2012a) stresses that these ties turn the neighbours into an inherent part of Turkey by claiming: "Turkey is a European country but at the same time an Aegean country. Turkey is a Balkan country but at the same time a Middle Eastern country, a Caucasian country. Turkey is a Black Sea country as it is also a Mediterranean country". This perspective is accompanied by a marked sense of 'returning' to a region that had either been part of the Ottoman Empire or had close relations with it. Davutoğlu (2010) remarks with regret that Turkey had to rediscover these regions with which it had historically been linked.

Overall, Turkey's foreign policy is driven by a rather differentiated if not fragmented approach towards this geographic space. It will be insightful to look into Turkey's rhetoric and action in the individual sectors of foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the individual countries. The following section will do so by looking at economic relations as well as energy, security, cultural, educational and migration policies towards the countries of the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood.

4. Turkey's Engagement in its Post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood

Overall, in recent years Turkey's foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the countries of its post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood increased in intensity and areas of activity. This section will discuss five sectors that allow us to illustrate the priorities of Turkey's engagement. Doing so will enable us to identify how the overall outlook of Turkish foreign policy breaks down in specific fields of action. These five sectors are, in order, trade policy, energy policy, security policy, educational and cultural policy and migration policy. This section will shed light on developments in these sectors since the 1990s by first sketching the dimension of the relations and then discussing Turkey's actions in terms of policies and instruments.

4.1. Foreign trade and development policy

An analysis of Turkey's international agreements shows that ever since the early 1990s trade has been the key focus of Turkey's foreign policy (Cakir and Akdag 2017: 350). Turkey's trade relations with the region date back to an agreement on the promotion of Turkish investments in the Soviet Union in 1990 during Turgut Özal's presidency. Özal's policy was in general shaped by the attempt to enhance Turkey's links with its wider neighbourhood, especially with the Middle East (Bilgin and Bilgiç 2011: 184). Turkey formally engages in economic ties with all post-Soviet Black Sea neighbours except for Armenia whose border with Turkey remains closed and with which formally reported trade exchanges hardly exist. When the influential Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSIAD) made efforts to improve trade relations with Armenia it was severely restrained by the need to cater to nationalist sensibilities (Kluge 2009). However, trade with Turkey is realized via Georgia and bilateral economic ties with Armenia often operate via hidden ownership structures or informal trade (Kirişçi 2013: 275). Given these rather opaque trade structures we omit the case of Armenia in this section as international economic data hardly disclose the flows and official state policies do not play a role.

4.1.1. Bilateral and multilateral trade flows

In the last ten years, Turkey's trade turnover with Azerbaijan and Georgia has increased fivefold, trade with Belarus increased fourfold and trade with Ukraine and Moldova has doubled with overall trade volume peaking in 2013. Among the five, in 2016 half of all trade was with Ukraine while the share of both Azerbaijan and Georgia had risen from six per cent each in 2002 to 20 % and 18 % respectively. However, while the rate of growth is impressive, trade with Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus has never made up more than three per cent of Turkey's global trade. Turkey's trade with these countries is comparable with its trade relations to South-East Asia, if we look at export, and is slightly more intensive than trade relations with Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (see figure 1).

The pattern of commodities traded has experienced substantial change. In the early 2000s, Turkey's imports from the region concentrated on heavy metals, mineral fuels, chemicals and fertilisers and wood products – key export goods of the former Soviet republics – while foodstuff such as sugar, fruits and flour as well as electrical equipment and detergents made up a large share of exports to the region in the same time period. In 2016, iron and steel remain the top import goods but are joined by oil seeds, wood and wooden articles, plant oils and food products while machinery, plastic, apparel, electrical equipment, iron and steel and fruits dominate Turkey's exports. Ukraine is both the largest exporter and import market followed by Georgia and Azerbaijan. It is noteworthy that none of these sectors bar heavy metals rank among the top ten sectors of Turkey's overall trade. Turkey thus does not depend on trade with the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbours in any sector. As a consequence, none of the states is a crucial trade partner for Turkey. Turkey has nonetheless engaged in developing trade policies and trade instruments with these neighbours, as the following sections will show.

4.1.2. Bilateral and multilateral trade policy

Turkey signed bilateral agreements on cooperation in communication, transport, economic cooperation and the protection of investments with all five countries in the 1990s and set up bilateral business councils run by the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK). Since the 2000s, Turkish business entrepreneurs increasingly lobby the government to facilitate access to potential export markets in Turkey's neighbourhood (Bilgin and Bilgiç 2011: 177; Kirişçi 2013). Turkey has signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with Georgia (2008) and Moldova (2014) and is in negotiations with Ukraine and Azerbaijan. However, a significant problem is that FTAs in the region are not actually properly implemented on the ground (Shiriyev 2016: 23). Turkey has also set up several multilateral forums which involve the post-Soviet Black Sea countries. In 1992, Turkey initiated the Black Sea Cooperation (BSEC) format which in 1999 turned into a full-fledged regional organisation. Turkey has, however, lacked both the capacity and the foreign policy toolkit to foster economic cooperation in this multilateral framework (Hatipoglu and Palmer 2016: 234) as apart from facilitating transportation BSEC has had little relevance for economic cooperation between Turkey and its neighbours over the past 15 years.

Another multilateral instrument to promote interaction with the wider region is the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) launched by the European Union in 1998. TRACECA was meant to contribute to the reconstruction of the Silk Road and, from Turkey's perspective, to increase the ease of trade and travel from the South Caucasus and Central Asia to Turkey and help turn Turkey into a transit hub for goods and people (Aytaç et al. 2007; Şensoy 2007). One of the projects related to TRACECA and a major component of Turkey's international trading and economic outreach strategy is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, to which Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan committed themselves in 2007. Financed in its entirety by the governments of Turkey and Azerbaijan, the railway's opening in October 2017 fills a missing link in the New Silk Road's middle corridor that is to link China to Europe via Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey (Klimas and Humbatov 2016). Another important feature of Turkey's transport policy towards the region is the fact that the Turkish TAV Holding has been operating the two airports in Tbilisi (since 2005) and Batumi (since 2007). An interesting feature is that Turkish Airlines classifies flights to Batumi, a city historically claimed by Turkey, as domestic flights (Bishku 2010: 31). Finally, due to their privileged access to the EU markets, both Georgia and Ukraine have gained in attraction and Turkish companies are increasingly considering to move at least part of their production to the two countries in order to get the made in Georgia/made in Ukraine label.

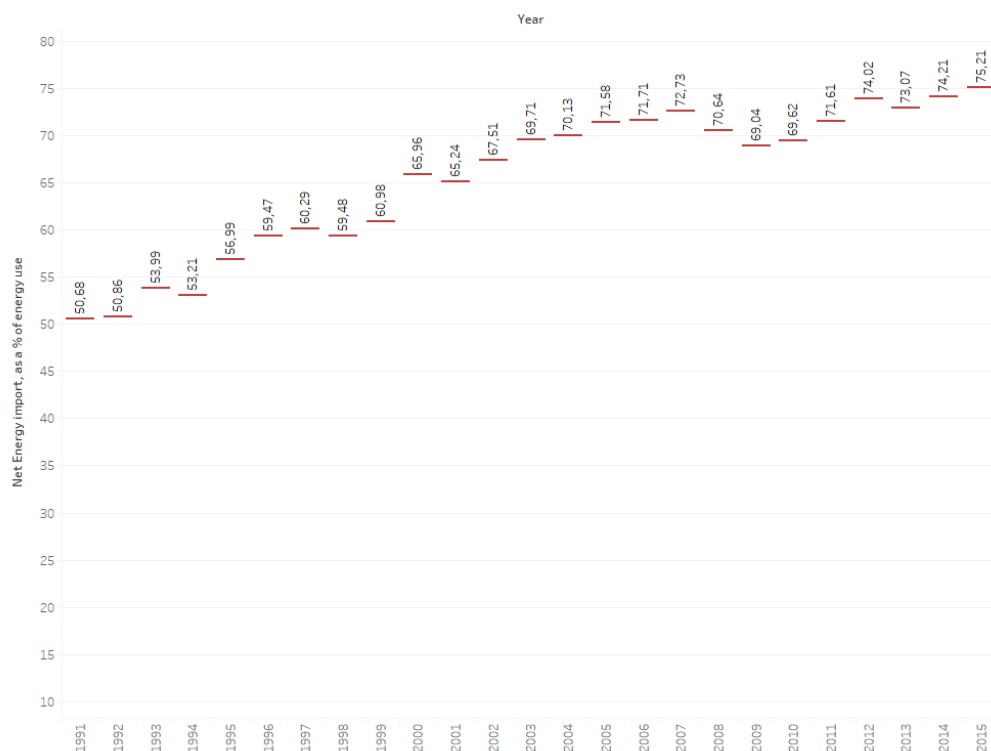
4.1.3. Development cooperation

Turkey's trade policy is supported by its development cooperation programmes. The development cooperation agency TIKA was founded in 1992 with a specific focus on the post-Soviet space and with a particular eye to supporting the newly independent Turkic Republics to which Azerbaijan belongs. In the period 1992-96 the larger Caucasus-Central Asia region had received more than 85 % of TIKA's budget. The share decreased thereafter with 40 % of the development aid sent to this geographic area between 1997-2003 (İpek 2015: 180). In the mid-2000s, TIKA was headed by Hakan Fidan, since 2010 head of national intelligence, who devised TIKA's strategy together with then-chief foreign policy advisor Davutoğlu (İpek 2015). Today, development aid to the post-Soviet space as a whole as well as to individual countries does not constitute a substantial share of Turkey's overall development aid. According to the official government figures, which have to be taken with a grain of salt the share of the six countries in Turkey's development aid is 0.23 % for both Ukraine and Azerbaijan, 0.1 % for Georgia, 0.05 % for Moldova and a mere 0.001 % for Belarus. In sum the countries thus receive a grand total of 0.6 % of Turkey's total aid spending of USD 3845 billion (TIKA 2016). That is a dramatic decline in spending on the region.

4.2. Energy policy

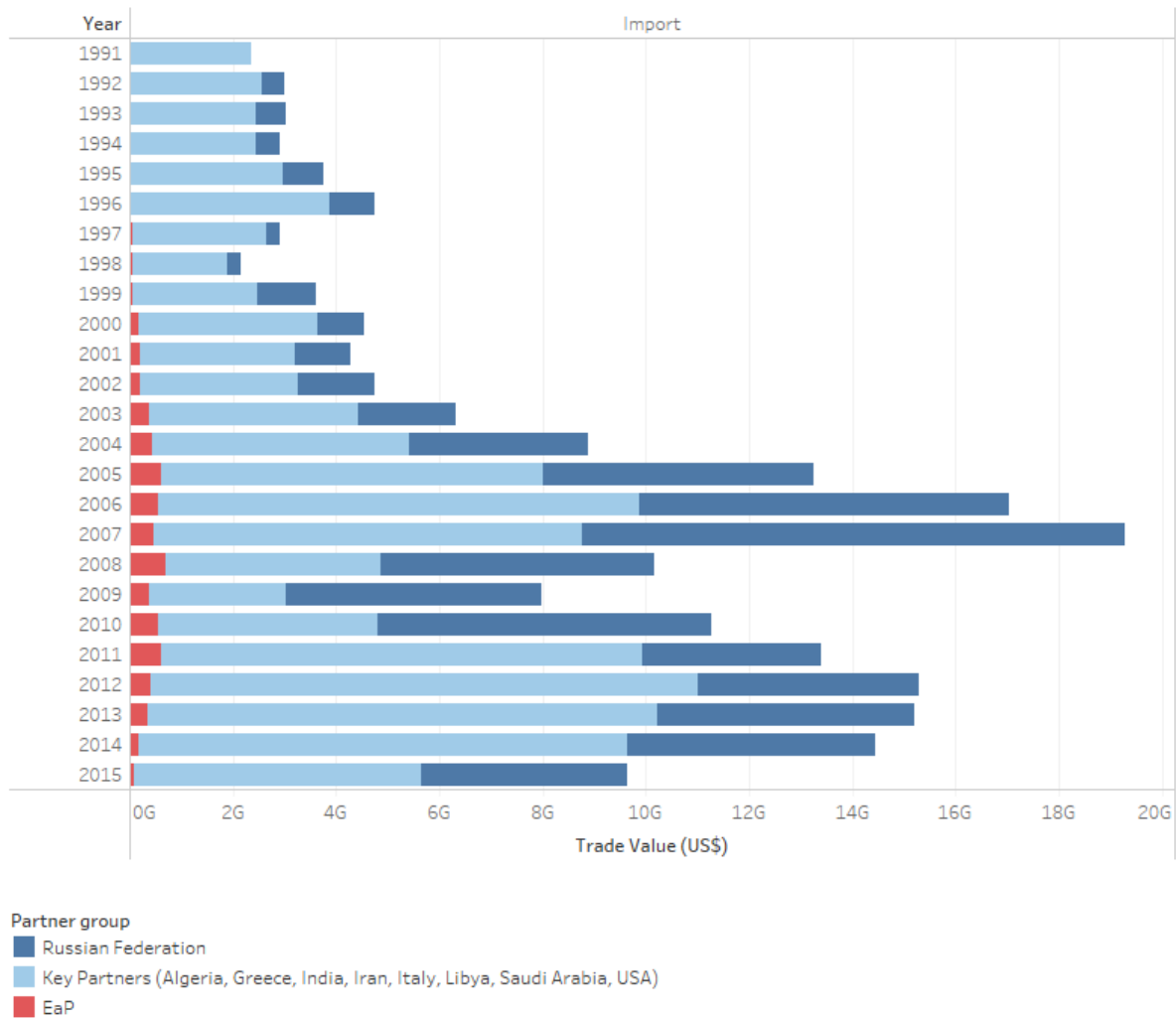
Energy is the key pillar in Turkey's conceptualization of its interests in this geographic space and therefore of its policy primarily *vis-à-vis* Azerbaijan and Georgia. As a comparatively resource-poor country, energy security had always been high on the agenda of Turkish policymakers; a concern that has only gained in urgency given the rapidly growing economy and concomitantly rising levels of energy consumption during the 2000s. Whereas in 1991 Turkey imported half of the energy it consumed, the figure had risen to three-fourths by 2015 (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Energy import of Turkey, net (percentage of energy use) from 1991 to 2015



When looking at energy imports, the space studied does not play a significant part neither in import of electricity and coal nor in import of oil. The only oil and gas rich partner is Azerbaijan and electricity flows with the immediate South Caucasus neighbourhood are weakly developed. In fact, after slowly rising from a very moderate level since about 2000, oil imports from the region peaked in 2008 and have been on the decline ever since and currently make up a minuscule percentage of Turkey's considerable oil imports (see figure 3). Since the 1990s the end of the Cold War, by far the largest share of Turkey's energy imports has hailed from Russia with whom the country has had an at times rocky relationship.

Figure 3. Energy imports to Turkey from key partners and EaP (incl. coal, electric energy, gas, petroleum)



Source: EU-STRAT Database “Interdependencies in the Eastern Partnership Region” based on Enerdata

Trying to respond to this conundrum, Turkey has announced its ambitions to become a global energy transit hub (Aras and Fidan 2009: 201). This ambition has followed the successful construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (BTC) in 2005 as well as the parallel gas pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) in 2006. Both of these projects had been pursued since the 1990s and were in part realized thanks to persistent support by the US (Çelikpala 2010: 100). Hence, it is as a transit bridge for energy from the Middle East and the Caspian Sea/Central Asia where Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia most closely cooperate. With treaties signed in 2011 and work having started on the project in 2015, the Transanatolian gas pipeline (TANAP) is due to be completed in 2018. TANAP is to connect Azeri gas fields via Georgia and Turkey to Greece where the pipeline will connect with the

Transadriatic Pipeline (TAP) that ends in Italy and thus supplies European markets. Turkey also attempts to connect via Azerbaijan to energy resources from Central Asia. In 2014 the Turkish foreign ministry established a trilateral mechanism between Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey to facilitate a potential transit link across the Caspian Sea (Erdoğan 2015b).

Turkey and Russia have since 2014 developed another pipeline project called Turkish Stream. The initiative was proposed by Russia as an alternative to the South Stream project through which Russia had since 2006 planned to supply Europe with gas by way of a pipeline from Russia through the Black Sea to Bulgaria. In response to the sanctions the EU imposed on Russia after it annexed Crimea, President Putin cancelled South Stream and launched the new project. With the 2015 crisis between Russia and Turkey, provoked by the downing of a Russian jet over Turkish territory in November 2015, the project came to a standstill. However, Turkish Stream was brought back into life shortly after the failed coup attempt of 2016 in a bilateral meeting between Putin and Erdoğan (Erşen 2017: 214). By October 2017 about 40 % of the offshore pipeline had been laid in the Black Sea.²

4.3. Security policy

In the 1990s, Turkey's policy towards the post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood was "noticeably cautious and moderate, despite considerable domestic pressure for greater military aid to beleaguered Muslim and Turkic communities" (Sayari 2000: 170). Turkey's contemporary security engagement can be distinguished into more narrowly defined security cooperation in terms of anti-terrorism initiatives and military cooperation and into measures related to the secessionist conflicts drawing on a broad understanding of security. There are a number of key tenets of Turkey's regional security architecture. The first is the insistence on the sacrosanct nature of internationally recognized boundaries and the existing state structure and thus a rejection of secessionist and separatist groups and regions. Secondly, Turkey has been a staunch supporter of Azerbaijan since the intensification of hostilities with Armenia in 1992 and has since 1993 permanently closed its land border with Armenia. A third dimension is that economic relations are a pillar of security and peacebuilding. Fourth, Turkey finds itself in an intermediary position between balancing against Russia and engaging with Russia. The following subsections serve to show how these tenets play out in Turkey's practical security engagement in the region's countries.

4.3.1. Cooperation in military and non-military security challenges

A key branch of Turkey's security cooperation stems from the fact that Turkey is the region's lone NATO member. On the one hand it acts as an extended hand to countries such as Georgia that aspire for NATO membership.³ Admittedly, Turkish support for Georgia's membership in particular used to be lukewarm and only became more pronounced in the wake of the plane crisis with Russia in 2015. However, Turkey was, for instance, instrumental in training and building up the Georgian army and restored military bases after the Russian withdrawal (Aydin 2006: 77). On the other hand, since its inception in 1998 as part of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, which all six countries participate in, the PfP Training Center in Ankara has been very active in training military staff from the PfP countries. Additionally, the Turkish General Staff operates mobile training teams in Azerbaijan and Georgia that taught, for example, a course on tactical civil-military cooperation in

² While the broad outlines of the pipeline are similar, Turkish Stream follows a slightly different route as it routes through Greece instead of through Bulgaria and onwards to Serbia as foreseen by South Stream.

³ Interview with government official, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 2017.

Azerbaijan in September 2017.⁴ Overall, Turkey is welcomed by the countries as a transmitter of NATO standards.⁵ Military cooperation is complemented by police cooperation under the umbrella of TIKA. Currently, Moldova is the only country from the region whose police force takes part in training schemes offered by Turkey (TIKA 2016).

Among Turkey's security relations with the countries studied, its relations with Azerbaijan deserve particular attention. Security cooperation as part of the "special relationship" with Azerbaijan (Aras and Fidan 2009: 202) dates back to 1992 when the two countries signed a bilateral agreement on military education which started a training scheme of Azerbaijani officers in Turkey which continues to the present day. The furthest-reaching agreement, the 2010 Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support between Turkey and Azerbaijan – a response to the Russo-Armenian strategic partnership (German 2012) – stipulates that in case of aggression the contracting countries will use all possibilities to support the affected partner country. While this raises the spectre of a wider regional conflagration in case of a renewed Armenian-Azerbaijan war, Turkish state officials are eager to stress that it does not imply a military alliance (Hale 2012: 216). In Azerbaijan, on the other hand, the government officially has the same reading of the mutual support pact but domestically allows speculation about Turkey's potential intervention on Azerbaijan's side to flourish. Turkey and Georgia have also signed a number of military agreements in the last few years. However, "Azerbaijani-Turkish military and defence cooperation is far closer than current state of level of Georgian-Turkish cooperation" (Shiriyev 2016: 9). While there are no traditional security ties between Ankara and Kyiv, the change in government and subsequent Russian aggression in 2014 has created a new environment for cooperation. In 2017, Turkey and Ukraine signed several memoranda of understanding to work on joint defence projects in the fields of ammunition, aviation, radar and communication (Hürriyet Daily News 2017). There are also persistent rumours that the Eurasian faction in the Turkish army that favours a stronger strategic alignment towards (Central) Asia is slowly gaining the upper hand versus the traditionally dominant transatlantic faction.⁶

Turkey's security policy also has a multilateral dimension. In 2012 Turkey initiated trilateral security cooperation between Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This format is another example of Turkey's substantial security engagement that stops short of providing full-fledged security guarantees. Thus, the format is not a security alliance but a platform for dialogue, support and exchange. Since 2012 there are annual trilateral joint military exercises under the banner 'Caucasian Eagle' that involve both ground forces and air forces, the latest taking place in June 2017 near Tbilisi (Frontnews.eu 2017). Turkey is also an observer to the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, the sub-regional organization of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. In its security dimension GUAM has mainly developed cooperation concerning anti-terrorism, anti-drug and human trafficking measures, but also attempts to raise awareness for the secessionist conflicts in their countries in international fora such as the UN.

⁴See the Turkish Armed Force's Partnership for Peace website http://www.bioem.tsk.tr/eng/icra_kurslar/2017/azerbaycan.htm (accessed 27 November 2017).

⁵ Interview with government official, Baku, Azerbaijan, January 2018.

⁶ Interview with an academic, Istanbul, Turkey, May 2018.

4.3.2. Mediation and peacebuilding

Turkey's general position towards the secessionist conflicts in Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan is to insist on the sacrosanct nature of internationally recognized borders. Moreover, Turkey addresses the matter of secessionist conflicts with diverse initiatives. An example is a journalism workshop for participants from Georgia and Abkhazia in Istanbul designed to bridge the perception gap between the two sides (Davutoğlu 2011c). Turkey's development cooperation agency TIKA also contributed to the renovation of the Enguri Bridge between Georgia proper and the *de facto* state Abkhazia "in order to foster trust-building and conciliation between Georgian and Abkhaz people" (TIKA 2016: 60). Beyond that, in 2009 then foreign minister Davutoğlu launched the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform. This high-level initiative was meant to provide stability in the aftermath of the Russia-Georgian war in 2008 by economic, societal and mediation projects. However, it has never had any direct impact on conflict resolution and prevention (Davutoğlu 2009c). Beyond such limited initiatives, Turkey has generally deferred – in spite of its limited success – to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as the leading multilateral conflict mediator in the region (Davutoğlu 2009a). A minor exception has been the Turkish government's role as a go-between in facilitating the release of Ukrainian Tatar activists from Russia in 2017 (BBC News 2017).

Turkey is strongly, if indirectly, linked to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, due to the closure of the border with Armenia in 1993 and its general support of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. However, the relations with Armenia are also marked by the conflict over the classification of the events in 1915 as genocide. There have been tentative steps towards a rapprochement with Armenia, be it the setting up of a Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (Ustun 2010: 233) or the Zurich talks in 2009 between government representatives from both sides in an abortive attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations. They, however, have not been able to overcome the reluctance on the part of Turkish governments to unilaterally acknowledge the Ottoman Empire's guilt for the systematic murder of Armenians – a *de facto* precondition for the Armenian side. In the absence of official diplomatic relations, Armenia's delegation to the BSEC in Istanbul serves as an unofficial conduit for bilateral talks (Kirişçi and Moffatt 2015: 78). This practice in fact predates the advent of the AKP government as the Armenian BSEC office was established in March 2002 and then-Foreign Minister İsmail Cem met there with his Armenian counterpart in June of the same year (Phillips 2005: 25).

4.4. Educational and cultural policy

Turkey launched the Mevlana Exchange programme in 2011, an alternative to the European Erasmus scheme, with student numbers that to date are very insignificant. Protocols have been signed by all countries, bar Armenia, and Azerbaijan was second to the US in the number of participating universities. It is, however, important to note that there is little immigration for educational purposes from Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus. A soft power tool in the field of higher education is the Turkish Diplomatic Academy that, in addition to training aspiring Turkish diplomats, also has a special programme for junior diplomats from around the world that according to Davutoğlu (2012f) is especially meant for young elites from newly democratizing countries like those in the post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood.

Turkish schools have likewise been a major factor of Turkey's reach into the countries studied. Whereas Gülenist schools for a long time used to act as an unofficial branch of state educational policy in the region (Balci 2014), today the government is keen to wrest control of Turkish schools away from Gülen's control. The Turkish

government's new rhetoric and actions against the Gülenist network after 2013 and especially demands on Georgia after the coup attempt of July 2016 to extradite alleged Gülenists has produced significant tension with the Georgian government triggered by the latter's reluctance to close all schools (Georgia did in fact close two schools in 2016) and to arrest alleged Gülenists (Adilgizi 2017). In Moldova, by contrast, the government resisted a direct request to close Gülen-affiliated Turkish schools uttered by Prime Minister Yildirim during a visit to Chişinău in May 2017. In the case of Azerbaijan, the Turkish lobbying led to the closing down or restructuring of several Gülen-affiliated schools and one university. A consequence of this was, however, that "Turkish religious soft power, and consequently Turkish soft power in general, has been on the wane in Azerbaijan" (Aliyev 2017: 46). The Maarif Foundation, established in 2016, is the designated organization to continue and take over the function of supervising and running Turkish schools abroad.

President Erdoğan also envisions regional specializations by Turkish universities in order to challenge the allegedly prevailing Western Orientalist gaze. In this vision, the universities of Kars and Erzurum in Eastern Turkey are to become specialized centres for the study of the Caucasus (Erdoğan 2015f). Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu (2017b) also acknowledges that in certain circumstances non-state actors such as academics and businessmen can be much more influential in explaining Turkish positions abroad than the state actors themselves. Additionally, there are also symbolic events like the opening of the Heydar Aliyev School in Kars attended by both countries' presidents.

In terms of cultural exchange, a key emphasis lies on common activities with the other Turkic peoples. While this primarily involves Azerbaijan as the lone Turkic state in the post-Soviet Black Sea region, cultural exchange organisations like the Ankara-based International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSÖY), the self-proclaimed UNESCO of the Turkic world, also feature the Gagăuzi community from Moldova as an observer (Purtaş 2017). In fact, the grassroots promotion of the Pan-Turkic ideology is a very illustrative example of how NGOs and other societal actors significantly shape Turkish foreign policy discourse (Köstem 2017). Since 2009, the Turkish state television (TRT) broadcasts a special channel, TRT Avaz, that targets the Turkic world and, among others, also has programmes in Azeri language. Furthermore, modelled on the British Council or the Goethe Institut and operating also since 2009, the Yunus Emre Cultural Institutes which have offices in Tbilisi, Baku and Comrat, the capital of Gagauzia, are explicitly designed as a means of cultural diplomacy (Çavuşoğlu 2016c). Beyond this, in 2009 the Turkic Council (TK) was established as an intergovernmental organization serving as an umbrella for a range of international Turkic organizations. Among them are TÜRKSÖY, the Turkish Cultural Heritage Fund, and since 2011 a Turkic Business Forum.

But cultural diplomacy also entails the construction of Quran schools and madrassas across the Islamic world (Erdoğan 2016d), including the new Minsk Mosque funded by the Turkish Diyanet Foundation (TDV) (Erdoğan 2016a). Having long stressed the state's secular identity, Turkey has transformed its self-conception under the AKP's rule. In the Alliance of Civilizations initiative from 2005, Turkey declares itself to be a modernized country that belongs to the 'Islamic civilization' (İğsız 2014: 691). Overall, the majority of religious activities in the post-Soviet Black Sea region's countries, especially in Georgia and Azerbaijan, such as building madrassas, teaching imams, organizing the hajj or giving scholarships for religious studies are run and funded by Diyanet, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, which is an official part of the Turkish government (Ter-Matevosyan 2017: 37). Although most of its activities touch upon Central Asia, the Eurasian Islamic Council, founded by TDV in 1995, is an important tool to spread the Turkish version of Islam in the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood. The Diyanet

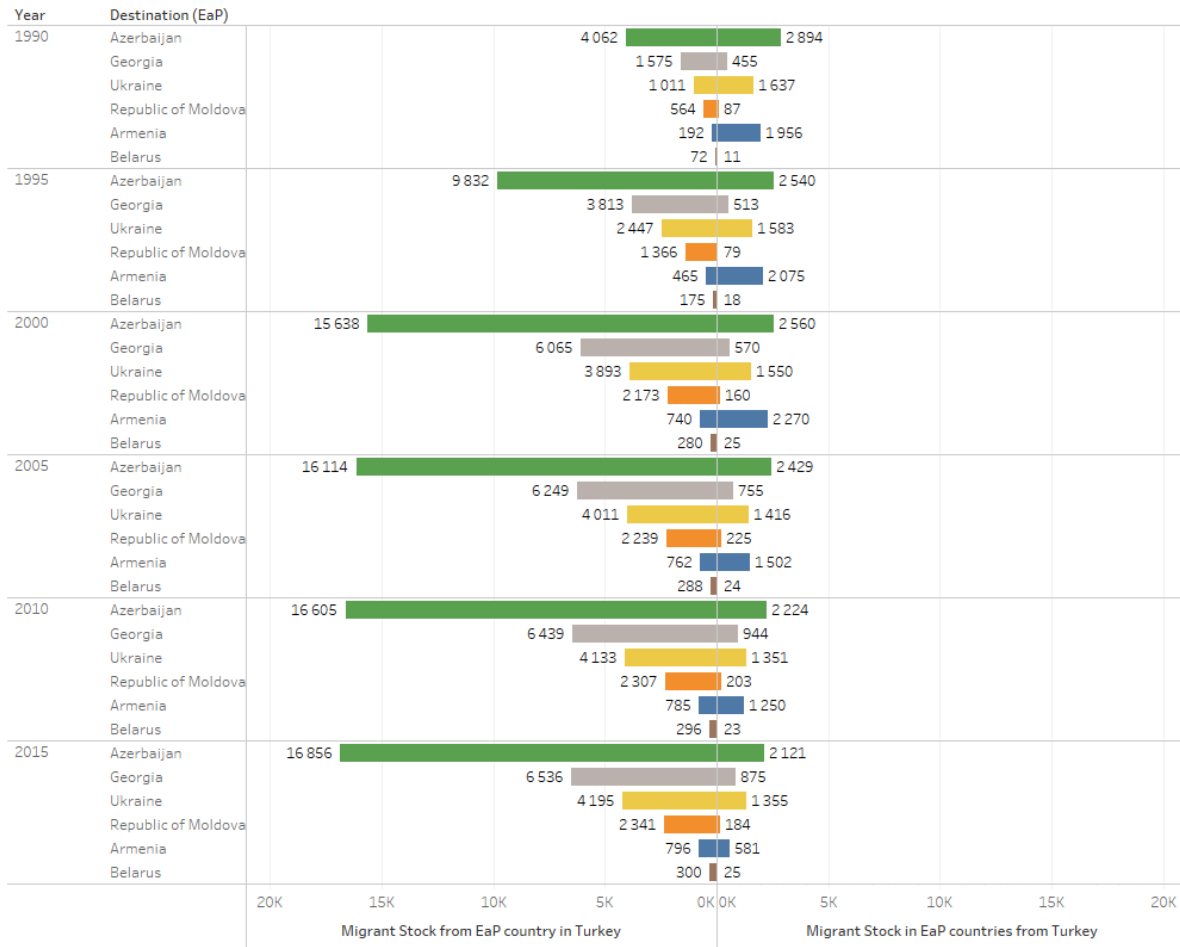
Foundation's activism in Azerbaijan where it runs a theology school, a secondary school and several mosques is particularly interesting considering that the majority of Azerbaijani Muslims are at least nominally Shia. A number of Turkish (Sufi) sects are also active in the post-Soviet space: the pietist-mystical Nurcu, the Süleymanci as well as the followers of the Nakshibendi Osman Nuri Topbaş (Balci 2014).

4.5. Migration flows and policy

Turkey has been a target country for 'old' and 'new' migration from Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Armenia (Kirişçi 2006). While old migration denotes the inflow of individuals of Turkic descent with ethnic, religious, cultural or societal linkages to Turkey, new migration, in contrast, refers to non-Muslim, non-Turkic people who settle in Turkey (Tolay 2015: 59). During the Ottoman Empire's collapse and the Turkish Republic's first decades, people of Turkic origin or cultural and societal proximity to Turkey dominated immigration flows. With regard to the post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood about 1,8mn Crimean Tatars settled in the Ottoman Empire from 1783 to 1922 and about 2,5mn Circassians and Abkhaz moved to Turkey from 1864 onwards (Akgündüz 1998: 99; Williams 2001). Today, Turkey hosts a large diaspora of Tatars (estimation 3mn), Circassians (estimation 130,000-2mn), and Abkhaz (estimation 450,000-500,000) (Eissler 2013; Smolnik et al. 2017).

'New' migration from the region is mostly labour migration as people from the post-Soviet space have since the 1990s sought to escape deep economic crises in their home countries (Kirişçi 2013; Toksöz and Ulutaş 2012: 18). However, migrants from the post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood constitute only a very minor share of the incoming millions of migrants since 2011 most of whom hail from Syria (OECD 2016: 308; Sirkeci and Pusch 2016: 10; Wissink et al. 2013: 1088). Migration flows from the region are thus not overly important for Turkey and reverse migration from Turkey to the region has been consistently lower still (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Migration stock Turkey-EaP countries over 1990-2015

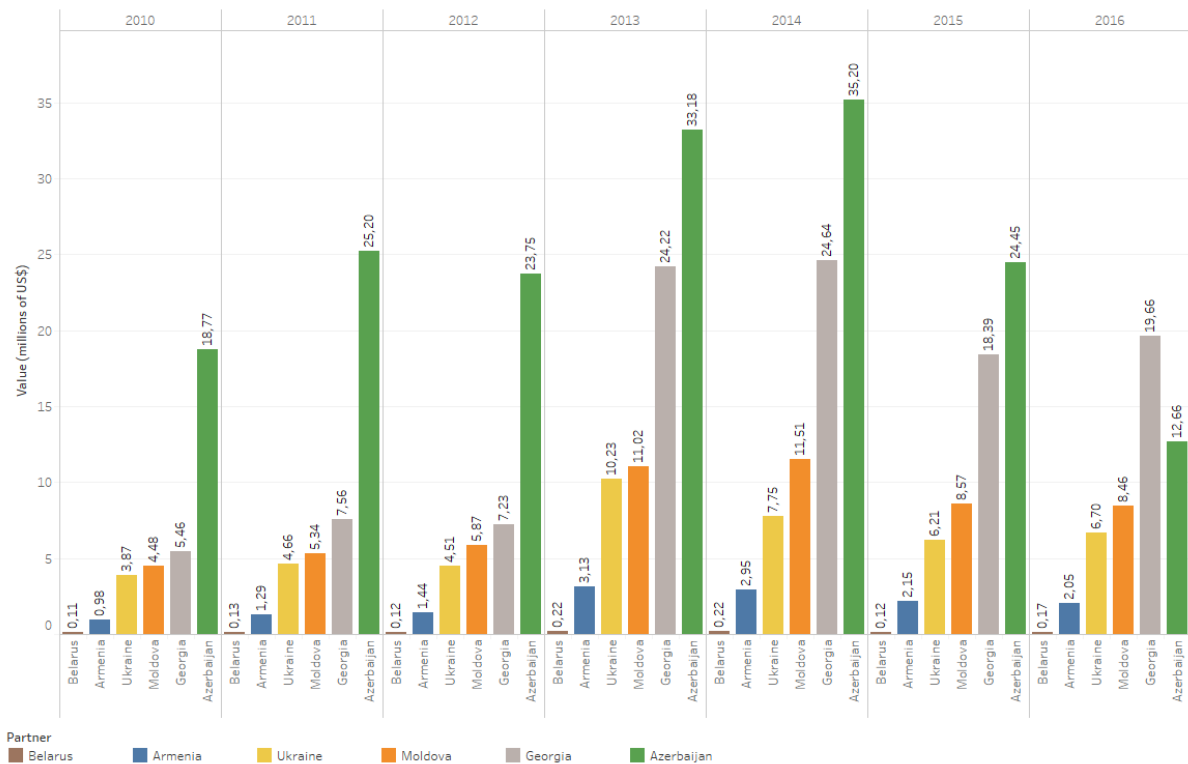


Source: EU-STRAT Database “Interdependencies in the Eastern Partnership Region” based on UNHCR data

Official records probably underestimate the extent of migration from the region as formally sent remittances from Turkey to the region do not correlate with the low number of registered immigrants. A study on remittances to Georgia estimates that in 2016 at least 61,000 immigrants from Georgia lived in Turkey as opposed to the 6536 officially registered migrants (Hosner 2016: 7) and it can be assumed that the actual number of immigrants from the other countries is also significantly higher than official figures.⁷ Data on remittances for the period from 2010 to 2016 show remittances from Turkey to the region rising steadily until 2014 and slightly decreasing thereafter (see figure 5). The key receiving country has been Azerbaijan, followed by Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia and Belarus.

⁷ A probable explanation for the discrepancy is that many Armenians come on short-term tourist visas and thus do not show up in official statistics on migrants.

Figure 5. Bilateral remittance estimates from 2010-16: from Turkey to EaP countries



Source: EU-STRAT Database “Interdependencies in the Eastern Partnership Region” based on World Bank data

In addition, these figures do not account for irregular and circular migrants who work in Turkey for four to 12 weeks and do not use the banking system for money transfers (Hosner 2016: 6). Qualitative studies rank Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia among the ten leading countries from which workers in Turkey’s informal economy originate (Içduygu 2003: 17; Toksöz et al. 2012: 87), which is borne out by Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine ranking among the top-six countries in 2016 from which irregular migrants have been detained (Akturk 2017: 1113). Irregular migrants from the region primarily work in domestic care, construction and in the textile industry (Toksöz and Ulutaş 2012: 89).

For decades Turkey’s migration policy focused on Muslims and migrants of Turkish decent since their settlement was seen as contribution to the project of building a homogeneous Turkish nation (Akturk 2017: 1104). Since the 1980s, Turkey’s approach to migration has been mostly driven by economic concerns. Thus, the first steps towards visa liberalization with the post-Soviet Black Sea region were taken in the 1990s in the context of the BSEC. Today, Turkey has visa-free travel arrangements with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - Georgians and Ukrainians can even enter the country using only their ID cards - while Armenians can easily obtain a visa; a fact that has contributed to the increase of circular migrants the majority of whom work irregularly in Turkey’s large informal economy. New legislation in 2003 and 2006 as part of the EU accession process made it easier to obtain a legal work permit and abolished preferential treatment for migrants of Turkic origin but it was the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection that fundamentally revised migrants’ status (Kaiser and Kaya 2016: 36). Overall, however, these laws focus on highly skilled workers and pay attention to irregular migration first and foremost by defining fines and proceedings for detained individuals (Sagirolu 2016: 43). The new law of 2013 is therefore criticised for failing to address the legalisation of irregular migrants. While there are immigrant organisations such as the Federation of the Caucasian Associations (KAFFED) which run education

projects and similar ventures for their countries of origin (Kirişçi 2012: 325), there appears to be very little interest on the part of the state or among NGOs and trade unions to engage with the topic (Rittersberger-Tılıç 2015: 98).

5. Turkey's Rhetorical Approach to the Post-Soviet Black Sea Neighbourhood

After having gained a better understanding of Turkey's foreign policy activities, this section will highlight the Turkish government's foreign policy rhetoric towards its post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood. In particular, we will point out the specific rhetoric towards the five sectors focused on in the previous section and thus provide a basis upon which to compare rhetoric and policy in the concluding discussion.

5.1. Foreign trade policy rhetoric

Seeing how a growth-oriented economic policy has been at the heart of Turkey's domestic politics since the AKP's ascension to power and considering the vital importance of energy imports to a resource-poor and fast-growing Turkey, it is not surprising that the fields of trade and economic development feature prominently in government rhetoric towards the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbours. Along with Turkey's other neighbouring regions – the Balkans and the Middle East – the post-Soviet Black Sea region plays a crucial part in Turkey's ambition to become one of the world's ten leading countries. Inhibited by what Davutoğlu perceives as the country's relatively modest size, Davutoğlu (2013a) explicitly stated in 2013 that Turkey seeks to use its central geographic position and its historical-cultural links to the surrounding regions to extend its sphere of influence and as a consequence punch above its weight. He frames economic, political and cultural links to its geographic neighbourhood as a means to a more exalted global role for Turkey. Doing so Davutoğlu builds explicitly on the example of Germany that in Davutoğlu's perception uses the European Union to have a more pronounced political role than her size would permit.

Speaking in Ukraine in 2012, Davutoğlu (2012a) made an important distinction between Ukraine and the region's other countries as he deemed Ukraine a pivotal country on the same plane as Turkey. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Turkic Republic's independence in 2011, Davutoğlu (2011d) draws a contrast between Turkey and the Soviet Union and accentuates that Turkey's aim *vis-à-vis* the region is not economic dominance but cooperation. He referred to the city of Baku as blossoming into "one of Eurasia's most colourful, brightest and beautiful cities" which, to his mind, shows the benefits of Turkey's policy of regional engagement (Davutoğlu 2011d). Stressing the benevolent and mutually beneficial side of Turkey's economic engagement Turkey's foreign political authorities are eager to emphasize a deliberate contrast to the at times belligerent economic pressure applied by Russia in the region it deems its Near Abroad. This chimes in with foreign minister Çavuşoğlu's (2016b) issue linkage between economics and security "as increasing trade and investment reinforce our efforts to create a more secure environment".

In relation to the international financial crisis of 2008, Davutoğlu (2012b) sees the centre of economic power shifting from the West to Asia. In this shifting economic environment, the signing of bilateral free trade agreements in the neighbourhood and beyond is therefore a strategic priority that is to stimulate the Turkish economy's dynamism (Davutoğlu 2013b). Accordingly, visa liberalization with the wider neighbourhood is not

only framed as a means of soft power but designed as a function of external economic policy so that “our businessmen can act and move in the surrounding countries as easily as in their own country” (Davutoğlu 2013a).

5.2. Energy policy rhetoric

The Turkish government’s rhetoric on international energy policy reflects the prevailing notion of the primacy of economic relations. At the same time, said rhetoric is marked by the conflict between on the one hand the ambition to become a regional if not global energy hub and on the other hand the reality of a resource-poor country with some of the world’s highest energy costs. Hence, the mutually beneficial side to the free movement of goods and people in the region is explicitly linked to Turkey’s need for energy supplies from the region. In Erdoğan’s (2014c) words, “Turkey is today not only looking for oil on its own soil but all across the world, from Azerbaijan to Iraq, from Afghanistan to Kazakhstan, from Russia to Kyrgyzstan, in Libya, Northern Cyprus, Colombia”. The Turkish government’s plan to become one of the world’s ten leading economies is, by Davutoğlu’s (2012b) own admission, tied to the country’s ability to connect Turkish industry and capital with the abundant energy sources in Turkey’s vicinity. If Turkey’s economy and thus its energy consumption were to grow as anticipated, so he argues, then “we absolutely have to use these energy sources to undertake joint projects for mutual benefit” (Davutoğlu 2012b).

For the countries studied, the prime reference point in energy policy rhetoric are the regional pipeline projects, the BTC oil pipeline opened in 2005, the BTE gas pipeline opened in 2006 and the TANAP gas pipeline due to open in 2018 (Davutoğlu 2012e). In highlighting the BTC pipeline’s success, Davutoğlu (2011d) in 2011 exclaimed that “a number of additional ‘projects of the century’ will come out of this region”. This thirst for energy to fuel the Turkish economy’s growth is also reflected in the country’s vision for geographically diversified energy supplies. In addition to ensuring that domestic demand is met, the declared aim is for Turkey to function as a bridge that opens energy reservoirs from the Middle East and the Caspian Sea to the world (Erdoğan 2015a). Energy relations are thus portrayed as a win-win proposition in that Turkey needs energy to keep growing while the neighbouring supplier countries need a reliable customer who may also provide access through its territory to the lucrative European energy market.

5.3. Security policy rhetoric

Befitting a region shaped by persistent internal conflicts as well as prone to external intervention, the interrelated topics of conflict and peace feature prominently in Turkish government rhetoric towards the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood. Several of the key themes of Turkey’s security architecture such as the focus on territorial integrity and the special relationship with Azerbaijan reappear in foreign policy speeches. Somewhat surprising given Turkey’s historical reluctance to act as mediator in this region is the emphasis on crisis management and peacebuilding.

5.3.1. Territorial integrity

Given Turkey’s own exposure to violent secessionism in its majority-Kurdish South-East and a deeply ingrained fear of Western attempts to dismantle its territory that goes back to the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres (İşeri and Çelik 2013), territorial integrity in its neighbourhood is framed as a key foreign policy objective. Crucially, Turkey’s own territorial integrity is at stake in its regional foreign relations as the Armenian government till today refuses to

recognize the 1921 Treaty of Kars which stokes Turkish fears of Armenian territorial claims in Eastern Turkey (Phillips 2005). Moreover, the insistence on existing state boundaries is framed as stemming from Turkey's principled defence of the principle of state sovereignty and non-interference into a state's domestic affairs. In contrasting contemporary Turkey to its historical predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, and by extension to other aggressive expansionist powers, President Erdoğan (2015d) thus states in 2015 that "Turkey does not have its eyes on any country's borders, territories, domestic affairs". Quite to the contrary, in late 2014 Erdoğan (2014a) depicts Turkey as a benevolent regional power that does not seek to mingle in neighbouring countries' internal affairs and "is not a country that looks at its neighbours or countries in the region as a means of gaining unilateral advantages".

The most frequently mentioned issue of territorial integrity is the refusal to acknowledge Karabakh's secession from Azerbaijan (e.g.; Davutoğlu 2012e; Erdoğan 2017; Gül 2008). However, the principle is consistently invoked across the post-Soviet Black Sea region, especially during state visits to or from the countries in question. While Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu (2017a) in a speech in early 2017 strikes a cordial note about the normalization of relations with Russia, he is firm about Turkey's commitment to Ukraine's and Georgia's territorial integrity. In the case of Ukraine, the call for a return to the pre-2014 borders is combined with special attention to the rights and status of the Crimean Tatars whom President Erdoğan (2015c) addressed as "Brothers" in a joint press conference with Ukraine's president Poroshenko. Similar special concern is given to the Ahiska Turks (also known as Meskhetian Turks) many of whom, having originally been deported from Georgia in 1944, now reside in squalid conditions in Ukraine and whom Erdoğan (2016e) invites to Turkish soil.

5.3.2. Special relationship with Azerbaijan

The one constant of Turkey's regional foreign policy in the post-Cold War period has been its focus on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Turkey has persistently emphasized its brotherhood with the Azerbaijani people as Abdullah Gül (2007a) in 2007 described bilateral relations as "one nation under the roof of two states". In a 2015 speech emblematic for this discourse, President Erdoğan not only called Azerbaijan and Turkey one nation but quoted the late Azeri poet Bahtiyar Vahapzade who likens the two countries to two sons from the same mother. Moreover, in the same speech Erdoğan points to the history of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus which in 1918 conquered/liberated Baku as a model for contemporary bilateral relations (Erdoğan 2015e).

The only significant thaw in relations with Armenia came in 2009 and proved both brief and transient – to a not insignificant extent because of Azerbaijan's active opposition to a genuine rapprochement. Still, the second half of the 2000s contained tentative rhetorical overtures towards a peaceful settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan standoff. When the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project was launched in 2007, for example, then-president Gül used the opportunity to implicitly invite Armenia to join the project which he portrayed as imbued with the spirit of peace and vividly opposed to ethnic and religious discrimination (Gül 2007b).

5.3.3. Peacebuilding and crisis management

Speaking at the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu (2016a) specifically lists the unresolved conflicts in Crimea, Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria as threats to European stability and democracy. One of Turkey's key goals in the region is therefore to act as a mediator and

peacebuilder in its neighbourhood and to use early warning and preventative diplomacy to stymie crises before they erupt (Davutoğlu 2011a). This is in line with a special focus on peacebuilding which emerged during Davutoğlu's time in the foreign office. President Erdoğan (2014b) actually establishes a link between a proactive foreign policy and a country's greatness: "A great state is one that can speak to hearts beyond its borders, take initiatives in crises and cope with risks instead of closing its borders to the world and avoiding such risks or crises".

On the other hand, Davutoğlu (2012c) is sanguine about the fact that "[t]he sole reason for this activism is the integral link between our own peace and security and that of the wider region around us". This is presented as part of the "visionary foreign policy" of zero-problems with the neighbours and in the tradition of Atatürk's famous creed 'peace at home, peace in the world'. Interestingly, in an official vision paper on Turkish conflict mediation efforts Davutoğlu does not mention the post-Soviet Black Sea region at all (Davutoğlu 2013c). This underscores the region's secondary status in Turkey's overall foreign policy as well as the lack of success in Turkey's conflict resolution role in the South Caucasus.

5.4. Cultural policy rhetoric

Turkic nationalism and Pan-Turkism not only feature prominently in recent (since about 2009) official policies, they also shape Turkey's foreign policy outlook (Sözen 2010). Some of the addressees of the policy of cultural outreach are the Gagauz in Moldova, the Tatars in Crimea or Azerbaijani internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Karabakh. It is in this light that Prime Minister Erdoğan's victory speech after the 2011 parliamentary elections needs to be understood: "The Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey" (Cornell 2012: 13; citing Erdoğan). Fittingly, a feature of Turkey's engagement with the region is the frequently invoked notion that Turkey's own internal transformation in terms of democratization and economic development is to serve as a model for the neighbourhood (Davutoğlu 2012f) – an idea that harks back to the early 1990s (Bal 2000).

The Turkish leadership thus portrays itself as the guarantor of Turkey's open, engaging and protective policies towards its neighbourhood while laying implicit claim to a regional leadership role, which is legitimized by a shared culture, past and future. Yet, an element of paternalism pervades the rhetoric. For example, Erdoğan (2016b) claims that the people in the towns and villages of Turkey's neighbouring regions are filled by excitement at the sight of the Turkish flag because Turkey is only there to help them. Similarly, Davutoğlu (2011a) argues that Turkey would seek to use its influence to improve the neighbouring regions' (Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East) presently mostly negative image. The same rebranding agenda also informed the Alliance of Civilization which Turkey had launched together with Spain in 2005 (İğsız 2014).

5.5. Migration policy rhetoric

Migration as such is not a key area of Turkish policy towards the region and the same is true for the place of migration from the region in foreign policy rhetoric. However, the topic of migration including the historical waves of migration from the region and their traces in Turkish society are occasionally referred to in an effort to underscore for example contemporary Turkey's openness. Accordingly, Turkey's Ottoman heritage as a melting pot of different peoples is utilized by the Turkish government as a sign of the country's special connection to surrounding regions as Davutoğlu's speech in 2009(b) illustrates:

“We have more Abkhazians living in Turkey than in Abkhazia, more Chechens living in Turkey than in Chechnya, more or equal Georgians living in Turkey than in Georgia. This is because the Republic of Turkey, as a nation-state, emerged out of the legacy of a long imperial tradition, not imperialistic but imperial.”

The policy of visa liberalization for all the countries of Turkey's extended neighbourhood is therefore justified on the grounds that it reunites people separated by artificial boundaries: “Why did we get rid of passport checks with Georgia? Because historically Batumi and Trabzon have lived side by side” (Davutoğlu 2012b). This supposedly historical openness to integrate migrants is discursively transplanted into the present-day policy towards migrants from the region. Thus, in 2016 Erdoğan (2016c) publicly pointed out that only about half of the approximately 100,000 Armenians in Turkey are Turkish citizens, which in his estimation is a sign of Turkey's hospitality, open-mindedness and lack of hostility towards Armenia as a whole. This echoes Hakan Fidan: “Turkey tolerates thousands of illegal Armenian workers within its borders” (Aras and Fidan 2009: 204). In 2007 during another low-point in bilateral relations, however, the Turkish government did not hesitate to publicly hint at the option of expelling irregular Armenian migrants (Hatipoglu and Palmer 2016: 242).

What is more, references to the founding years of the Turkish Republic in the course of World War I and its aftermath as well as to the country's founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk are ubiquitous in Turkish public life and constitute an essential part of national identity construction. Except for Kurdish nationalists and the political fringes (far left groupings, radical Islamists), Turkish nationalism is the ideology of a very large subset of Turkish society that comprises arguably a majority of political elites across the aisle (Yılmaz 2011). Accordingly, challenges to the established nationalist historiography and hagiography are therefore a vital matter of domestic policy that impacts directly upon foreign relations with the countries from whom the challenge originates.

6. Concluding Discussion

This outline of Turkey's foreign policy towards the countries of its post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood is to serve as a crucial baseline for further investigations into more specific aspects of Turkish policy. In addition, it provides a sounding board to a contrasting juxtaposition with the regional countries' own policies *towards* Turkey. In this concluding discussion, we seek to highlight a number of critical issues that have emerged in the process of unearthing and comparing Turkey's foreign policy rhetoric and action in the region and that therefore warrant a second more thorough look.

6.1. Turkey's foreign policy in rhetoric and action

Scholarly literature often views Turkish foreign policy after the end of the Cold War as having shifted from maintaining the status quo to a policy that is bent on a dynamic view of its neighbourhood and open to changes in bilateral and multilateral relations and regimes. The one area where this view comes up against countervailing evidence both in the field of policies and the field of political rhetoric is Turkey's defence of territorial integrity in the region. On the one hand, Turkish officials emphasize support of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, but also Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine with regard to the respective territorial conflicts. Also, Turkey's linking of the question of Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkey's territorial integrity substantially contributes to the lack of progress

in relations with Armenia (Novikova 2015: 438). On the other hand, the rhetoric does not find expression in actual strategies or policy initiatives to find a solution to the different secessionist conflicts. Moreover, the Turkish government's declared policy of supporting Georgia's territorial integrity runs afoul of the observed reality of Turkish vessels – generally operated by members of the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey – conducting regular trade with the unrecognized breakaway region of Abkhazia without interference by the Turkish government (Kapanadze 2014). Something that also applies to Turkish ships docking under false flags in Crimea.⁸

The idea of becoming one of the world's leading economies and powers features strongly in the Turkish government's foreign policy rhetoric. When it comes to the countries studied, Turkey's foreign policy actions fall short of meeting this ambition. The notion that Turkey could use its cultural, historical and – in part – religious proximity to the region's countries as a soft power tool to complement its seemingly benevolent economic engagement is not borne out by the instruments Turkey employs *vis-à-vis* the region. In particular, Turkey's attitude as a big brother or model country has not fallen on fertile ground (Çınar 2013: 267). And while Turkish soap operas enjoy a rabid following in the region, the overall 'Turkey' brand lacks an appeal that could rival Europe or the US (Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2017).

In the field of energy policy, there is quite a marked difference between the relatively negligible role played by energy trade with the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood on the one and the frequent emphasis placed on energy cooperation in speeches and other official public foreign policy statements on the other hand. The most likely explanation for this discrepancy is Turkey's focus on becoming an energy hub rather than merely an end consumer. Yet, there are concerns that the growing domestic demand, especially for gas, will preclude Turkey's ambition to function as a transit hub (Önis and Yılmaz 2015: 85). On top of that, as the controlling partner in the TANAP consortium "Baku is set to garner much of the economic and strategic benefit of TANAP" (Çağaptay and Evans 2013: 21).

The same pattern as with energy policy can also be found in the area of economic cooperation as the region does not hold a significant place in Turkey's overall trade and investments and receives only a tiny share of Turkey's development budget. The fact that Turkey invited Azerbaijan to attend the 2015 G20 summit in Istanbul is thus clearly an outgrowth of political considerations and not borne out by Azerbaijan's economic importance to Turkey. The frequent mentioning of economic exchange between Turkey and the countries of the region is, however, much easier understood when you consider that for the post-Soviet Black Sea region's countries Turkey is a very significant economic partner, e.g. Georgia's largest single trading partner. The Turkish government's emphasis on mutually beneficial interaction can be seen as a part of its strategy to use the country's neighbourhood to attain an indispensable position in wider regional and global affairs. As such, in the economic policy towards the region it is possible to hear an echo of the Özal era's functionalist idea of enhancing political cooperation and security by creating regional economic interdependencies.

While the characterization of former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Davutoğlu as a constructivist based on civilizational theories and Islamic values is probably fitting (Cohen 2016), there appear to be limits to the extent to which normative concerns drive Turkish foreign policy. The relatively high degree of volatility which, in the country's policy towards the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood, finds particularly strong expression in the policy towards Russia, illustrates the interest-driven transactional nature of Turkish policies. Policies often appear

⁸ Interview with a diplomat, Kyiv, Ukraine, April 2018.

at least in equal part driven by domestic considerations, especially the measures against alleged Gülenists residing and working in the region. The Turkish government's very unpredictability is the prime reason why governments in the region (including Azerbaijan) conceive of Turkey less as a benign strategic partner than as an actor with whom cooperation is based on shared interests only.⁹

6.2. Digging deeper: Turkey's sectoral engagement in the region

Turkey's foreign policy in the early 1990s and in the early 2000s was marked by a strong focus on multilateral formats of cooperation as nearly one third of all international agreements Turkey signed between 1984 and 2015 are multilateral ones. Most of these were signed in the early 1990s and during the first AKP government (2002-07). What is quite striking about Turkey's policy *vis-à-vis* the region is the frequent reliance on trilateral formats not merely on an *ad hoc* basis but as a key framework for engaging with certain sub-regions as well as with countries beyond the region. Thus, there is not only the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey format (since 2012) but also the looser Azerbaijan-Iran-Turkey format (since 2010), the Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Turkey format (since 2014), the planned Turkey-Russia-Azerbaijan and Turkey-Azerbaijan-Kazakhstan forums (Azernews 2017) as well as a now-defunct Turkey-Azerbaijan-Israel axis (Murinson 2010).

It is apparent that migration plays hardly a role at all for Turkey's policies and rhetoric towards the region which is interesting considering Turkey is one of the key target countries for migrants from the region, in particular from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova but also mostly illicit migration from Armenia. Seeing how the prevailing Turkish perspective on migration is the question of how the country is to deal with an estimated three-and-a-half million refugees from Iraq and Syria, the region clearly plays second fiddle. At the same time, if migration does in fact become a topic of political contestation in Turkey (International Crisis Group 2016), then this would likely also affect the prospects for migrants from the region. The one area where migration has a measurable cross-sectoral effect on Turkish foreign policy is regarding the well-integrated Abkhaz, Circassian and Tatar diasporas. These diaspora groups are a constitutive link from Turkey to Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and to the *de facto* state of Abkhazia with a strong voice in Turkey's policy towards the territorial conflicts over Abkhazia and Crimea (Eissler 2013; Williams 2001: 270).

A clear issue linkage also exists between Turkey's transport, economic and diplomatic policies towards the South Caucasus. An example of this linkage is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line. The railway follows an entirely new trajectory and replaces an existing railway connection between Turkey and Azerbaijan that had passed through Armenia. Hence, a side effect of the project is that it serves to further isolate Armenia from transit routes and other cross-regional initiatives (Shepard 2017). Energy policy overall and the changing fortunes of the Russo-Turkish Turkish Stream project, on the other hand, are somewhat at odds with the closer relations Ankara has been pursuing with the current Ukrainian government. Turkey appears to be oscillating between collaborating with Russia – notably in their post-2016 Middle Eastern policy – and balancing against Russia by intensifying relations with Ukraine in such sensitive areas as transport and arms production. In that sense, energy policy is not only intricately connected to Turkey's top priority of sustained economic growth as the bedrock of the Turkish government's domestic appeal but also closely linked to Turkish regional security policy.

⁹ Interview with policy advisor, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 2017.

6.3. Turkey's post-Soviet Black Sea policy in relation to Russia and the EU

Returning to the point made in the introduction, we here discuss some implications of Turkey's post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood policy for regional policies writ large; i.e. we present tentative ideas as to how Turkey's regional foreign policy, both factual and ideological, fits into the complicated relations between the other major powers active in the region. For the purposes of this paper, we shall concentrate on Russia and the EU.

Political affairs in the post-Soviet Black Sea region are a linchpin of Turkish-Russian relations whose salience for Turkey go back not only to its institutional memory as a Cold War frontline state but reach back to the drawn-out encroachment of Czarist Russia on Ottoman territories from the late 18th century onwards. Next to Syria, a 2017 assessment by the pro-AKP think tank SETA saw Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh as Turkey's key disputes with Russia (Ufuk et al. 2017: 5). The 2008 Five Days War with Georgia, a close Turkish ally, and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, whose Tatar population Turkey claims to protect, effectively undermined Turkey's regional standing (Akturk 2014) as it showed that in its material capacities "in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions, Turkey is overwhelmed by Russia" (Kardaş 2013: 648). However, most of the time Ankara does in fact coordinate with or at least adjusts its policy towards the South Caucasus with Russia's policy (Novikova 2015: 440). Importantly, Turkey did not join in the EU's sanctions regime against Russia that has been in place since 2014.

One key aspect of the twisting nature of Turkish-Russian interaction in the post-Soviet Black Sea region is energy policy. Far from constituting a potential strategic partnership (Hill and Taşpınar 2006), South Stream's transformation into Turkish Stream in late 2016 only a year after both countries publicly vilified one another over the downing of a Russian jet over Turkish soil underlines the flexible, contractual and interest-driven approaches to bilateral relations in both Moscow and Ankara. The real driver of rapprochement seem to be both sides' deteriorating relations with the West (Erşen 2017: 216). Ankara's occasional public flirtation with joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation should be seen in the same light as mostly rhetorical statements (Reuters 2016).

A good example of how Turkey's policy towards the region is affected by wider international relations in the region is the fate of the Caucasus Stability Initiative. Launched in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian war over South Ossetia of 2008, the very fact that then-Prime Minister Erdoğan first went to Moscow to present the plan meant that it was met with open hostility by the Georgian side.¹⁰ This example also reveals a glaring lack of awareness and skill in managing different regional actors' perceptions and interests on the part of the Turkish government (Göksel 2011: 6). The chances of multilateral initiatives based on a win-win rationale are thin when most other participants operate regional relations on a zero-sum logic.

On the other hand, as the Turkish government's relations with the EU have progressively cooled down, this has had an effect on how Turkey frames its engagement with the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood. Thus in early 2015, President Erdoğan (2015a) took the field of energy policy to elucidate what he sees as the EU's hesitancy and indecision: "They kept saying NABUCCO, NABUCCO, NABUCCO. They could not get it done. TANAP came and passed and hopefully soon gas will start flowing; meanwhile they are still staring". This stands in sharp contrast to the tacit and at times open support the West showed for Turkish cultural-religious outreach programmes in the post-Soviet space that includes the post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood (Balci 2014).

¹⁰ Interview with analyst, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 2017.

6.4. What is to be done: Non-state actors – the missing piece of the puzzle?

The overview provided here of the state of political, economic and cultural relations between Turkey and the six countries of its post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood has shown the salience of the region as a key secondary geographical focus of Turkey's foreign policy. Intriguingly, Turkey is likewise a country of secondary importance to almost all the region's countries (arguably excluding Belarus). Alas, in order to develop truly novel empirical as well as theoretical insights into the region's international relations and the nature of Turkey as a foreign policy actor, a more intrusive qualitative analysis of specific aspects like, say, Turkish investments' relationship to high-level foreign policy strategies, ought to be on the agenda. What this requires is a thicker description of how these relations break down on the level of individual actors as individual participants that are involved in and thus shape Turkey's ties to the countries of its post-Soviet Black Sea neighbourhood.

Thus, only by including non-state actors in addition to state actors into the analysis is it possible to get a more comprehensive understanding of Turkish foreign policy. Building on the small number of works on the role and impact of non-state actors in Turkey's foreign policy in general (Çelikpala 2006; Panayirci and Iseri 2014) and towards the region in particular (Dogan and Ulman 2016; Eissler 2013; Görgülü and Krikorian 2012) the next task for research on Turkey as a foreign policy actor in the post-Soviet Black Sea region will have to be a closer look at non-state actors in the field of civil society and the business community in order to assess their impact as well as their congruence with or divergence from the official state policies and rhetoric toward the region.

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The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment

Against the background of the war in Ukraine and the rising tensions with Russia, a reassessment of the European Neighborhood Policy has become both more urgent and more challenging. Adopting an inside-out perspective on the challenges of transformation the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the European Union face, the research project EU-STRAT seeks to understand varieties of social orders in EaP countries and to explain the propensity of domestic actors to engage in change. EU-STRAT also investigates how bilateral, regional and global interdependencies shape domestic actors' preferences and scope of action. Featuring an eleven-partner consortium of academic, policy, and management excellence, EU-STRAT creates new and strengthens existing links within and between the academic and the policy world on matters relating to current and future relations with EaP countries.
