Twitter Thread by Sonja Schiffers

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I recently submitted my PhD dissertation titled "Illiberalism Beyond Borders. Dissecting Russian and Turkish External Influence in Bosnia and Georgia" at @FU_Berlin. Interested in what I found? Read this thread ■■

ILLIBERALISM BEYOND BORDERS

Dissecting Russian and Turkish External Influence in Bosnia and Georgia

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To begin with, I hypothesise that illiberal external influence (IEX) is more likely to contribute to the contestation of #democracy in a given polity when it appears in the context of a favorable domestic environment and the absence of liberal external counterpressure.

I particularly scrutinise the role of domestic elites in facilitating/obstructing IEX, based on findings by J. Tolstrup, @otansey, R. Vanderhill et al. I also look at how liberal ext. counterpressure can help prevent a major contribution of IEX to the contestation of #democracy.

Between 2016-2018, I conducted 95 interviews in #Tbilisi, #Moscow, #Sarajevo & #BanjaLuka (thx to all interlocutors!). Given the increasingly unfree environment in Turkey, I didn't dare to make a trip to Ankara, but talked to local experts about Turkish IEX in BiH & Georgia.

In #Bosnia, #Ankara has engaged in illiberal sponsorship of the Party of Democratic Action for many years. However, in both Bosnia and #Georgia, Ankara mostly exerted illiberal external influence after the 2016 coup attempt, following which it exerted pressure on the rule of law.

#Russia, in contrast, has exerted illiberal external influence in #BiH & GEO for much longer. The #Kremlin has sponsored pro-Russian & illiberal forces & served as an inspiration for attempts to challenge the freedom of association & expression as well as sexual minority rights.

Importantly, all investigated cases clearly demonstrate the agency of domestic elites in facilitating or obstructing IEX. For instance, in #Bosnia, #Dodik & the SNSD have made great use of the Kremlin to further their own political goals.

In Georgia, the #Saakashvili governments effectively counteracted Russian IEX. Although this is not part of my research, I note that in doing so, they posed their own challenges to democracy, which points at the tension between deterring IEX and safeguarding/promoting liberalism.

Beyond highlighting domestic elites, my findings stress the potential of liberal external counterpressure. E.g., in the Turkish-Georgian case, the EP, specifically the involvement of @RebHarms, seemed too deter some of the Turkish IEX on the contestation of the rule of law.

Illiberal external influence is very difficult to trace & I often wished I had chosen a different topic. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand how external & domestic factors contributing to the contribution of democracy are interlinked & every attempt to do so is worth it.

Crucially, I look at IEX as one out of many (!) factors that contribute to the contestation of liberal democracy in a given polity. Blaming rising illiberalism predominantly on external forces is reductionist and dangerous. Plus, even in the case of IEX, domestic elites are key.

Last but not least: don't hesitate to contact me if you'd like to collaborate or are looking for a speaker/writer on these matters. While I kept relatively quiet about my PhD research for a long time, I'll be happy to finally share my findings and experience. Thanks!