

# Europe and Central Asia

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## Balkans

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➔ **Kosovo** EU-facilitated talks between Kosovo and Serbia 18 July ended without apparent progress on normalisation of relations. EU Commissioner for Migration Dimitris Avramopoulos 18 July confirmed that Kosovo met criteria for visa liberalisation, having ratified border demarcation agreement with Montenegro and “demonstrated full commitment in fighting corruption and organised crime”; commissioner voiced hope that Kosovo citizens would be able to travel to EU countries without visas by year-end. At London summit on Western Balkans 10 July, EU countries pledged to increase funding for region; participants discussed ways to improve security and regional cooperation.

➔ **Macedonia** Following June historic deal with Greece ending decades-long dispute over country name, govt started preparations for referendum on name deal. Parliament 25 July voted to appoint new electoral commission required to organise referendum; came after delay after opposition VMRO-DPMNE withheld its support, demanding provision guaranteeing formation of a technical govt 100 days ahead of any future elections. Parliament 30 July approved date for referendum as 30 Sept, in vote boycotted by VMRO-DPMNE. NATO 11 July invited Macedonia to start accession talks, to take place once name deal fully implemented. Macedonia 17 July started technical screening process to assess readiness for EU accession talks.

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## Caucasus

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➔ **Armenia** New govt of PM Pashinyan, who continues to enjoy high popularity levels, arrested more former govt officials and their relatives, including launch of investigations into former President Sargsyan’s brother, nephew and niece, reportedly charged with conducting illegal business activities. Armenia’s second President Robert Kocharyan sentenced 27 July to two-month pre-trial detention in court investigation into his involvement in crackdown on protesters in March 2008 that left ten dead; former ruling Republican Party and Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun party spoke about possible political motivation of investigation. Amid ongoing uncertainty over date for new parliamentary elections, speculation increased that they will be postponed until 2019, as parliamentarians continue to amend electoral code. Armenia took part in Russia-led military exercises “International Army Games” late July.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Turbulence in second-largest city Ganja after attacker 3 July shot city’s unpopular mayor, seriously wounding him; police detained suspect identified as Russian national Yunis Safarov, later described by authorities as belonging to a radical Islamist group. Estimated 150-200 people 10 July joined protest in Ganja city centre, interpreted by some opposition politicians and observers as show of anger against corruption; two policemen stabbed and killed as they were confronting demonstrators. Next day govt launched security operation detaining more than 100 people and arresting more than 60; one suspect in death of police officer was shot

dead 13 July. Interior ministry 9 July reported fourteen people jailed for online comments about shooting and about nationwide power blackout 3 July. President Aliyev 13 July made statement blaming events in Ganja on “religious radicals”; Iran dismissed and criticised speculation by Azerbaijani politicians of Islamic extremists with links to Iran. Azerbaijan took part in Russia-led military exercises “International Army Games” late July.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs with Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs 11 July held first official meeting on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) issue since recent change in Armenian leadership; no detailed information or date for further meetings released. Amid uncertainty over position of new Armenian govt on peace process, Armenian PM Pashinyan at 20 July press conference did not provide direct response to question on whether he believed territories around NK were to “go back” to Azerbaijan, saying that no decision would go against will of Armenian people; some observers interpreted this as indication that Pashinyan will not favour territorial concessions. Incidents along border between Armenia and Azerbaijan included 1 July exchange of fire near Nakhchivan; Azerbaijan reported detention on 15 July of Armenian national, accusing him of “sabotage” attempt against army; Armenia denied, said he was civilian with health problems. Azerbaijan 21 July reported one soldier killed as result of ceasefire violation in unspecified location. Azerbaijani armed forces started large-scale exercises 2 July; Ministry of Defence said exercises aimed at “the liberation of the occupied territories [Nagorno-Karabakh]”.

➡ **Georgia** President Margvelashvili announced at 11-12 July NATO summit that Georgia was ready to join NATO. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg 18 July said Georgia had right to choose for itself whether to join NATO, said Russian pressure was “totally unacceptable”. De facto leader of Georgian breakaway republic South Ossetia visited Syria and met with President Assad 23 July, two months after Syria recognised South Ossetia’s independence.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Shali city court 9 July extended detention of Oyub Titiyev, director of Chechnya office of Memorial human rights organisation, until Dec; Titiyev’s lawyers 9 July filled complaint to European Court of Human Rights for “politically motivated prosecution”; Council of Europe Commissioner Dunja Mijatović 17 July called for Titiyev’s release in letter to prosecutor general of Russia. In Chechnya, police reportedly detained one villager from Novye Atagi 10 July and six villagers from Borozdinovskaya 12 July without official charges, and with police reportedly giving no news to relatives. Gunmen 20 July attacked police car in Dagestan’s Kizilyurtovsky district, killing two policemen and wounding one; Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility. Vladimir Vasilyev, acting head of Dagestan, 10 July reported over 200 officials had been prosecuted for corruption charges; detained officials included former deputy PM and former minister for public health. In Chechen capital Grozny, city council 26 July appointed nephew of republic leader Ramzan Kadyrov as mayor.

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## Eastern Europe

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➔ **Moldova** Hundreds joined protest in front of parliament 19 July against annulment of Andrei Năstase's victory in 3 June Chişinău mayoral election and demanding new elections. Responding to election annulment, EU 4 July froze first tranche of €100mn financial assistance program, citing annulment which it said showed lack of respect for preconditions of democratic mechanisms and rule of law; European Parliament 5 July said annulment of mayoral election was evidence of "state capture and a very deep crisis of institutions".

➔ **Ukraine** Security situation in east improved from 1 July "Harvest Ceasefire" between Ukrainian military and Russia-backed armed formations; Kyiv reported ceasefire violations dropped 80% 1-11 July; however Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) noted "sharp increase" in ceasefire violations in Donetsk region 29-30 July. Following 11 July Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) meeting, Kyiv reiterated calls for OSCE monitors' full access up to Russian border; and for return to military positions established by Sept 2014 memorandum. Following 25 July TCG meeting, Kyiv envoy Iryna Herashchenko said Russia refused to consider new prisoner exchange and urged TCG resolution guaranteeing International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to Ukrainians in Russian and separatist detention. Ukrainian military casualties included four killed 1-30 July; OSCE reported eight civilians injured, two dead. Tensions rose around Azov Sea, amid reports of Russian searches of Ukrainian vessels and May opening of Kerch bridge linking Crimea to Russia's Krasnodar region. President Poroshenko 17 July pledged military measures to stop "Russian provocations"; accused Moscow of hindering mining and metallurgical industries, cementing annexation of Crimea, and violating 2003 agreement guaranteeing free movement of vessels in area. Russia accused Ukraine and Western backers of provocations via military exercises in Black Sea, which were followed by Ukrainian aviation exercises on Azov Sea reported by military 30 July. Talks on potential UN mission in Donbas remained deadlocked. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov 16 July elaborated plan for reintegration of areas outside Kyiv's control through security operations facilitated by a small peacekeeping force; said open questions include nature and duration of "special status" for reintegrated territories; status of Russian language. Following closed-door session at 16 July Helsinki summit between U.S. and Russian leaders, President Putin allegedly claimed he suggested to President Trump for his private consideration that Ukraine's separatist-held territories conduct internationally recognised referendum on status; U.S. govt 20 July denied it would consider this. U.S. 20 July announced additional \$200mn in security assistance for "training, equipment, and advisory efforts". Parliament 12 July passed amendments to June anti-corruption court law as per calls from Western counterparts.

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## Western Europe/Mediterranean

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➔ **Cyprus** Turkey 4 July approved appointment of Jane Holl Lute as new UN special envoy on Cyprus; Holl Lute met 23 July with Greek Cypriot President Nikos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı to discuss ways forward on possible new round of reunification talks. No substantial progress was reported. Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu met same day with Akıncı, later stated that Turkish Cypriots would accept no less than political equality. Greek FM Nikos Kotzias 3 July expressed Greece's desire for treaty with Turkey on issues of security and guarantees before holding an international conference on Cyprus; Greek PM Tsipras 12 July

broached topic with Turkish President Erdoğan on sidelines of NATO summit in Brussels, emphasising importance of restarting talks and establishing close contact between Greek and Turkish FMs in process. UN Security Council 26 July unanimously voted to renew UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)'s mandate for six months until 31 Jan 2019.

➡ **Northern Ireland** Month saw incidents of republican and unionist violence. Republican dissidents 7-12 July reportedly orchestrated violence over six successive nights in republican neighbourhood of Londonderry, firing shots at police 10 July and throwing 75 petrol bombs and two IEDs at police on 12 July. Police 16 July blamed "new IRA" republican dissidents, saying they had arrested thirteen in connection with attacks. Unidentified assailants 13 July threw explosive device at house of former leader of republican party Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, in west Belfast and attacked house of another republican activist and former IRA member; current Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald 16 July blamed dissent republicans for attacks. Loyalist paramilitary group Ulster Volunteer Force 11 July reportedly hijacked and burnt thirteen vehicles in protest at govt limiting size of bonfires for annual 12 July Orange Order parades. Five largest political parties, including Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, released joint statement 11 July appealing for end to all violence. British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference 25 July met for first time since 2007 in London to discuss issues including paramilitary and dissident violence, support for Good Friday Agreement and British and Irish relations post-Brexit.

➡ **Turkey** Number of fatalities and attacks in conflict between Turkey and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in south east went down compared to previous month; fatalities were concentrated in rural areas of Hakkari and Diyarbakır. By three-year anniversary of breakdown of ceasefire with PKK 20 July, Crisis Group had recorded almost 4,000 fatalities. Military conducted at least five major air operations hitting PKK targets in northern Iraq around Qandil during month. Govt crackdown on Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) continued: court 10 July sentenced two previous HDP deputies to fifteen months in prison based on claims they disobeyed law on meetings and demonstrations; authorities launched investigations into four newly elected HDP MPs over "terrorist propaganda" charges after they attended funerals of PKK militants. Govt 18 July lifted state of emergency introduced following July 2016 coup attempt, in move expected to ease economic and political tensions, however ruling Justice and Development Party (AK) 25 July passed bill amending Turkey's anti-terror law retaining some contentious provisions. Anti-Islamic State (ISIS) operations continued with further arrests. In northern Syria, Turkey and U.S. continued coordinated patrols around Manbij as part of their negotiated roadmap (see Syria). Relations with U.S. remain strained; FM Çavuşoğlu confirmed during 11-12 July NATO summit that Turkey would complete contentious purchase of Russian S-400 missiles by end-2019. Tensions increased after Turkish court 25 July ruled to put jailed U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson under house arrest (U.S. had expected his release). President Erdoğan met Russian President Putin on sidelines of BRICS summit in Johannesburg 26 July, reportedly discussing bilateral ties, Syria and upcoming Tehran summit (as part of Astana process dialogue on Syria conflict). Cooperation with EU on Syrian refugees continued with EU's late June allocation of second tranche of €3bn to assist with Syrian refugees' basic needs and integration. Tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities flared 2 July with fight in Bursa city, south of Istanbul, prompting some 500 residents to protest Syrian presence and vandalise Syrian-owned shops.

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbayev 5 July signed decree, which came into force 12 July, making him head of Security Council for life, and changing body's status from consultative to constitutional. U.S. officials visiting Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan 20-23 July met with representatives from all five Central Asian states for meetings under C5+1 format which includes economic and security cooperation.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** Amid ongoing feud between President Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev, Bishkek mayor and Atambayev ally Albek Ibraimov was detained 19 July on corruption charges. FM Sirodjidin Aslov 21 July hosted meeting of FMs representing all five Central Asian states, who agreed to increase cooperation on regional issues including combatting terrorism and drug trafficking. Kazakh Defence Minister Saken Zhasuzaqov 25 July travelled to Bishkek in first such visit since independence in 1991.

➔ **Tajikistan** Court 11 July sentenced journalist Hairullo Mirsaidov to twelve years' imprisonment for financial crimes and false reporting to police; several NGOs including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International condemned conviction, saying charges were politically motivated. Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for 29 July attack on group of foreign cyclists on road in Khatlon region in south, in which four were killed.

➔ **Uzbekistan** U.S. officials visiting Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan 20-23 July met with representatives from all five Central Asian states for meetings under C5+1 format which includes economic and security cooperation.