

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Campaigning began 7 Sept for 7 Oct presidential, parliamentary (state and entity level) and cantonal (for Federation entity) elections. Russian FM Sergey Lavrov visited Bosnia 21 Sept; meeting with tripartite state presidency in Sarajevo, said Russia supports Bosnia's territorial integrity and constitution and denied interfering in elections; also visited Republika Srpska (RS) capital Banja Luka, where he met with RS President Dodik (who is running for tripartite state presidency) and Serbian PM Dacic, and opened new Russian church and cultural centre; Dodik visited Russia late month, met with President Putin 30 Sept.

➔ **Kosovo** Talk of possible border adjustment between Kosovo and Serbia as part of EU-facilitated normalisation dialogue continued to prompt strong opposition within Kosovo and internationally, while tensions rose between countries. Serbian President Vučić 7 Sept called off meeting with Kosovo President Thaci, reportedly citing "lies" from Pristina; same day ordered Serbian institutions to stop all communications with Kosovo police and international peacekeepers. Vučić went ahead with rare visit to Kosovo 8-9 Sept; addressing thousands of Kosovo Serbs at rally in Mitrovica 9 Sept, his remarks praising former Serbian President Milosevic, who died while on trial for crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes, as a "great Serbian leader", drew criticism from neighbouring countries. Kosovo opposition continued efforts to block potential border change as part of normalisation deal, arguing it would require two-thirds parliamentary approval; local media 20 Sept reported Thaci had asked Constitutional Court to clarify whether his signature of an international agreement would be sufficient for ratification. Thousands joined opposition-organised protest against border correction proposal 29 Sept. Vučić in interview published 13 Sept said Serbia would need clear guarantees of EU membership in 2025 if it reaches agreement with Kosovo. Pristina deployed special police to Gazivode Lake area in northern Kosovo 29 Sept for visit by Thaci, prompting Serbia to put its troops on alert and accuse Pristina of breaking agreements. Govt 13 Sept approved bill expanding competences of Kosovo Security Force (KSF) without need for constitutional changes; Thaci expressed concern about need for support from Western allies including U.S. and NATO. Local NGO Kosovar Center for Security Studies published report 19 Sept claiming Belgrade put pressure on over 60 ethnic Serb members of Kosovo Security Force to resign. Local NGO Aktiv reported that integration of courts in Serb-run north into Kosovo judicial system, which came into force Oct 2017 following agreement as part of Serbia-Kosovo dialogue, has not helped backlog of tens of thousands of court cases.

➔ **Macedonia** In 30 Sept consultative referendum, 91.33% voted in favour of NATO and EU membership and accepting 17 June name agreement with Greece, however opponents of name deal, who had called for boycott, also claimed victory due to low turnout at 37%. PM Zaev said vote gave "crystal clear message" and he would proceed with bid to pass name change through vote in parliament, which as a constitutional change would require two-thirds support (80 out of 120 votes). Govt reported 71 deputies support name agreement; Zaev said if parliamentary vote failed

he would call early general elections. Ahead of referendum, opposition called for boycott, while country's Western partners lent support to yes campaign, with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg during visit 6 Sept saying alliance was "ready to welcome" Macedonia once it finalises agreement with Greece; German and Austrian leaders also visited ahead of vote, along with senior U.S. defence secretary Jim Mattis, who warned of Russian attempts to influence vote, and EU foreign policy chief Mogherini. Thousands marched in Skopje in support of yes vote 16 Sept.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Political turbulence continued; Robert Kocharyan, country's second president facing criminal charges for "overturning the constitutional order" but freed on appeal in Aug, continued to tell media about his intention to form new opposition to run in anticipated parliamentary elections; several key members of former ruling Republican party and Dashnaksutyun party said they would join him.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Turkish President Erdoğan 15 Sept visited Azerbaijan, met with President Aliyev and in speech made remarks about Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and need to resolve it as a precondition to improving Turkish-Armenian relations. Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman also visited Baku 15-20 Sept for discussions on regional security, development, military-technical cooperation; observers speculated visit may herald big purchase of military equipment from Israel, already a major supplier to Azerbaijani military. Russian President Putin 27 Sept visited Baku for bilateral meeting with Aliyev and to participate in 9th Russia-Azerbaijan Interregional Forum in Baku; discussed trade, economy and humanitarian issues during visit.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Armenian and Azerbaijan foreign ministers met at UN General Assembly 26 Sept, second such meeting since change in Armenian leadership in April; ministers reportedly continued negotiations on peaceful settlement of conflict; Minsk Group co-chairs' released statement which "underscored that a comprehensive settlement will require compromise on all sides" and sought clarifications on some recent statements and incidents. Earlier in month, Azerbaijani foreign ministry condemned remarks by Armenian PM Pashinyan at 8 Sept meeting of businessmen in Russia that he wanted to see NK eventually become part of Armenia. Continuing to favour more agency for NK de facto leadership – a red line for Baku – Pashinyan in 10 Sept interview with Russian newspaper said issue of return of lands should be discussed with de facto leadership, which effectively controls the territory. Amid tensions over Armenian statements, several reports of exchange of fire at Armenia-Azerbaijan border, with two soldiers killed: one Azerbaijani 5 Sept, and one Armenian 20 Sept; three more Armenian soldiers reported dead 22 and 26 Sept in isolated incidents at Line of Contact. Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders 28 Sept had brief informal exchange at Commonwealth of Independent States Summit in Dushanbe; both sides reached preliminary agreement on establishing an operational channel that should help sustain ceasefire regime through direct communication between Yerevan and Baku.

➔ **Georgia** Month saw further breakdown of main negotiation forum between Georgia, Russia and breakaway republics, which could increase tensions and

aggravate difficulties faced by residents of conflict zones. Following months of growing crisis in Geneva International Discussions, launched in 2008 as main negotiation forum for Georgian conflicts and with representatives from Russia, Georgia, de facto Abkhazia and South Ossetia along with U.S., EU, OSCE and UN, de facto South Ossetian officials 14 Sept walked out of meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM, meant to meet every two-to-three weeks, aimed at defusing tensions along administrative boundary line), protesting Interpol's decision to accept Georgian appeal to add two South Ossetian suspects in Feb 2018 death of ethnic Georgian Archil Tatumashvili. Similar IPRM in Abkhazia context has not taken place since de facto Abkhazia officials walked out in June protesting Georgian intention to prosecute several Abkhazia de facto officials and residents suspected of crimes against ethnic Georgians. Moscow 18 Sept accused Georgia of attempting to add "politically motivated" issues to agenda; Tbilisi accused Russia of attempting to "undermine" IPRM and the Geneva format. Uncertainty on date for next possible meeting, with no side showing readiness to find compromise to resume IPRM meetings. IPRM format is only communication channel between conflict parties to tackle practical problems in conflict zones; next round of Geneva discussions scheduled for mid-Oct, seen as chance to avert potential crisis of Geneva format. Amid growing opposition protests over lack of reforms, rising crime and deteriorating living conditions in de facto Abkhazia, opposition announced major protest in Sukhumi early Oct, demanding de facto leader Raul Khajimba should not run for second term in presidential election scheduled for Aug 2019; some also calling for him to step down early.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Amid ongoing anti-militant operations, concerns over human rights continued. Security forces 15 Sept reported counter-terrorism operation in area of Dagestan's Talgi village had eliminated three militants. Residents of Shali early Sept told "Caucasian Knot" website that families of alleged perpetrators of 20 Aug attacks on police had been expelled from Chechnya. Chechen judge 20 Sept ordered that trial for drugs charges of Oyub Titiyev, director of Chechnya office of Memorial human rights organisation, be closed to public. Fifteen members of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 30 Aug enacted Vienna Human Dimension Mechanism, requesting concrete information on and investigations of human rights violations in Chechnya, and citing "climate of impunity". Amnesty International 3 Sept called on authorities to disclose whereabouts of Chechen refugee deported from Poland 31 Aug, who disappeared 1 Sept reportedly after a dozen armed men wearing uniforms of Federal Security Service came to his residence in Chechen village Shalazhi. Violence broke out in Kabardino-Balkar Republic starting 18 Sept with fighting in Kendelen village between ethnic Balkars and Kabardinians staging march commemorating historic battle, followed by clashes between civilians and police next day in neighbouring villages, and in capital Nalchik 20 and 21 Sept; 45 people reportedly injured, over 100 detained. 26 Sept border agreement between Chechnya and Ingushetia prompted protests in Ingush capital Magas.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Ukraine** Tensions continued over Russia's military presence in Azov Sea and obstruction of international shipping to Ukrainian ports Mariupol and Berdyansk.

President Poroshenko 13 Sept called for further sanctions on Russia over its detention of ships bound for Ukrainian ports since May. Govt 16 Sept announced plans to build new Azov Sea naval base by end of 2018. Ukrainian Navy dispatched two armoured gunboats to littoral Donetsk region 8 Sept, 20 Sept moved two ships and boat from Black to Azov Sea. Russian state media claimed ships had passed into Russian exclusive economic zone and were being “escorted” by Russian coast guard; as boats passed through Kerch strait, Ukrainian navy claimed over ten Russian ships and one Russian aircraft were accompanying them. Russian media 25 Sept reported Ukraine had requested Russian permission for ships’ passage; Ukrainian navy denied. Poroshenko 26 Sept addressed UN General Assembly, highlighting need for peacekeeping force in Donbas and Russia’s military build-up in Crimea, which he said had reflected campaign to annex Azov Sea. In continued fighting in eastern Ukraine, casualties were down from Aug; at least seven killed among forces on both sides; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe monitors confirmed one civilian death; de facto authorities reported three children killed by landmine 30 Sept. Army 22 Sept announced it had taken control of Vilne (population 150) in Luhansk region, which was previously in no-man’s land. Following 31 Aug killing of separatist leader Aleksandr Zakharchenko, Ukraine’s human rights ombudsman for region reported mass detentions, torture in areas outside govt control, forcing confessions of cooperation with Ukrainian authorities in assassination. Amid backdrop of historical tensions with Budapest over Ukraine’s Hungarian minority, FM Pavlo Klimkin 26 Sept called for closure of Hungarian consulate in Berehove after media published video appearing to show diplomats granting Hungarian citizenship to Ukrainian citizens, in violation of Ukrainian law.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Tensions over hydrocarbon explorations continued; Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 3 Sept said Turkey, having purchased new drilling platform, could begin drilling in the east Mediterranean within months if Greek-Cypriot govt continued to take unilateral steps toward exploration. Turkish President Erdoğan 16 Sept said Turkey will increase Turkish troops in northern Cyprus. UN Special Envoy to Cyprus Jane Holl Lute travelled to Athens and London 11-12 Sept to complete meetings with all parties involved in Cyprus issue to assess possibility of renewed reunification talks. Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı 27-29 Sept attended UN General Assembly.

➔ **Turkey** Govt continued military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in south-east Turkey and northern Iraq. Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu 18 Sept said PKK was “taking its last breaths” and “this winter will be difficult [for the PKK]”, demonstrating Ankara’s determination to continue pushing for military solution. Ankara welcomed appointment of new UN Special Envoy for Syria, former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey James Jeffery, who in 4 Sept meeting with Turkish defence minister reportedly emphasised importance of continued U.S.-Turkish cooperation on Syria. President Erdoğan and Russian President Putin 17 Sept signed agreement for demilitarised buffer zone to allow for “radical” rebels and heavy weaponry to be “removed” from rebel-held north-western governorate of Idlib, alleviating concerns over possible refugee influx from what appeared to be an imminent Syrian regime offensive. Disagreement between Ankara and Washington

over U.S. support for People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria continued. Erdoğan 24 Sept said Ankara could take military action against YPG in north-eastern Syria. Relations with EU and some EU capitals showed signs of improvement during month.

Central Asia

➡ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbayev 10 Sept dismissed Chief of Staff Adilbek Zhaqsybekov, ostensibly because he reached retirement age, replacing him with mayor of capital Aset Isekeshev. After Human Rights Watch 10 Sept issued report claiming cultural and religious eradication of Muslims in China's Xinjiang province, adjacent to Kazakhstan, Kazakhs reported their relatives were being held in Chinese "re-education camps".

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Attending meeting of Turkic Council in Bishkek, Turkish President Erdoğan 1 Sept called for closer ties with Kyrgyzstan and urged counterpart President Jeenbekov to crack down on groups associated with banned Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen. Also attending, Hungarian President Orbán 4 Sept called for closer ties. In 18 Sept report, Human Rights Watch said govt has used "dangerously overbroad" interpretation of extremism to convict 258 suspects since 2010. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women same day said govt had allowed "systemic" human rights violations due to pervasive practice of bride kidnapping and forced marriage. Kyrgyz and Russian troops conducted joint counterterrorism exercise late Sept.

➡ **Tajikistan** Visiting Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) bordering Afghanistan, President Rahmon 15 Sept criticised GBAO officials for failing to address criminal and drug-trafficking groups. Opposition 17 Sept said govt planning military operation in area; video footage surfaced online 19 Sept purportedly showing military equipment being transferred to region. Russian defence ministry reported it conducted counter-terrorism exercise in neighbouring Khatlon region 24-28 Sept. Scuffle broke out between govt officials attending 11 Sept meeting of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Warsaw and activists calling for release of jailed members of banned Islamic Renaissance Party.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Attending meeting of Turkic Council in Kyrgyzstan, President Mirziyoyev 3 Sept said Uzbekistan eager to join organisation. Committee to Protect Journalists 6 Sept criticised govt's 28 Aug-2 Sept roundup of bloggers, which it said signals that "the country is not serious about improving the environment for press freedom".