

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

↓ **Bosnia** Observers of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) criticised campaign for 7 Oct presidential and parliamentary elections at state and entity levels for deficiencies in legal framework, biased media coverage, focus on fearmongering, as well as inadequate transparency and accountability of campaign finances, while victory of Serb nationalist Milorad Dodik (outgoing president of Republika Srpska (RS) entity) in race for Serb seat on three-member state presidency prompted concerns among Western officials citing his calls for RS secession from Bosnia, alleged ties to Russia and announcement, on winning, that his priority would be “to work above all and only for the interests of Serbs”. Dodik 9 Oct told Russian newspaper he would launch initiative for Bosnia to recognise Ukraine’s annexed Crimean peninsula as part of Russia, and prevent activities implementing Bosnia’s NATO Membership Action Plan. Sefik Dzaferovic from main Bosniak party SDA and ally of outgoing Bosniak president Bakir Izetbegovic won Bosniak presidency seat, and moderate Zeljko Komsic (Democratic Front) won Croat seat, beating incumbent Dragan Covic, leader of main Croat party HDZ. Thousands of Bosnian Croat supporters of defeated Covic gathered in Mostar 11 Oct to protest Komsic’s victory, claiming he won with Bosniak votes. Dodik ally Zeljka Cvijanovic won race for RS presidency, although opposition claimed fraud. In vote for state and Federation entity parliament, largest parties maintained their seats, however ongoing dispute on electoral law means they cannot form govt at entity or state level. Election turnout reportedly 53.36%; anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International alleged abuses during campaign period included “direct threats and attacks, pressure on voters and vote-buying, which in the past had been somehow subtle, [but which] have become fully transparent”.

↓ **Kosovo** Tensions grew with Serbia over moves in legislature to transform Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into a national army. Parliament 18 Oct approved three draft laws on defence ministry and KSF, expanding latter’s size and competences by transforming it into an organisation to protect Kosovo’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Kosovo Serb representatives boycotted vote. Earlier, NATO said “any initiatives regarding the mandate of the [KSF] should be fully consulted with all communities in Kosovo and with NATO Allies”. Belgrade said transformation of KSF into a regular army is a “threat to peace” that would make Serbia’s position “extremely difficult”, and said it would talk to NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo. After outgoing U.S. ambassador to UN called for termination of United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Serbian President Vucic 17 Oct said combination of UNMIK departure and formation of Kosovo army would leave Serbia no choice but to “protect” Kosovo’s Serbs. Amid ongoing division within Pristina govt over President Thaci’s proposal for “border correction” as part of EU-facilitated dialogue with Serbia, Thaci 11 Oct claimed French President Macron expressed his support for his proposal.

➔ **Macedonia** Following several days of debate, parliament 19 Oct approved govt proposal to change name of country to North Macedonia, in line with June deal

resolving name dispute with Greece, in return for Greece lifting its veto on Macedonia joining NATO and EU. Vote just met required two-thirds majority with 80 out of 120 votes, after eight members of opposition coalition voted “yes” against party line, laying out four conditions for their support including formation of parliamentary committee for proposed national reconciliation process. With approval to start procedure, govt immediately began process to prepare and submit draft constitutional amendments to parliament. NATO, U.S. and EU leaders welcomed vote outcome. Interior minister 22 Oct said police providing additional protection for deputies who approved name change, some of whom received death threats. Appeals court 5 Oct upheld two-year jail sentence for former PM Gruevski for unlawfully influencing officials over illegal purchase of luxury car; Skopje court 8 Oct sentenced former interior minister to six years jail for her role in purchase.

Caucasus

➡ **Armenia** PM Nikol Pashinyan resigned 16 Oct, triggering formal process paving way for snap parliamentary elections, expected to take place 12 Dec if National Assembly is unable to elect new PM in next two sessions, first of which took place 24 Oct. Former Republican Party and two other parliamentary groups, who still form majority of MPs, tried to enact bill 2 Oct to block snap election, prompting several hours of street protests in Yerevan initiated by Pashinyan on social media; after days of consultations, parties mid-Oct reached agreement not to nominate PM candidate. Amid ongoing distrust, Republican Party 22 and 29 Oct refused to support amendments to election code, which could delay parliamentary elections.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Deputy Defence Minister met with Israeli Defence Minister 24 Oct to discuss regional security and military-technical cooperation. State budget for 2019 submitted to parliament, outlines roughly 5% increase in defence-related expenditures, up to \$1.8bn.

⬆ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Both Armenia and Azerbaijan took actions to implement late Sept agreement to establish communication channel which started operating during month, while international partners voiced support, and situation in conflict zone remained calm. Yerevan and Baku both identified representatives within their govts to stay in direct contact for communication channel, intended to support (but not limited to) efforts to prevent incidents on Armenia-Azerbaijan state border and on Line of Contact in NK conflict zone, especially as Armenia prepares for snap parliamentary elections (see Armenia). Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairs started regional visit in late Oct. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton visiting region 24-26 Oct met with Azerbaijan and Armenian leaders, reasserting U.S. commitment to peaceful resolution of NK conflict; asked about arms sales to Armenia and Azerbaijan, he noted Russian provision of these had not produced peace but that U.S. should consider provision. Azerbaijani foreign ministry 23 Oct summoned French Ambassador to express discontent regarding recent “illegal” visits of French officials to NK. Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey adopted statement calling for peaceful resolution of NK conflict “based on the principle of territorial integrity” at meeting in Istanbul 29 Oct; Armenia downplayed importance of statement.

➔ **Georgia** During 45th round of Geneva International Discussions 9-10 Oct, launched in 2008 as main negotiation forum for Georgian conflicts, UN, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), EU co-chairs and U.S. and Georgian representatives urged all participants to resume Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings (aimed at defusing tensions along boundary line) after participants from South Ossetia walked out of meeting in Sept. Participants from Moscow, Abkhazia and South Ossetia expressed support for joint steps to restart IPRM meetings. Co-chairs acknowledged achievements of discussions over last ten years, emphasising however that “core issues remain to be resolved”, including adoption of a joint statement on non-use of force and situation of IDPs and refugees. In presidential elections 28 Oct, no candidate received more than 50% required to avoid runoff; second round scheduled early Dec between two candidates: independent Salome Zourabishvili, supported by ruling Georgian Dream party, who won 39% of votes in first round, and Grigol Vashadze from opposition United National Movement-led coalition, with some 38%. OSCE observers concluded voters had genuine choice despite an unlevel playing field, and voting generally orderly and transparent.

↓ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Following controversial 26 Sept deal with Chechnya on demarcation of administrative boundary between regions, month saw political crisis in Ingushetia and increased tensions with neighbouring republic Chechnya. Thousands rallied in front of regional parliament in Ingush capital Magas 4 Oct as lawmakers debated deal; bodyguards of regional leader Yunus-Bek Yevkurov fired into air after protesters threw plastic bottles at him. Govt reported parliament approved deal, although some lawmakers claimed vote was falsified. Protests continued in main square 5-7 Oct, and from 8 Oct in front of state radio and TV, demanding Yevkurov’s resignation and referendum on deal; media reported large numbers of women and elderly among protesters. Leadership claimed deal only exchanges unpopulated agricultural land, however protesters claim it is unfair and detrimental to region and was made without consultation; adding to pressure on Yevkurov, Ingushetia’s constitutional court ruled decision illegal, saying it should be decided by referendum, however Yevkurov refused to accept ruling. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said protesters would be “held accountable”, and 19 Oct reportedly visited villager in area concerned. Presidential envoy Alexander Matovnikov and local civil society representatives met 16 Oct, decided to hold session of Ingush Commission on Cooperation with Chechen govt agencies on border dispute; Ingush authorities said meeting took place next day; Russia’s RBC media reported that Kremlin officials acknowledged law had “inconsistencies”. Amnesty International said one of its researchers monitoring protests in Magas was abducted 6 Oct by men claiming to be security officials, who held him hostage for six days, beat him and subjected him to mock execution; Ingushetia interior ministry said it could not verify claims. In Dagestan, security forces reported they killed two suspected militants during counterterrorism operation 13 Oct in Khasavyurt region, where they have been conducting operations since mid-Sept. Military tribunal in Ingushetia 25 Oct upheld murder and torture convictions against seven security personnel including head of counter-terrorism centre, for killing, use of violence and extortion.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** European Parliament 4 Oct passed a resolution calling on Belarus to “end all judicial harassment, intimidation, and threats” against journalists and independent media.

↓ **Ukraine** Hostilities in eastern conflict zone worsened as back-to-school ceasefire deteriorated, while tensions increased with Russia over Azov Sea and proposed establishment of a self-governing Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Violence rose in east mid-Oct: reported casualties highest among separatist fighters, however several Ukrainian soldiers also killed, and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mission reported several civilian deaths, including of minors. OSCE mission reported more convoys appearing to cross Ukraine-Russia border by night 9-12 Oct, 16 Oct and 27 Oct, when the mission’s drone went missing after spotting convoy. Vladislav Surkov, personal adviser to Russian President Putin, reportedly endorsed separatist “elections” on 11 Nov; pledged financial support to separatist entities. Russian parliament 18 Oct adopted resolution warning of “growing military threat from the Kyiv authorities in Donbas”. Ukrainian concerns about Russian activities in Azov Sea persisted; govt 12 Oct published decree on “Immediate measures for the protection of national interests in southern and eastern Ukraine, the Black and Azov Seas and the Kerch Strait”, including steps to demarcate Ukrainian waters, and deploy military and law enforcement divisions to monitor sea borders. European Parliament passed nonbinding resolution 25 Oct reiterating opposition to Russia’s construction of Kerch bridge and burdensome inspection regime for ships entering and exiting Ukraine’s Azov Sea ports; warned of “reinforced” sanctions on Russia “if the conflict in the Azov Sea escalates further”. Kyiv parliament prolonged special status law for separatist-controlled entities until 31 Dec 2019. Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate announced break with Ecumenical Patriarchate following latter’s 11 Oct move to bring Ukrainian clergy previously excommunicated by Moscow Patriarchate into communion, and its intention to grant autocephaly (self-government) to Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Moscow said move could lead to seizure of worship facilities, Russian parliament statement 18 Oct warned of possible attacks on adherents of Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine; in Kyiv, interior minister said police will curtail any illegal attempts to seize worship sites. Diplomatic row with Hungary intensified over latter’s granting of citizenship to Ukrainian nationals in violation of Ukrainian law; Kyiv expelled Hungarian consul 4 Oct; Budapest expelled top Ukrainian diplomat and pledged to continue opposing Kyiv’s EU and NATO integration efforts.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute 15 Oct submitted report to UN Secretary-General Guterres reportedly stating that “prospects of comprehensive settlement between the communities on the island remain alive”. Came after discussions between Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Turkish Cypriot “foreign minister” Kudret Özersay and Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades on sidelines of UN General Assembly late Sept on alternative solution proposals to “bi-zonal and bi-communal federation”, reportedly discussing new formats including

“confederation”, “loose federation” and “decentralised federation”. UN Security Council 30 Oct welcomed report and Guterres’ decision to continue efforts to resume negotiations. Lute met with Anastasiades and Akinci 31 Oct. Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci 26 Oct agreed to open two new border crossings along buffer zone at Dherynia/Derinya and Lefka/Aplici 12 Nov. Tensions over hydrocarbon explorations continued; Greek Cypriot administration 3 Oct invited international energy companies to bid on exploration licence in Block 7 of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), prompting harsh criticism from Ankara, which said move violated Turkish Cypriots’ “inalienable rights to natural resources”. ExxonMobil 5 Oct said it was still planning drilling activities in Republic of Cyprus’ EEZ in 2018.

➔ **Turkey** Month saw continued military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in south-east Turkey and northern Iraq and uptick in crackdown on suspected PKK sympathisers; spike in tensions with Saudi Arabia over Khashoggi killing; and implementation of deal on removal of heavy weapons from Syria’s Idlib province alleviating immediate concerns over refugee influx. Eight soldiers killed 4 Oct in PKK-claimed attack in Batman, triggering wave of detentions of suspected PKK sympathisers, with almost 400 detained by 10 Oct; govt dismissed 559 village guards and suspended 259 neighbourhood heads for alleged PKK links. In crackdown on pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) Diyarbakır head arrested on terrorism charges 9 Oct. Ahead of March 2019 municipal elections, President Erdoğan 7 Oct said, “If those involved with terror are elected we will do what is needed and replace them with [state-appointed] trustees”. Turkish military carried out three major cross-border air raids against PKK in northern Iraq; and late Oct reportedly hit People’s Protection Units (YPG) targets located east of Euphrates at Turkey-Syria border. Implementation of Sept deal between Russia and Turkey on demilitarised buffer zone in Syria’s rebel-held Idlib province continued, forestalling mass influx of refugees (see Syria). Turkey, Russia, France and Germany agreed joint communiqué at summit in Istanbul 27 Oct calling for “inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process” and emphasising “need to create conditions throughout the country for the safe and voluntary return of refugees”. Turkish officials expressed dissatisfaction with “U.S. delaying tactic” in implementation of so-called “Manbij roadmap” despite launch of training for joint U.S.-Turkish patrols in Manbij. Tensions with Saudi Arabia spiked as Turkey accused Riyadh of murdering Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at Istanbul consulate 2 Oct, and provided details to press on alleged torture and dismemberment of body (see Saudi Arabia). Tensions with U.S. eased somewhat after Ankara 12 Oct released U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson, although differences remain over key strategic issues. Relations with EU improved following Ankara’s efforts to mend ties with key EU capitals.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** Amid reports of harassment and detention of ethnic Kazakhs in “re-education” camps in China’s Xinjiang province (see China), dozens of Kazakhs 4 Oct presented petition at German Embassy appealing to German Chancellor Merkel for help with release of their relatives. Govt 5 Oct denied asylum request of ethnic Kazakh Chinese woman who fled China and spoke out about “re-education” camps in Xinjiang. Police 27 Sept arrested French journalist Vincent Prado, investigating

2011 deadly crackdown on oil workers' protest in Zhanaozen (south west); released same day, banned from working in Aktau region.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Supreme Court 3 Oct ruled that legal immunity for former presidents is unconstitutional; move comes as authorities continue to pursue corruption cases against associates of former President Atambayev.

➡ **Tajikistan** Trial of seventeen Tajiks charged with involvement in July killing of four foreign cyclists started 23 Oct. Amid improved bilateral ties with Uzbekistan, govt 6 Oct announced start of demining work along Tajik-Uzbek border. After President Rahmon's mid-Sept criticism of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region leadership, govt early Oct named Yodgor Fayzov new head of oblast.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Amid ongoing reports of economic crisis and food shortages, Russia's Gazprom announced it would resume purchasing natural gas from Turkmenistan in Jan 2019 after three year gap.

➡ **Uzbekistan** During 23 Oct visit, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross met with President Mirziyoyev and hailed Uzbek govt commitment to democratic reforms, calling for close partnership. Russian President Putin 18-19 Oct visited Tashkent, and together with Mirziyoyev launched construction of nuclear power plant in Navoy region; also discussed military technical cooperation, regional security. Mirziyoyev 8 Oct met French President Macron in Paris during his first official visit to Europe. Amid improved bilateral ties between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Tajik govt 6 Oct announced start of demining work along Tajik-Uzbek border (see Tajikistan). Mirziyoyev 30 Oct fired VP Zoyir Mirzayev after film emerged of him humiliating farmers during agricultural inspection trip. Prosecutor general's office 3 Oct denied reports that late President Karimov's daughter Gulnara Karimova, who govt in 2017 said had been sentenced to five years jail for tax evasion and other charges, was staying at luxury hotel in Dubai.