

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Bosnia** Republika Srpska entity set up new “Council for the Protection of Constitutional Order” to monitor threats to its constitution and jurisdiction, seen by some as a move toward creating an entity-level security and intelligence service.

⚠ **Kosovo** Tensions increased with Serbia and within Kosovo after govt imposed customs tariff on Serbian imports. PM Haradinaj 6 Nov announced new 10% customs tariff on imports from Bosnia and Serbia, citing their “negative behaviour” including lack of recognition, alleged threats from Serbia against members of Kosovo Security Force members, and Bosnia blocking goods from Kosovo. Serbia and Bosnia, both with large trade surpluses with Kosovo, criticised move, which Belgrade said undermined EU-facilitated dialogue. Kosovo and Serbian leaders exchanged angry remarks after latest round of EU-mediated talks 8 Nov (first since July); Serbian President Vucic said Kosovo must lift tariff before dialogue can proceed, and said move by Pristina to build army violated earlier agreements. Pristina 21 Nov raised customs tariff to 100% to protect country’s “vital interest” in response to alleged “aggressive campaign” by Belgrade, which it claimed had influenced decision by international police agency Interpol previous day to again reject Kosovo’s membership. EU and U.S. called on Kosovo to lift tariff, which EU foreign policy chief Mogherini warned is “clear violation” of regional trade agreement Cefta “and the spirit of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Kosovo”; Haradinaj 29 Nov said tariff on Serbian imports would remain until Serbia recognises Kosovo’s independence and stops blocking its membership of international organisations. Mayors of four Serb majority municipalities in northern Kosovo resigned 27 Nov in protest at tariff hike and said their municipalities would end communication with Kosovo govt institutions; also complained of “brutal” police operation 23 Nov arresting three Kosovo Serbs allegedly linked to Jan 2018 murder of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic. Hundreds of Kosovo Serbs rallied in Mitrovica same day. In media interview 9 Nov President Thaci said any agreement in dialogue with Serbia would not involve redrawing borders along ethnic lines; said “armed forces of Kosovo will be created”.

➔ **Macedonia** Police issued arrest warrant for former PM Gruevski after court 9 Nov rejected his final appeal against two-year jail sentence for conviction on corruption charges. Gruevski reportedly fled Macedonia 11 Nov through Albania, Montenegro and Serbia to Hungary, where govt granted him political asylum despite Macedonia’s request to deny him asylum and extradite him. Govt 2 Nov submitted four draft constitutional amendments to parliament, part of process to implement name agreement with Greece. Several thousand people protested in Skopje against name deal with Greece 18 Nov and 28 Nov organised by opposition. First passenger flight in twelve years between Greece and Macedonia landed in Skopje 1 Nov.

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## Caucasus

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➔ **Armenia** Parliament dissolved 1 Nov ahead of snap parliamentary elections to take place 9 Dec. Tensions increased with Belarus, which proposed taking chairmanship of Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) ahead of schedule after Armenia recalled its official who has been charged with overthrowing constitutional order in 2008, part of ongoing criminal investigations into post-election crackdown. CSTO members were unable to reach final decision on candidacy of the next chair at 8 Nov meeting, to continue discussion at 6 Dec session.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Security forces 4 Nov killed two alleged religious extremists in shootout in second-largest city, Ganja, who were alleged to be planning terrorist attack. Police 17 Nov detained 52 and arrested eleven members of opposition Popular Front Party for holding unsanctioned political march; eight of the eleven were released with administrative fines two days later, three sentenced to twenty-day administrative arrests.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Armenia and Azerbaijan continued efforts to exercise restraint in conflict zone, using newly-established communication channel to manage incidents on line of contact. During 28 Nov pre-election rally in Tavush province, acting Armenian PM Pashinyan, who heads electoral list of the My Step alliance, said that Armenia used communication channel to discuss fate of one Armenian citizen detained in Azerbaijan in July. Efforts by both sides to secure release of prisoners (at least three on each side), which some hope could help further build trust, leaked to press early Nov; sides remain unable to agree on conditions. De facto NK President Bako Sahakyan visited France 15 Nov, U.S. 16 Nov and Russia 24 Nov, taking part in annual fundraising events hosted by local Armenian diaspora organisations; Baku strongly criticised Paris, Washington and Moscow for granting entry permits, 24 Nov said such visits by “head’ of the illegal regime” to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group co-chair countries “can lead to an unpredictable development of the situation around the conflict”; said Armenian side would bear entire responsibility.

➔ **Georgia** Second round of presidential elections between ruling party-endorsed candidate and former French diplomat Salome Zourabishvili and opposition coalition’s Grigol Vashadze 28 Nov resulted in victory for Zourabishvili, who gained 59.62% of votes, almost doubling her first-round result; Vashadze finished worse than predicted with 40.38%. Zourabishvili becomes first woman to hold Georgian presidency in permanent capacity. Ahead of second round, local watchdogs complained about vote buying and intimidation of voters, especially when govt promised to write off debts of 600,000 citizens one week prior to election. Opposition refused to accept election results, planning street protests early Dec to reinforce its call for early parliamentary elections. Preliminary joint post-election statements from Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and European Parliament 29 Nov stated that second round was “competitive and candidates were able to campaign freely”, stressed that “one side enjoyed an undue advantage and the negative character of the campaign on both sides undermined the process”.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Tensions continued over controversial late Sept border agreement between Chechnya and Ingushetia. Ingush law enforcement 17 Nov detained four activists in territory transferred to Chechnya. Protesters rallied in Nazran 27 Nov as Russia's Constitutional Court began examining legality of land deal; several activists detained in St Petersburg 26-27 Nov in sporadic shows of support to Ingush people. Sixteen members of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 2 Nov triggered Moscow Mechanism to establish fact-finding mission in Chechnya amid reports of "antigay purge" and human rights violations against independent journalists and activists. Unidentified woman 17 Nov blew herself up near police checkpoint in Chechen capital Grozny; no others injured. Three suspected religious extremists reported killed in shootout with security forces and one detained in Maisky district, Kabardino-Balkaria 30 Nov.

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## Eastern Europe

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➡ **Moldova** European Parliament 14 Nov passed resolution stating Moldova has become "state captured by oligarchic interests" and citing concern over democratic backsliding, shrinking space for civil society and other issues; said future EU aid should take only once Feb 2019 parliamentary elections are conducted in line with international standards. European Commission 15 Nov announced it was cutting financial assistance to Moldova by €20mn annually in 2017 and 2018 due to concerns about rule of law and democratic backsliding; also said €100mn in macro financial assistance suspended indefinitely. EU called for action on voiding of mayoral elections in capital and 2014 disappearance of funds from banks.

↓ **Ukraine** Incident involving Russian and Ukrainian naval vessels in Azov Sea late month exacerbated tensions between Kyiv and Moscow, while in Donbas hostilities continued. Russian border patrol 25 Nov attacked Ukrainian naval vessels near Kerch Strait; three Ukrainian servicemen injured, three vessels and 24 servicemen captured; incident believed to constitute Russia's first overt and uncontested use of force against Ukraine since 2014 annexation of Crimea. In statement to UN Security Council next day, Russia accused Kyiv of "very serious provocation". Moscow said it would charge captured sailors with violating Russia's state borders. Ukraine said its vessels acted according to 2003 treaty granting free access to Azov Sea; were attacked in international waters. EU urged Russia to restore freedom of passage and both sides to act with restraint; U.S. accused Russia of reckless escalation, President Trump cancelled meeting with President Putin. Ukrainian govt 26 Nov announced martial law for 30 days starting 28 Nov in ten provinces bordering Russia, Azov and Black Seas, and Moldova's Russian-allied breakaway area, Transnistria, and 30 Nov banned male Russian nationals aged sixteen-60 from entering country during martial law. Fighting continued in east as peacekeeping talks remained stuck. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) recorded daily average of 120 explosions, down slightly from Oct. Ukrainian army reported increase in casualties with nine soldiers killed 1-29 Nov; separatist forces reported eight killed; one civilian killed and three injured. Candidates backed by Kremlin claimed victory in elections in Russian-backed separatist entities 11 Nov that Kyiv and allies consider illegal. Tensions grew ahead of final moves to establish self-governing Ukrainian Orthodox Church, opposed by Ukrainian branch of Moscow Patriarchate; amid concerns over possible reallocation

of worship sites, unidentified attackers 15 Nov threw two Molotov cocktails on prominent Kyiv church in Kyiv given to Ecumenical Patriarchate. Death of anti-corruption activist Kateryna Handziuk 4 Nov following acid attack late July sparked public demands for more effective law enforcement investigation into her assault. Presidential candidate Anatoliy Hrytsenko attacked by group of masked men in Odesa 28 Nov.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus** Tensions over hydrocarbon exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean increased. Turkey's drilling vessel Fatih 31 Oct started first deep drilling activities off coast of Antalya. Turkish govt spokesperson 1 Nov said Turkish Armed Forces ready to retaliate if Republic of Cyprus continued to claim rights over Block 7, for which Republic of Cyprus invited international bids in Oct. Prospects for relaunching talks between Greek Cypriot president and Turkish Cypriot leader remained dim despite intense efforts by UN, with persistent disagreement over what type of govt they could work toward. Both sides 12 Nov opened two new checkpoints along the UN buffer zone separating them, in line with 26 Oct agreement.

➔ **Turkey** Month saw continued security operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in south east Turkey and northern Iraq, and crackdown on Kurdish movement representatives and individuals suspected to have links to PKK as well as human rights activists; tensions in Turkey-U.S. relations still run high, though month marked cooperation in some areas. Military operations against PKK in south east saw fatalities slightly higher than previous month, concentrated in rural areas of Şırnak and Hakkari. Interior ministry 2 Nov announced police in Oct had detained 687 suspects and arrested 125 for alleged links to PKK. Authorities detained at least 40 members of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and sister Democratic Regions' Party (DBP) in Mersin, Batman, Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul. U.S. embassy 6 Nov announced a \$12mn reward for information on three leading PKK figures; govt called decision "positive, but belated", signifying effort to "mask" U.S. support for Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria. 26 Nov establishment of five U.S. military observation posts in north-east Syria raised concern in Ankara over U.S. backing for YPG. Increased U.S.-Turkey cooperation also included 1 Nov launch of joint patrols in Manbij; mutual lifting of sanctions on ministers 2 Nov; and U.S. decision 5 Nov to exempt Turkey from sanctions on imports of Iranian crude oil; but differences remain including over north-east Syria and Ankara's purchase of Russian S-400 missile systems. Crackdown on Islamic State (ISIS) continued; military 6 Nov reportedly detained 24 suspected ISIS sympathisers in simultaneous operations in Diyarbakır province. Govt crackdown on human rights activists intensified, with authorities 16 Nov detaining thirteen activists and staff of NGOs on – among others – charges of "deepening and spreading Gezi protests"; twelve released pending trial after interrogation, one arrested, prompting strong criticism from EU institutions and member states.

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kazakhstan** Amid ongoing reports of harassment and detention of ethnic Kazakhs in “re-education” camps in China’s Xinjiang province, 50 schoolchildren gathered in Almaty 2 Nov calling for authorities and international human rights organisations to press for release of their parents.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** Tensions continued between President Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev; Atambayev in 19 Nov television interview publicly criticised President Jeenbekov and called govt’s anti-corruption campaign “a show”. Authorities 2 Nov detained five foreigners and four Kyrgyz citizens suspected of being members of international terrorist organisation. Responding to appeal by relatives of ethnic Kyrgyz reportedly detained in China’s Xinjiang region as part of mass internment of Muslims, Foreign Minister Chingiz Aidarbekov 27 Nov told media that govt was monitoring issue (see China (internal)).

➔ **Tajikistan** Riot broke out in high-security prison in northern city Khujand 7 Nov; Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility. Govt said 21 rioters were killed, along with two prison officers; media reported six prison guards including department chief arrested, and reported dozens of inmates killed. Court 21 Nov convicted Husein Abdusamadov of murder for July attack killing four foreign cyclists, sentenced him to life in prison. President Rahmon 16 Nov inaugurated controversial new Roghun hydroelectric power plant, longstanding source of tension with former Uzbek President Karimov. State Committee for National Security 13 Nov confirmed arrest of twelve alleged ISIS members suspected of plotting attack on Russian military base.

➔ **Turkmenistan** Reports continued of bread shortages and growing concern among population over end of free natural gas, water and electricity starting in Jan 2019, declared by President Berdymukhammedov in Sept.

➔ **Uzbekistan** At EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council meeting in Brussels 22 Nov, Austrian FM said as representative of rotating EU presidency that “overall human rights situation” in Uzbekistan has improved. Unregistered Uzbek opposition group Birdomlik People’s Democratic Movement said Uzbek authorities had prevented its members from travelling to southern Kazakhstan to hold party congress mid Nov. Defence ministry announced start of large-scale military exercises 26 Nov.