



Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Kosovo** Pristina took further de-escalatory steps in Serb-majority northern municipalities, though tensions remained high; EU stepped up pressure on Pristina and Belgrade to resume normalisation efforts.

Kosovo police further reduced presence at municipal buildings in north. Authorities 3 Aug announced 25% reduction of police presence around municipal buildings in north, second such reduction in two months, while PM Kurti next day described security situation as “calm”. NATO-led force KFOR 4 Aug and EU 10 Aug welcomed move. Tensions simmered, however, after authorities in North Mitrovica town 22 Aug ordered Serbia’s parallel govt institutions to “vacate” their premises within three days; EU 24 Aug condemned move and town’s mayor 25 Aug postponed deadline by two weeks.

EU maintained pressure on Pristina and Belgrade to de-escalate. Following reduced police presence in north, Pristina called for removal of EU’s punitive measures, imposed in June. EU 10 Aug demanded additional de-escalatory steps, however, while stating readiness to impose “punitive measures” against Serbia unless it too works to de-escalate. French President Emmanuel Macron 28 Aug threatened Pristina and Belgrade with “review” of EU visa liberalisation and economic cooperation amid growing EU pressure on sides to resume efforts on normalising relations. EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák same day met with PM Kurti, 30 Aug met with Serb President Aleksandar Vučić ahead of possible trilateral meeting in Sept.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** UN Security Council (UNSC) held emergency session on humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK); violence flared along Armenia-Azerbaijan border.

UNSC failed to pass resolution on NK during emergency session. Deteriorating humanitarian situation in NK due to Lachin blockade (see Nagorno-Karabakh) sharpened tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia, with latter 11 Aug formally requesting emergency UNSC session to address situation. During 16 Aug session, UNSC members highlighted worsening humanitarian situation and called for resumption of aid deliveries – halted in July – but did not pass resolution on matter. PM Pashinyan 17 Aug said UNSC “reaffirmed the existence of a humanitarian crisis”,

which therefore contradicted Azerbaijan's denial of blockade; Azerbaijan same day dismissed Armenia's failed "attempt to instrumentalise" UNSC.

Violence flared at Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Azerbaijan early Aug claimed its forces had intercepted two Armenian reconnaissance drones heading toward Lachin region. Sides throughout month traded blame for shootings along border between Azerbaijan's Kelbajar district and Armenia's Gegharkunik region. Notably, Armenia 15 Aug claimed Azerbaijan fired at individuals from EU civilian observation mission, which EU same day confirmed. Armenia 14 Aug reported one soldier injured, 21 Aug reported one serviceman "fatally wounded"; Azerbaijan 16 Aug said it injured and detained Armenian soldier and 22 Aug reported one of its soldiers injured.

➔ **Azerbaijan UN Security Council (UNSC) held emergency session on humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK); violence flared along Azerbaijan-Armenia border.**

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Authorities brought fresh charges against detained opposition politician. News agency *Turan* 25 Aug reported that authorities had brought new charge – religious extremism – against prominent opposition politician Qubad İbadoğlu, arrested late July for alleged involvement in "preparation, acquisition or sale of counterfeit money or securities by an organised group".

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh Escalating humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh triggered emergency session at UN Security Council (UNSC); de facto authorities and Baku remained at loggerheads.**

Humanitarian crisis deteriorated further. Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) continued to experience acute shortages of food, fuel and medical supplies due to Baku's blockade of Lachin road, which connects NK to Armenia, fuelling humanitarian crisis. International Committee of Red Cross, unable to deliver aid since late July, 18 Aug reiterated appeal to resume assistance. Baku 30 Aug blocked French humanitarian convoy from entering NK via Lachin. Azerbaijani Red Crescent society 29 Aug sent food trucks via Agdam road, which connects NK to Azerbaijan-controlled Agdam

region; de facto authorities 30 Aug declared it would not accept aid (many in Armenia and NK view Baku's preference for Agdam route as tactic to integrate enclave into Azerbaijan and entrench Lachin blockade). Meanwhile, Azerbaijani border guards 28 Aug detained three ethnic Armenians from NK as they attempted to cross Lachin checkpoint; detainees allegedly members of football team filmed stepping on Azerbaijani flag in 2021.

UNSC failed to pass NK resolution during emergency session. UNSC 16 Aug held emergency session on crisis at Yerevan's request, highlighting worsening humanitarian situation and urging resumption of aid deliveries but failing to pass resolution. Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan 17 Aug said UNSC "reaffirmed the existence of a humanitarian crisis", which therefore contradicted Azerbaijan's denial of blockade; Azerbaijan same day dismissed Armenia's failed "attempt to instrumentalise" UNSC.

Baku and Stepanakert disagreed on proposal to resolve crisis. Azerbaijani foreign ministry 11 Aug announced that international "shuttle diplomacy" had produced deal to resolve crisis; agreement (based on Russian proposal put forward in July) envisioned opening Agdam road and in reciprocation, 24 hours later, traffic through Lachin road would be allowed to increase. Despite reportedly considering proposal, de facto authorities 17 Aug rejected it on grounds it gave Baku full control over deliveries via both roads; Baku consequently accused Stepanakert of sabotaging efforts to resolve crisis. De facto leader of NK Arayik Harutyunyan 31 Aug announced intention to resign, marking further blow to work on resolving crisis. Meanwhile, de facto forces and Azerbaijan throughout month traded blame for near daily "ceasefire violations".

➔ **Georgia** Tense political atmosphere prevailed as Georgia marked 15th anniversary of 2008 war with Russia; former Russian president warned Moscow could annex breakaway regions.

15th anniversary of Russia-Georgia 2008 war provoked fierce debate. Foreign Ministry 7 Aug called on Russia to withdraw its troops from Georgian territory on occasion of 15th anniversary of Russian-Georgian war. Opposing narratives of conflict, meanwhile, dominated anniversary. Notably, PM Garibashvili 8 Aug blamed former govt of jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili for war that "could have been avoided"; move followed chairman of main opposition party United National Movement day before criticising ruling Georgian Dream for allowing Russia to pursue its goals even after war ended. EU and U.S. 7 Aug condemned Moscow's invasion, while Russian officials sought to shift blame onto NATO; notably, deputy Head of Russian Security Council and former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev 8 Aug claimed "the U.S. and its vassals" had waged proxy war in Georgia. Breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia 7 Aug praised Russian "aid" in 2008.

Former Russian president threatened to annex breakaways. Ahead of 15th anniversary of Russia recognising South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence on 25 Aug, Medvedev 23 Aug published article in *Argumenty i Fakty* newspaper blaming NATO for escalating tensions over Georgia by discussing country's potential membership to alliance. He concluded by threatening to annex breakaways "if there are good reasons"; Tbilisi same day condemned comments.

➔ **Russia (Internal) Authorities confirmed Wagner chief's death in plane crash amid speculation about Putin's role; Ukraine intensified drone strikes on Russian territory.**

Wagner boss killed in plane crash. Authorities 27 Aug confirmed that head of paramilitary Wagner Group Yevgeny Prigozhin, who staged failed mutiny in June, was killed 23 Aug in plane crash outside capital Moscow alongside nine others. U.S. 24 Aug said explosion on board likely brought down plane as number of Western intelligence assessments suggested President Putin may have ordered his death, which Kremlin 25 Aug denied. Meanwhile, Putin 23 Aug sacked Gen. Surovikin, ally of Prigozhin who many believe knew about plans for June insurrection and possibly aided him.

Ukraine conducted near-daily drone attacks on Russia. Ukraine intensified strikes on Russian territory, with largest drone attack since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine 29-30 Aug targeting seven regions. Among other notable incidents, aquatic drones 4 Aug struck Navy base in Black Sea port city of Novorossiysk; drones 19 Aug struck Soltsy airfield in northwestern Novgorod region; shelling in Belgorod region 23 Aug killed three; and shelling in Bryansk region left several people dead. Moscow targeted throughout month.

Rumours of possible mobilisation swirled. Bloomberg report 20 Aug revealed hardline members within Russia's security apparatus are pushing for changes to army leadership (including dismissal of Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Valerii Gerasimov), declaration of martial law and introduction of full-scale mobilisation. Though Putin gave no indication he plans to take such steps, rumours of new mobilisation wave due to shortage of volunteers spread on social networks. Meanwhile, Putin 4 Aug signed into law measures to increase number of potential conscripts.

Crackdown on dissent continued, value of Russian ruble tumbled. Court 4 Aug sentenced imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny to 19 years in prison on extremism charges; authorities 17 Aug searched offices and homes of members of Golos movement, which monitors elections; and Moscow court 29 Aug sentenced in absentia investigator Ruslan Leviev and journalist Michael Naki to 11 years in prison for spreading disinformation or "fakes" about army. Meanwhile, Russian ruble 14 Aug hit 17-month low against dollar.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus Tensions with western neighbours rose, while govt continued to stifle dissent.**

Tensions with neighbouring NATO member states intensified. Following July arrival of mercenaries from Russia paramilitary Wagner Group, tensions between Minsk and its western neighbours escalated further. Notably, Poland 1 Aug accused Belarus of airspace incursion, which latter 3 Aug denied. Belarus 7 Aug began military drills in Grodno region near Polish and Lithuanian borders. Poland 9 Aug deployed 2,000 soldiers to border, citing mercenaries' presence and rise in illegal border crossings, Latvia 15 Aug announced deployment of "additional forces" to its

border and Lithuania 18 Aug closed two border crossings to Belarus. Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski 28 Aug said Poland, Latvia and Lithuania would close their borders with Belarus if “critical incident” involving Wagner mercenaries took place; Kaminski added that this would include border with Russian exclave Kaliningrad, which lies between Poland and Lithuania. Meanwhile, Polish President Andrzej Duda 22 Aug confirmed Russia had begun transferring short-range nuclear weapons to Belarus, which he said would change regional security architecture.

Western countries imposed more punitive measures on Belarus. EU 3 Aug and U.S. 9 Aug sanctioned dozens of Belarusian individuals and entities for human rights abuses and “involvement” in Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Lithuania 4 Aug declared 910 Belarusian citizens living in country were “threat” to national security, revoking residence permits and rejecting residency requests.

Authorities continued to suppress opposition. Supreme Court mid-Aug ordered dissolution of two opposition parties, Belarusian Popular Front Party and United Civil Party. Authorities 23 Aug reportedly declared Vyasna Human Rights Centre “extremist”. Homel regional court 31 Aug sentenced journalist Larysa Shchyrakova to three years and six months in prison for “discrediting” country and facilitating extremism.

➔ **Ukraine South remained epicentre of fighting as Russia intensified attacks on Odesa region and Ukraine’s counteroffensive continued at slow pace; Kyiv sought to drum up support for peace plan during well-attended summit in Saudi Arabia.**

Russian withdrawal from grain deal brought more fighting to Odesa region. After scuppering Black Sea grain deal, Moscow intensified air raids on port infrastructure and grain facilities along Black Sea coast and Danube River in Odesa region. Notably, Russian drone 2 Aug destroyed port administration building in Izmail city; military 23 Aug said drones targeted “grain storage facilities and production complex in Danube region”. Russia continued to strike cities elsewhere; notably, missile hit theatre in Chernihiv city 19 Aug, killing at least seven. Kyiv, meanwhile, stepped up drone attacks on Russia (see Russia) and Russian-controlled territory, including massive attack 25 Aug on Russian-annexed Crimea.

Ukrainian counteroffensive ground on slowly. Ukraine’s counteroffensive along southern front, which stretches across Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions, continued to make incremental progress at high cost. Forces 16 Aug liberated Urozhaine village (Donetsk) and 28 Aug freed Robotyne village (Zaporizhzhia), pushing frontline closer toward road and rail hub of Tokmak city; neither advance broke through Russia’s main defensive lines. Senior NATO commanders mid-Aug reportedly urged Ukrainian Commander in Chief Gen. Zaluzhniy to concentrate forces on southern front rather than Donetsk, request which Ukrainians appeared to heed. Ukrainian forces 24 Aug raided Russian-annexed Crimea, briefly clashing with Russian forces and planting Ukrainian flag to mark country’s Independence Day. Meanwhile, Russian forces conducted operations near Kupiansk town (Kharkiv region), forcing authorities 10 Aug to issue evacuation order.

Saudi Arabia hosted dozens of nations for Ukraine talks. Kyiv gathered delegations from around 40 countries, including China and India but not Russia, in Saudi city of

Jeddah 5-6 Aug to drum up support for peace plan; 7 Aug announced more extensive talks would follow in Autumn 2023.

In important domestic developments. President Zelenskyy 10 Aug announced govt is working on comprehensive framework document, which would lay foundation for “transformation of our state” in order to “win the war [without] losing the country”. Govt 18 Aug prolonged martial law and mobilisation for another 90 days.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

↓ Cyprus Violent skirmishes erupted in buffer zone between Turkish Cypriots and UN personnel, injuring multiple peacekeepers and Turkish Cypriot police officers and sparking diplomatic furore.

Turkish Cypriots and UN peacekeepers clashed, triggering diplomatic spat. Turkish Cypriots 17 Aug began constructing road to connect village of Pile/Pyla, located within UN controlled demilitarised zone known as Green Line, to “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”), citing humanitarian reasons. “TRNC” police and construction crews next day approached Green Line where UN peacekeepers bolstered presence with civilian vehicles to prevent construction; construction workers used excavators and physical force to disperse UN troops, leading to skirmishes that harmed at least three peacekeepers and eight Turkish Cypriot police officers. Incident sparked stern diplomatic responses. Notably, Greek PM Kyriákos Mitsotákis 18 Aug denounced Turkish Cypriot actions as “unacceptable”, while “TRNC” and Türkiye same day condemned UN personnel, claiming peacekeepers wrongfully intervened in humanitarian project. Although Russia next day vetoed UN Security Council resolution introduced by UK against actions of Turkish Cypriots, UN Sec Gen along with several embassies, including UK, U.S., EU and China, condemned “TRNC’s” actions. U.S. senator Robert Menendez 24 Aug visited Republic of Cyprus where he described Turkish Cypriot actions as unacceptable violation of international law.

Prospects for relaunching formal talks remained dim. Before buffer zone incident, Republic of Cyprus defence minister 6 Aug repeated that President Christodoulides is focussed on lifting deadlock and welcomes negotiations under UN auspices with active EU engagement. “TRNC” leader Ersin Tatar 11 Aug rejected Christodoulides’ proposal for joint meeting with UN Assistant Sec Gen Miroslav Jenča, who visited island 27-29 Aug, preferring to hold separate meeting on 28 Aug. Meanwhile, after U.S. 18 Aug announced it would continue to lift for another year arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus – imposed in 1987 and first lifted in 2021 – “TRNC” same day expressed concern over “upsetting the delicate balance on the island”; “TRNC” also described docking of U.S. destroyer *USS Ramage* at Limassol port on 17 Aug as “worrying”.

➡ Türkiye Military targeted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and affiliates – principally in Iraq and Syria – while govt sought improved ties with Greece and EU, and tensions surfaced with Russia in Black Sea.

Military intensified strikes in Iraq and Syria. In northern Iraq, military stepped up strikes (see Iraq): notably, clashes between military and PKK in Zap region 9-10 Aug

killed at least six Turkish soldiers; retaliatory Turkish air strikes 10 Aug killed at least four PKK operatives. Turkish FM Hakan Fidan 21-24 August visited Iraqi capital Baghdad and Erbil, met with local and national authorities. In northern Syria, military predominantly struck Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and PKK-linked militants, “neutralising” dozens: notably, drone 4 Aug struck Syrian regime position in northern Aleppo and SDF vehicle near Qamishli, killing four. In Türkiye, security forces 3 Aug captured two alleged PKK members in Istanbul and 22 Aug captured seven in Edirne city.

Ties with Greece and EU showed signs of improvement. Greek FM Giorgos Gerapetritis 3 Aug said Athens was “relatively eager” to enhance relations and political dialogue. After years of strained relations, govt 7 Aug announced plan to improve bilateral trade and economic relations with EU; FM Hakan Fidan same day defined obstruction of Türkiye’s EU membership as “strategic blindness” and asserted “without Türkiye, the EU would never be a truly global actor”. Skirmishes erupted between Turkish Cypriots and UN peacekeepers (see Cyprus).

Tensions with Russia surfaced in Black Sea. Amid intense diplomacy to revive Black Sea grain deal, President Erdoğan and Russian President Putin 2 Aug held phone call to discuss possible avenues for cooperation. Russian navy 15 Aug fired warning shots and raided Palau-flagged Turkish ship near Romanian waters. Ankara 17 Aug announced it had warned Russia against moves “which could escalate tensions in the Black Sea”; Moscow claimed ship had failed to respond to demands to halt.

Anti-Islamic State (ISIS) operations continued. Security forces during Aug detained at least 45 individuals with alleged links to ISIS; notably, security units 10 Aug arrested three ISIS members allegedly readying attack in northern Syria.

Central Asia

➡ **Kyrgyzstan Activists detained for protesting border delimitation agreement with Uzbekistan went on hunger strike; U.S. and EU raised concerns with govt about circumvention of sanctions on Russia.**

Jailed activists launched hunger strike. Six activists detained late Oct for protesting border demarcation agreement that handed Kempir-Abad water reservoir to Uzbekistan 22 Aug launched hunger strike amid ongoing court hearings.

Western powers urged govt to tackle efforts to circumvent sanctions. U.S. Senator and Chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Menendez 8 Aug sent letter to President Japarov condemning govt’s “complicit facilitation of trade with Russia in products that implicate sanctions” and urging it to “establish more reliable processes to prevent the illicit flow of goods” to Russia. Delegation from EU’s Foreign Affairs Committee 21-25 Aug visited Kyrgyzstan as well as Kazakhstan, where “issues of the circumvention of sanctions featured prominently” during exchanges with politicians and other stakeholders. Following visit, EU Foreign Affairs Committee Chair David McAllister said “allowing sanction circumvention feeds the Russian war machine” and praised govt’s “readiness... to work with the EU on this issue”.

➡ **Tajikistan President Rahmon visited Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in first trip since May 2022 violence; repression of civil society and curtailment of media freedom continued.**

President Rahmon 15-18 Aug visited Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) for first time since anti-govt protests in May 2022 and subsequent crackdown but reportedly made no mention of violence during trip. Meanwhile, Deputy Justice Minister Asadullo Hakimzoda 8 Aug announced that five NGOs in GBAO had been shuttered in past six months owing to their alleged links with local criminal groups; announcement came amid ongoing crackdown on civil society representatives from region. Committee to Protect Journalists 15 Aug called for “immediate release” of journalist Khurshed Fozilov, sentenced in May to seven years in prison, and condemned “criminalisation of the press” in Tajikistan.

➡ **Uzbekistan Court sentenced police officers for abuses during Karakalpakstan unrest, and U.S. sought to strengthen development cooperation.**

Court handed prison sentences to police officers over Karakalpakstan unrest. Supreme Court 5 Aug announced that court in Kogon city had sentenced two police officers to seven years in prison for torture during crackdown on July 2022 protests in autonomous Karakalpakstan region; third officer handed three-year prison sentence for failing to prevent crime.

In another important development. U.S. development agency officials 26-30 Aug visited country “to advance the U.S.-Uzbekistan development partnership”.