

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia and Herzegovina Political tensions grew after memo promoting country's partition circulated publicly.** Leaked memo advocating partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina along ethnic lines 12 April surfaced in Slovenian press; memo allegedly originated from office of Slovenian PM Janez Janša and was reportedly sent to EU Council President Charles Michel in Feb; in response, Janša and Slovenian President Borut Pahor 12 April denied role in writing memo. EU delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina 15 April said EU “unequivocally committed to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity” of country. In response to leak, Bakir Izetbegović, leader of largest Bosniak political party, Party of Democratic Action, 20 April told media he was “not sure that there would be no war”. Leader of Republika Srpska entity Milorand Dodik same day announced initiative to formally discuss country's future with Croat and Bosniak counterparts; proposal followed videos previous days from Dodik calling for “peaceful break-up” of country. International partners expressed opposition to leaked memo's proposals. U.S. ambassador to country 28 April warned that “sanctions for destabilizing the [Dayton Peace Agreement] and for corruption are on the table” while German FM Heiko Mass 22 April said redrawing borders “is not only unrealistic, but it is dangerous to even initiate this discussion”.

➔ **Kosovo Parliament endorsed Vjosa Osmani as new president while EU and U.S. continued to call for normalisation talks with Serbia.** Parliament 4 April elected Vetëvendosje party candidate Vjosa Osmani as new president, with 71 votes in favour out of 120; vote was boycotted by two opposition parties and ethnic Serb community party; in response, President Osmani said that peace with Serbia “would be achieved only when we see remorse and an apology.” In congratulatory letter to Osmani, U.S. President Biden 20 April urged Kosovo institutions to prioritise dialogue with Serbia, underscoring that “normalisation of relations with Serbia is essential for Kosovo to realise its potential and fully integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions”. German FM Heiko Maas 23 April called on Serbia and Kosovo to resume talks on normalising bilateral relations. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 27 April expressed hope that Serbia and Kosovo will resume normalisation talks on 11 May; PM Kurti next day rejected offer after meeting with senior EU officials, including Borrell and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in Brussels 27-28 April.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia Tensions persisted with Azerbaijan, PM Pashinyan resigned ahead of June elections, and U.S. President Biden recognised 1915 Armenian genocide.** PM Pashinyan 7 April asked Russian President Putin for help in releasing dozens of prisoners of war captured by Azerbaijan during and after the military escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) in late 2020. Govt next day said that it expected group of prisoners of war to be repatriated to its capital Yerevan

from Azerbaijan's capital Baku; transport plane however arrived empty, prompting authorities 9 April to accuse Azerbaijan of violating terms of Russian-brokered Nov 2020 agreement (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijani President Aliyev 12 April opened new Military Trophy Park in Baku, displaying installations of Armenian trenches and soldiers in NK, prompting public outcry in Armenia. Meanwhile, PM Pashinyan 14 April told Parliament that govt was considering possible expansion of existing Russian military base in Gyumri town amid concern over attempts by Azerbaijan and Turkey to take over some parts of region; Armenian chief of general staff next day discussed expansion of Russian troops to Armenia's south with Russian counterparts during visit to Moscow. Domestically, judge 6 April dropped criminal case against former President Robert Kocharyan and co-defendants over deadly crackdown on protesters in 2008; Constitutional Court found that basis on which they were prosecuted in Criminal Code was "invalid". Pashinyan 25 April resigned as PM as part of preparations for elections anticipated for 20 June. U.S. President Joe Biden 24 April became first U.S. president to formally recognise 1915 Armenian genocide; Pashinyan said Biden "honoured the memory" of those who died.

➡ **Azerbaijan Tensions persisted with Armenia over repatriation of prisoners of war from Azerbaijan.** Armenian Deputy PM Tigran Avinian 9 April accused Baku of violating terms of Russian-brokered Nov ceasefire by refusing to free Armenian soldiers and civilians captured during Autumn 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. In response, FM Ceyhun Bayramov 9 April stated that Baku had no more prisoners or detainees, and all of those detained in Azerbaijan were Armenian terrorists (see Nagorno-Karabakh). President Aliyev 12 April opened new Military Trophy Park in centre of capital Baku, displaying installations of Armenian trenches and soldiers in NK, prompting public outcry in Armenia; Council of Europe commissioner for human rights 27 April raised concerns over park and called on Aliyev "to take a firm stance against any rhetoric or actions which lead to triggering animosity or hatred"; Baku same day rebuffed statement.

⬆ **Georgia Govt and opposition reached deal to end months-long political crisis following EU- and U.S.-facilitated talks.** Ruling Georgia Dream party and most opposition parties 19 April signed EU- and U.S.-brokered agreement to end political deadlock that followed contested parliamentary election in Oct 2020; deal, which formally ends months-long opposition boycott of parliament, includes plans for electoral and judicial reforms, and could lead to release of jailed opposition members. Most opposition MPs 27 April joined parliament; meanwhile, one activist backing opposition movement same day released from prison following presidential pardon. In de facto entity Abkhazia, Georgian State Security Service 7 April found bodies of four Georgian residents of Gali district who had attempted to swim across Inguri river between Abkhazia and Georgia-controlled villages; crossing points have been largely closed since March 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Following public criticism after incident, govt 14 April announced lifting of requirement for people entering Georgia from Abkhazia to enter five-day mandatory quarantine, as of 19 April.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) Russian-brokered ceasefire held in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone amid tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over release of prisoners of war.** Situation inside

NK conflict zone remained mostly stable throughout month with minor incidents: car 4 April reportedly stoned on Goris-Kapan road in south of Armenia where Azerbaijani, Russian and Armenian forces operate; at southern section of line of separation, two local farmers 12 April said tractor was shot from Azerbaijani military position, prompting involvement by Russian peacekeepers; residential outskirts of NK capital Stepanakert 21 April faced gunfire from Azerbaijani positions close to Azerbaijan's Shusha city. Both Baku and Stepanakert continued to report civilians and soldiers injured in mine-related incidents in NK conflict zone; mine explosion 26 April injured two Russian peacekeepers inside NK. On diplomatic front, Armenian PM Pashinyan 7 April met Russian President Putin in Russian capital Moscow to discuss post-war issues and assist in release of dozens of prisoners of war captured by Azerbaijan during conflict; Putin next day spoke with Azerbaijani President Aliyev on phone about past agreements. Russian govt 9 April dispatched plane to Azerbaijani capital Baku for transportation of Armenian prisoners of war and detainees to Armenia, but plane same day arrived in Armenian capital Yerevan empty. In response, Armenian Deputy PM Tigran Avinian 9 April accused Azerbaijan of violating terms of Russian-brokered ceasefire by refusing to free Armenian soldiers and civilians captured during conflict; Azerbaijani FM Ceyhan Bayramov same day stated that Baku had no more prisoners or detainees, and all of those detained in Azerbaijan were Armenian terrorists. Head of Russian peacekeeping mission 10 April in short comment to Armenian reporter announced that there was no plan to bring prisoners and detainees from Baku. EU Committee of Ministers 28 April called on Azerbaijan to release Armenian captives.

➔ **Russia (internal) Nationwide rallies in support of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny resurged; meanwhile, in North Caucasus, authorities killed suspected Islamist militant.** Authorities continued to apply pressure to opposition supporters throughout April. Prosecutor's Office 16 April demanded Navalny's headquarters and linked organisations be listed as extremist organisations. Police 21 April detained scores of opposition supporters, including over 1,400 people in more than 60 cities, after protesters same day rallied in capital Moscow and other regions in support of Navalny. Moscow's chief prosecutor 26 April suspended activities of organisations backing Navalny. Navalny 23 April announced end of hunger strike amid medical concerns over his health. In North Caucasus, law enforcement officers in Ingushetia 28 April killed suspected militant with links to Aslan Byutukayev, Chechen commander of Islamic State (ISIS), who was killed by law enforcement in Chechnya in Jan. Amid military build-up at border with Ukraine's east, federal security service 29 April reported it detained 16 supporters of Ukrainian radical group in nine cities for allegedly preparing armed attacks (see Ukraine). In his annual address to Federal Assembly, President Putin 21 April reiterated proposal for meeting between permanent member of UN Security Council to discuss "issues related to strategic weapons and ensuring global stability".

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus Opposition leader called for greater international support while President Lukashenka claimed assassination attempt and U.S.-backed coup plot.** Following low ebb of opposition protests in recent months, opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya 20 April described level of repression in

Belarus as “unprecedented” and called on EU to be “faster and braver” in its actions against govt. In sign of possible splintering of opposition unity, former diplomat Pavel Latushko 8 April announced separate political party. Lukashenka 17 April claimed assassination attempt was being prepared against him and his two sons as well as military coup by “a group of foreign secret services, probably the CIA and the FBI” and approved “by the top political leadership” in U.S.; Russian security services same day reported they detained two individuals allegedly planning military coup in Belarus. Chair of Central Election Commission 27 April said referendum on constitutional amendments promised by Lukashenka likely to take place in early 2022.

➡ **Moldova Amid ongoing political tensions, President Maia Sandu called for parliamentary elections in July; meanwhile, news reports revealed Russian military activity in Transnistria.** Following 31 March vote by deputies of Socialist Party led by ex-President Dodon and Pentru Moldova platform to impose state of emergency until 30 May, Constitutional Court 28 April stated decision violated the law, clearing way for snap elections. In response, Dodon same day criticised court decision and called for “political response to usurpers who want to set up external control”. Maia Sandu 28 April dissolved parliament and scheduled early elections for 11 July; since her Nov 2020 victory as president over her main political rival Dodon, Sandu had been unable to nominate PM supporting her. Polls 21 April showed “The Action and Solidarity” party (which backs current president) ahead of Dodon-led Socialists. Meanwhile, amid growing tensions between Kyiv and Moscow (see Ukraine), Russian soldiers carried out up to seven military drills in country’s breakaway region of Transnistria in April. Ukrainian judge Mykola Chaus, wanted for bribery in Ukraine, 3 April was abducted in capital Chisinau, causing tensions in country’s relations with Kyiv.

➡ **Ukraine Fighting continued in east while largest Russian military build-up at border since Moscow’s 2014 invasion brought renewed international attention.** In Donbas conflict zone, fighting killed 15 Ukrainian govt troops and five Russian-backed fighters throughout month, per official and de facto reports. Moreover, explosion 2 April killed five-year-old child 14km from contact line, while three other civilians were killed and six injured during month. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe indicated shelling frequency doubled in April compared to previous month while Ukraine’s military casualties increased fivefold compared to April 2020. Following late March announcement by Ukrainian military commander Ruslan Khomchak that Russia was building up forces on borders, U.S. President Biden 2 April called President Zelenskyy and pledged support for country’s territorial integrity. Zelenskyy 6 April spoke to NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg, requesting Membership Action Plan and asserting “NATO is the only way to end the war in Donbas”. French President Macron, German Chancellor Merkel and Zelenskyy 16 April discussed de-escalation measures. Advisers to Normandy Four (Russia, Ukraine, Germany, France) heads of state 19 April pledged efforts to rescue July 2020 ceasefire through strengthening bilateral coordination and verification measures; Moscow same day rejected joint statement proposed by France and Germany as “unspecific and declarative”; Kyiv proposed stricter liability for sniper fire on grounds that Russian shooters had driven rise in military casualties. Zelenskyy 20 April suggested meeting in Donbas; Putin counter-offered meeting in Moscow, provided Kyiv negotiated directly with Moscow-backed

forces in Donbas first. Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu 22 April said troops were returning to permanent bases. Moscow mid-month announced closure of sections of Black Sea to foreign naval ships and state vessels until 31 Oct. Trilateral Contact Group for Donbas peace process met 28 April, voiced readiness to renew ceasefire but failed to agree on joint plan.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** **Informal five-plus-one talks commenced in Geneva, ending without breakthrough but with sides expressing willingness to continue dialogue in near future.** Leaders of two Cypriot communities, UN and three guarantor powers Greece, Turkey and UK 27-29 April met in Swiss city Geneva for informal talks. Meeting concluded without bridging differences between Greek Cypriot delegation, which favours bi-zonal, bi-communal federation, and Turkish Cypriot delegation, which seeks two-state solution; following talks, UN Sec-Gen Antonio Guterres 29 April concluded: “We have not yet found enough common grounds to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations”, but announced that sides voiced willingness to hold further informal talks in coming months. Ahead of meeting, thousands of protesters from both Cypriot communities 24 April rallied in support of reunification. Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 25 April said “only realistic solution” is one “based on the sovereign equality of two states living side by side”. Meanwhile, Greek and Turkish sides exchanged fiery rhetoric. Turkish President Erdoğan 14 April said if “rights of Northern Cyprus are usurped” then Turkey will intervene as “our ships are ready to sail”. Turkish FM Mevlut Çavuşoğlu next day said negotiating federation, which Turkey has done for past five decades, is waste of time and impossibility; remarks followed Greek PM Mitsotakis’s comments last month that “Turkish aggression against Cyprus undermines Ankara’s European course and essentially the very resumption of talks on resolving the Cyprus issue”.

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean** **Ankara hosted high-level Greek delegation for talks on regional disputes while maritime tensions continued between Turkey and Greece.** In first visit by Greek minister in over two years, Greek FM Nikos Dendias 15 April met his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Çavuşoğlu in Turkish capital Ankara for talks on contentious issues dividing NATO allies, including Cyprus, demilitarisation of Aegean islands and other issues. Outcome of meeting proved positive as sides confirmed resumption of political consultations, exploratory talks and military-to-military contacts on confidence-building measures; Dendias also invited Çavuşoğlu to Greek capital Athens with prospect of preparing leaders’ meeting between Greek PM Mitsotakis and Turkish President Erdoğan. Post-meeting press conference, however, descended into heated exchange as FMs traded accusations of blame, highlighting potential for dialogue derailing. Meanwhile, maritime tensions continued between Turkish and Greek sides. Greek chief of staff 3 April asserted right to expand Greek territorial waters, prompting Turkish minister of defence to call comments “provocative”. Athens issued navigational advisory for military drills until 21 April in areas south of Greek island Rhodes; Ankara responded with own advisory, claiming jurisdiction over same maritime area. Athens 17-18 April issued advisory for energy exploration by French research vessel accompanied by Greek frigate in areas south of Greek island Crete, delimited under both Turkish-Libyan and Greek-Egyptian maritime deals; Ankara

said Turkish military frigate deployed to area pushed back vessel. Mitsotakis and Dendias 6 April visited Libya, requesting annulment of Dec 2019 Turkish-Libyan maritime deal. Libyan PM Abdul Hamid Dbeibah 12 April visited Ankara, reaffirming validity of maritime deal; Turkish officials during month reiterated intention to embark on energy exploration activities in areas claimed under Turkish-Libyan deal.

↓ **Northern Ireland (UK) Violent unrest erupted in capital Belfast and other cities against backdrop of rising unionist anger over controversial Northern Ireland Protocol.** Unrest 2-9 April broke out across several cities, reportedly leaving at least 90 police officers injured; violence erupted amid rising discontent within unionist community over Northern Ireland Protocol – provision of UK-EU “Brexit” agreement in effect since 1 Jan 2020 that created regulatory border in Irish Sea – as well as anger over Public Prosecution Service’s late March decision not to prosecute Sinn Fein politicians who attended funeral last summer in violation of COVID-19 restrictions on large gatherings. Notably, groups of predominantly youths 2 April assaulted police officers, injuring 12 in Londonderry city; next day hijacked and set alight three vehicles and threw over 30 petrol bombs at police in Newtownabbey town. In capital Belfast, authorities 2 April arrested eight individuals, including 13-year-old boy, after youth groups attacked police officers in historically loyalist area. Group mostly encompassing youths 7 April hijacked and set bus on fire at intersectional area between nationalist and unionist communities; 8 April threw petrol bombs at police officers who deployed water cannons for first time in six years. First Minister Arlene Foster 7 April condemned violence, stating actions “do not represent unionism or loyalism”. Loyalist Communities Council, umbrella group representing paramilitary groups, 9 April said there had been “spectacular collective failure” to understand scale and nature of unionist and loyalist anger and called for new protocol to be negotiated. In letter to UK PM Boris Johnson, four former Northern Ireland secretaries of state voiced concerns over violence and risk that situation could “fall over” unless UK govt took urgent action. Following letter signed by 21 Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) representatives 27 April expressing no confidence in Arlene Foster, Foster 28 April announced intention to step down as DUP leader and first minister in May and June, respectively.

➔ **Turkey Military operations continued against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in south-eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, killing eight soldiers.** Turkish military 25 April announced new land and air operation against the PKK in northern Iraq’s Dohuk area and 29 April in rural areas of Turkish south-eastern provinces of Şırnak and Hakkari. Fighting in rural Siirt in south east 9 April killed one soldier; rocket attack in Hakkâri province 30 April killed another. Rocket attack attributed to paramilitary coalition Popular Mobilisation Front 14 April targeted Turkish military base in Bashiqa in northern Iraq, killing one Turkish soldier; clashes late month in northern Iraq killed four soldiers, and helicopter accident 30 April left one soldier dead (see Iraq). Govt continued efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP); court 2 April sentenced HDP MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu to two years and six months imprisonment on terrorist propaganda charges, and 6 April sentenced HDP deputy mayor of Kars to six years and ten months imprisonment for “membership of a terrorist organization”; court case to ban the HDP and 600 of its members is

ongoing. Security forces continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) operatives; police throughout month detained over 80 individuals for alleged links to ISIS. Meanwhile, U.S. sanctions on Ankara for its acquisition of S-400 Russian air defence system 7 April came into force. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken and Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu in 12 April phone call discussed bilateral issues, including Turkey's role as mediator in planned Afghan peace talks (see Afghanistan). Erdoğan 26 April denounced U.S. President Biden's 24 April decision to recognise Armenian genocide, calling decision "groundless and unfair". Ankara 15 April hosted high-level Greek delegation for first time in over two years to discuss regional issues (see Eastern Mediterranean).

Central Asia

↓ **Kyrgyzstan Deadliest fighting in years erupted on Kyrgyz-Tajik border, killing dozens and displacing thousands, while voters endorsed constitutional amendments to strengthen presidential powers.** Local residents in Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken region and Tajikistan's northern Sughd region 28 April clashed and pelted stones at each other, injuring many on both sides; incident reportedly related to ongoing dispute over water facility both sides claim. Kyrgyz police in Batken next day reported that gunfire from Tajik side of border targeted military unit in Kok-Tash village, while Tajikistan's border guards same day claimed Kyrgyz military personnel opened fire on border units; sides 29 April agreed to ceasefire. Kyrgyz authorities reported 34 people dead, including three civilians, while Tajikistan reported 15 dead, including six border guards; fighting reportedly injured scores more and displaced thousands. Prior to fighting, foreign ministry 26 April summoned Tajik ambassador to protest Tajik authorities' decision previous day to briefly detain two Kyrgyz men near disputed border in southern Batken region. Earlier in month, following last month's breakthrough deal with Uzbekistan to resolve longstanding border disputes, local villagers in Kara-Suu district, Osh oblast, mid-month began protests over subsequent days in opposition to transferring land to Uzbekistan as part of deal. Earlier in month, voters 11 April participated in referendum on constitutional amendments that include greater powers for president and reducing number of lawmakers from 120 to 90; of 36.7% of eligible voters who cast votes, 79% approved new amendments. Country 11 April also held local elections; around 50 supporters of several parties same day gathered near Central Election Commission building in capital Bishkek to express dissatisfaction with results.

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Vorukh city, Tajik enclave situated inside Kyrgyzstan's southernmost Batken province, President Rahmon 9 April said talks on delimitation and demarcation of border with Kyrgyzstan have taken place since 2002 and govt had never considered swapping Vorukh for other land; visit and remarks followed proposal by senior Tajik official to exchange Vorukh for other land in Batken region that sparked domestic criticism. Russia 1 April resumed regular flights with Tajikistan, paving way for return of Tajik migrants to Russia. Tajik and Russian militaries 19-23 April held joint exercises involving some 50,000 troops.

➡ **Uzbekistan Authorities implemented last month's border agreement with Kyrgyzstan while seeking to improve economic ties with adjoining provinces in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.** Following last month's deal with Kyrgyzstan to resolve longstanding border disputes, authorities 1 April held opening ceremony for road from Rishtan district of Fergana region to Sokh exclave inside Kyrgyzstan. Governor of eastern Ferghana province 23 April hosted governors of Tajikistan's Sughd province and Kyrgyzstan's Batken province for forum aimed at boosting economic and cultural ties between three adjoining regions that are located in Ferghana Valley. After new Criminal Code 31 March went into effect, which among other provisions introduced prison sentences for insulting president online, rights group Committee to Protect Journalists 28 April urged govt to repeal laws ahead of Oct presidential election