

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Bosnia and Herzegovina** Three main nationalist parties representing ethnic political blocs (Bosnian Croat, Bosniak and Bosnian Serb) failed to break political deadlock that has prevented govt formation since Oct 2018 elections. Party leaders 5 Aug agreed to form new cabinet within 30 days. But talks between three leaders in tripartite presidency representing each bloc broke down 20 Aug reportedly over whether or not to activate NATO Membership Action Plan that would prepare for possible membership of alliance; party of Milorad Dodik, Bosnian Serb member of presidency, opposed activation while Croat and Bosniak blocs were in favour. Dodik 27 Aug cancelled extraordinary session of tripartite presidency to discuss appointment of new chairman of Council of Ministers, new deadline for talks set for 5 Sept. Dodik 13 Aug said that unless govt was formed soon, majority Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS) would withdraw from several reforms, including formation of joint armed forces, creation of state prosecutor court and joint tax policy. U.S. Deputy Assistant Sec State Matthew Palmer mid-Aug expressed concern over Dodik's comments and urged him to stop "hardline rhetoric".

➔ **Kosovo** Following resignation of PM Haradinaj in July, parliament dissolved itself, while Kosovo-Serbia relations remained tense. Parliamentary Speaker Kadri Veseli 2 Aug reportedly rejected President Thaçi's request to nominate new PM, instead parliament's leadership 5 Aug opted to vote on dissolution. In 22 Aug session, parliament voted to dissolve itself and hold new legislative elections, scheduled for 6 Oct. In 13 Aug statement, U.S., UK, France, Germany and Italy (known as Quint member states) called on Kosovo and Serbia to renew EU-mediated dialogue "with urgency", said status quo was "not sustainable", and urged Kosovo to lift customs tariff on Serbian imports. After meeting with U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo, Serbian President Vučić 20 Aug said he expected to resume dialogue with Kosovo in Dec. Thaçi late Aug said dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia was "indispensable".

## **Caucasus**

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➔ **Azerbaijan** Supreme Court 7 Aug upheld charges of tax evasion against journalist Khadija Ismayilova, previously imprisoned 2014-2016 on charges of embezzlement and tax evasion; outside Azerbaijan, case was widely perceived as politically motivated and prompted international condemnation.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Speech by Armenian PM Pashinyan in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) capital Stepanakert 5 Aug, including assertion that NK was part of Armenia, angered Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan called speech "aggressive" and "major blow" to negotiations. Armenia dismissed criticism as misunderstanding of speech's "context and content". Azerbaijan 12 Aug said it had detained Armenian soldier who same day crossed front line in NK from Armenian-controlled territory to Azerbaijani trenches.

↓ **Georgia** Tensions rose between Georgia and its breakaway region of South Ossetia as Georgia responded to Russia and de facto South Ossetia's construction of border fence by building two police stations near Georgian villages close to separation line. Govt 14 Aug said Russian and de facto South Ossetian border guards were again building fence on line between South Ossetia and Georgia-controlled territory, this time in Gugutiantkari village; Russian and de facto border guards have been trying to erect barriers along separation line since 2011. UN, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, U.S., EU, Poland, Lithuania and several other govts condemned fence construction. Georgia 24 and 25 Aug started erecting two police stations near other villages close to separation line. De facto South Ossetia claimed one near village of Chorchana was in territory it controlled, and 28 Aug deployed armoured vehicles to patrol area; Georgia denied building was in South Ossetia. Officials from Georgia, Russia and de facto South Ossetia govt 29 Aug in Ergneti failed to discuss issue at meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), structure aimed at defusing tensions in conflict zone. De facto South Ossetia official 29 Aug demanded Georgia dismantle police building near Chorchana, and said that, if it did not, local authorities would "take all ... legal measures to ensure the security" of territory they control. Officials from Georgian interior and foreign ministries and EU Monitoring Mission observers 30 Aug were present in area. De facto officials 30 Aug erected flags on hills near police station and agreed to renew discussions in IPRM format. In Abkhazia's 25 Aug presidential elections, no candidate won over 50% of votes, threshold required to avoid run-off; two candidates with most votes, incumbent Raul Khajimba, who won 24.83%, and Alkhaz Kvitsiniya, head of Amsakhara opposition party, who won 22.91%, to compete in second round scheduled for 8 Sept. In lead-up to polls, Khajimba met Russian President Putin 6 Aug.

➔ **North Caucasus/Russia** Authorities responded with force to series of weekly unpermitted protests in Moscow that started mid-July after govt banned most independent candidates from running in 8 Sept Moscow city council election; hundreds arrested. Some 50,000 took part in sanctioned protest in Moscow 10 Aug, and some also participated in unsanctioned side-protests. Police reportedly arrested 256 protesters, with police brutality reports fewer than in prior weeks. To avoid arrests, protest leaders 17 Aug organised series of single-person pickets, which require no permit, and called on supporters not to demonstrate. Thousands attended unsanctioned protests in Moscow 31 Aug, police refrained from intervening. President Putin 21 Aug said protests were part of "pre-election tensions". France and Germany 3 Aug condemned police crackdown on opposition rallies, citing "excessive use of force". Chechen ex-commander Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, living in exile in Germany, was shot dead 23 Aug in Berlin; German authorities same day arrested Russian national in Berlin. German media 30 Aug reported links between suspect and Russian military intelligence. Putin's spokesperson 28 Aug rejected any links between killing and Russian state. Federal Security Service raided offices of human rights group Justice Initiative in Moscow 14 Aug and Ingushetia 16 Aug; Human Rights NGO Amnesty International said that, according to police directive, authorities had conducted raids on grounds that group that had played role in organising protests in Moscow 27 July and 3 Aug. Also in North Caucasus region, National Anti-Terrorism Committee in Ingushetia 7 Aug said that Russian security forces had killed man suspected of plotting terror attack when he opened fire to resist arrest. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) 29 Aug said it had foiled series of

planned terrorist attacks targeting law enforcement facilities in Kabardino-Balkaria, arresting one suspect in region.

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➔ **Ukraine** Combatants violated ceasefire in Donbas in east, while Ukraine and Russia moved closer to landmark prisoner swap and resumption of Normandy Four talks on implementing 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements. In Donbas, despite unprecedented agreement late July to renew ceasefire indefinitely, clashes continued with flare-ups 6 and 29 Aug; nine Ukrainian servicemen and at least nineteen separatist fighters killed, no civilian deaths reported. Number of ceasefire violations recorded by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe fell to one third of number recorded in July. President Zelensky and Russian President Putin 7 Aug reportedly discussed potential release of Ukrainians imprisoned in Russia on charges connected to hostilities between two countries. Zelensky 13 Aug signed decree simplifying Ukrainian citizenship procedures for Russian victims of political repression and foreigners and stateless persons who have fought against Russian-backed forces in east. After Putin met French President Macron 19 Aug, Putin's press secretary 22 Aug said that two presidents had discussed prisoner exchanges and Moscow was taking steps in that regard. Ukrainian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Olena Zerkal 22 Aug suggested Russia was using prisoner exchanges as part of "bargaining" strategy to facilitate its return to G7. German Chancellor Merkel 25 Aug said preparations were underway for summit in Paris of Normandy Four (Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France); Putin's spokesman said that whether or not meeting takes place would depend on progress in prisoner exchanges. Zelensky told U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton in 28 Aug meeting in Kyiv that Ukraine would welcome U.S. participation in Normandy format talks. Ukrainian authorities 28 Aug released Kirill Vyshinsky, former editor of Ukrainian service of Russia's RIA News, charged with treason in 2018; release was key Russian demand. Ukrainian activist 30 Aug reported 28 prisoners, including Crimean filmmaker Oleh Sentsov and sailors arrested after Nov Black Sea standoff, were due in Kyiv imminently, but negotiations over possible transfer to Russia of Volodymyr Tsemakh, key witness to 2014 downing of flight MH-17, were delaying their return.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus** Cypriot President and Turkish Cypriot leader held first talks since Feb, as Turkey's drilling for hydrocarbons off Cypriot coast continued to fuel tension between countries. Cypriot President Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı met informally 9 Aug; in joint statement, leaders said they were ready to hold tripartite meeting with UN Sec-Gen Guterres in Sept to plan resumption of talks. Cypriot govt 16 Aug said it was not willing to engage with Ankara's "rhetoric of tension". Turkish energy minister Fatih Dönmez, Turkish Cypriot "PM" Tatar and "Minister of Economy and Energy" Hasan Taçoy 6 Aug visited Turkey's Yavuz drilling vessel in Bay of Famagusta off Cyprus's eastern shore to highlight their efforts to protect "rights and interest of Turkey and [Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus]". Dönmez same day said Yavuz and Fatih vessels were continuing to drill in

Finike-1 and Karpaz-1 wells, adding that Turkey would deploy third seismic exploration vessel Oruç Reis to eastern Mediterranean by end of Aug. Oruç Reis departed from Istanbul 28 Aug en route to Mersin Taşucu Port on Turkey's southern shore adjacent to Cyprus. U.S. State Department 20 Aug said Yavuz's activities were "unlawful" and called on Turkey to remove it from Cypriot Economic Exclusive Zone. Anastasides 9 Aug rejected Turkish claim of rights over resources in East Med and any joint committee on natural resources.

➡ **Northern Ireland (UK)** Security incidents continued. Police night of 17-18 Aug responded to report of suspicious object in road near Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh near border with Republic of Ireland, discovering on investigation that it was fake bomb. As police and bomb disposal officers cleared area 19 Aug, bomb in area detonated causing no injuries. Police accused dissident republicans of hoax to lure police and bomb disposal officers. No group claimed responsibility, but police 22 Aug blamed paramilitary group Continuity Irish Republican Army. Police 25 Aug arrested two in connection with bombing. Shooting at petrol station in Waringstown, County Down 19 Aug left suspected loyalist militant dead; 24 Aug police arrested two and next day charged them with murder. Unidentified assailants 21 Aug shot man in legs in Belfast in what police called paramilitary style attack.

➡ **Turkey** Govt kept up military operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and intensified crackdown on people affiliated with Kurdish movement. In south east, govt launched operations against PKK in Şırnak, Hakkari and Van provinces 19 Aug and in Mardin, Şırnak and Batman provinces 28 Aug. Turkish media 8 Aug reported that security forces had "neutralised" two PKK militants allegedly responsible for 17 July killing of Turkish diplomat in Iraqi Kurdistan's capital Erbil. Govt increased pressure on members of pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP): authorities 15 Aug arrested 21 HDP members in cities of Mardin, Şırnak and Izmir; 19 Aug dismissed newly-elected metropolitan mayors of majority Kurdish provinces Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van on grounds that they were affiliated with terrorist organisations and replaced them with state-appointed trustees; same day detained 418 people affiliated with Kurdish movement in 29 provinces. Authorities 22 Aug detained seventeen in Ankara and 27 in Izmir during protests over removal of Kurdish mayors. Batman province governor's office removed four elected neighbourhood heads from their posts "due to investigations into them and trials they face on terrorism charges". In north-western Syria, as regime forces threatened to take Turkish observation post in northern Hama province, Turkey 19 Aug sent military convoy to support rebels; Syrian regime carried out airstrikes targeting convoy, killing three Syrian civilians (see Syria). U.S. and Turkey 7 Aug said they had reached agreement on general framework for way forward in north-eastern Syria, despite continued disagreement over depth of proposed safe zone along Turkey-Syria border and composition of troops that would man it. Turkey and U.S. defence officials 12 Aug started to establish joint operation centre in Şanlıurfa to coordinate safe zone preparations. In Istanbul, authorities 1 Aug said they had transferred to refugee camps 12,474 irregular migrants for deportation and 2,630 unregistered Syrians 12-31 July; interior minister 20 Aug extended to 30 Oct deadline for refugees to leave Istanbul and return to places where they registered. Authorities 8 Aug detained suspected Syrian suicide bomber in Şanlıurfa's central square; 6-15 Aug arrested 48 suspected Islamic State (ISIS)-linked individuals in Hatay, Konya, Izmir and Adana's Yüreğir district.

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## Central Asia

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➡ **Kazakhstan** Anti-govt protests eased. Dozens of activists marched in Almaty 30 Aug demanding democratic reforms, police refrained from interfering. Summit of C5+1 (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and U.S.) held in capital Nur-Sultan 20-23 Aug.

↓ **Kyrgyzstan** Tensions between President Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev led to deadly raid on Atambayev's home and street protests. Special forces 7 Aug broke into Atambayev's compound in Koi Tash village outside capital Bishkek intending to detain former president, who had refused three summons for questioning. But hundreds of his supporters took up arms and successfully resisted operation, shooting one member of special forces who later died; about 100 people reportedly injured in fighting. Security forces 8 Aug tried again to arrest Atambayev, who gave himself up. Hundreds of Atambayev's supporters same day marched in capital Bishkek to protest his arrest leading to skirmishes between protesters and security forces, 40 people detained. In addition to previous charges, authorities 13 Aug added plotting coup and 20 Aug extended Atambayev's pre-trial detention until 26 Oct. Clashes between residents of Solton-Sary in centre and Chinese workers of Chinese mining company 5 Aug over company's alleged environmental damage left twenty workers injured; company suspended operations at gold mine.

➡ **Turkmenistan** President Berdymukhamedov 12 Aug made speech at Caspian Economic Forum; his first public appearance since 5 July dispelled rumours that he had died.