

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Kosovo** Following sharp rise in tensions late July, govt reached agreement with Serbia allowing border crossings with existing ID cards, but failed to resolve license plate dispute. Uptick in tensions late July continued into Aug over govt plans to issue temporary IDs and license plates to Serbs entering country. Notably, PM Albin Kurti 10 Aug warned of “possibility of rising tensions and new conflicts”; NATO 17 Aug confirmed increase in troop numbers and reiterated readiness to “deploy them”; and Serbian President Vučić 21 Aug accused Pristina of seeking “final removal” of Serbs, warning that if NATO did not protect them, Serbia “will save our people from persecution and pogroms”; PM Kurti 26 Aug asked NATO for additional troops to “improve security”. However, following unsuccessful talks earlier in Aug, EU High Representative Josep Borrell 27 Aug announced Kosovo and Serbia had reached deal to resolve dispute over temporary IDs, agreeing that neither side will require additional documentation for crossing border. However, sides failed to resolve license plate dispute as govt planned to begin policy of making all Serbia-registered vehicles switch to temporary Republic of Kosovo plates at border from 1 Sept; EU Special Envoy Miroslav Lajcak 31 Aug said “we have two months to find a solution”, referring to 31 Oct deadline set by Pristina for switch to local license plates. Meanwhile, in accordance with June agreement struck with Serbia, govt 10 Aug transferred \$40 million to cover Serb minority’s energy costs until Nov, when Serbs will take over payments.

## **Caucasus**

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➔ **Armenia** Azerbaijan launched military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) ahead of high-level meetings in Brussels and Moscow; opposition announced return to parliament after five-month boycott. After weeks of relative calm in NK, clashes erupted early Aug between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces answering to de facto authorities in NK, with Baku 3 Aug launching new military operation; both sides reported casualties, as international community called for end to hostilities (see Nagorno-Karabakh). EU Special Representative for South Caucasus Toivo Klaar 19 Aug met with senior representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan in first senior bilateral meeting after escalation. Both countries’ leaders 31 Aug met in Brussels for EU-mediated talks, agreed to “step up substantive work to advance on the peace treaty”; deputy PMs of both countries 30 Aug met in Russian capital Moscow to discuss issues related to transport, communication and delimitation of international borders (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijani foreign ministry 25 Aug criticised appointment of new U.S. co-chair of OSCE Minsk Group, saying “attempts to revive the almost defunct Minsk Group” could lead to sidelining of U.S. from normalisation process of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Armenian foreign ministry same day said OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs still had international mandate to support comprehensive settlement of NK conflict. Meanwhile, opposition leader Ishkhan Saghatelyan 23 Aug announced

return of opposition MPs to parliament in Sept; opposition had boycotted parliamentary sessions since April and organised protests in bid to force resignation of PM Pashinyan over alleged compromises on NK's independence.

➡ **Azerbaijan Govt launched military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) ahead of high-level meetings with Armenia in Brussels and Moscow, while proceeding with return of internally displaced people to adjacent territories.** After weeks of relative calm in NK, clashes erupted early Aug between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces answering to de facto authorities in NK, with Baku 3 Aug launching new military operation; both sides reported casualties as international community called for end to hostilities (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Meanwhile, govt 19-20 Aug moved first group of 200 people from 41 families, internally displaced since war in 1990s, to Agali village in south-western Zangilan district; 325 families hail from area. EU Special Representative for South Caucasus Toivo Klaar 19 Aug met with senior representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan in first senior bilateral meeting after escalation. Both countries' leaders 31 Aug met in Brussels for EU-mediated talks, agreed to "step up substantive work to advance on the peace treaty"; deputy PMs of both countries 30 Aug met in Moscow to discuss issues related to transport, communication and delimitation of international borders (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Foreign ministry 25 Aug criticised appointment of new U.S. co-chair of OSCE Minsk Group, saying "attempts to revive the almost defunct Minsk Group" could lead to sidelining of U.S. from normalisation process of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Armenian foreign ministry same day said OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs still had international mandate to support comprehensive settlement of NK conflict.

↓ **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Azerbaijan launched military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), ending period of relative calm as clashes with ethnic Armenian forces left three dead.** Amid reports Baku was pressing for speedy launch of new road linking NK with Armenia and demanding disarmament of local Armenian forces, de facto authorities 1 Aug said Azerbaijani forces wounded one soldier during clashes at north-eastern front, which Russian peacekeepers confirmed; same day said Azerbaijani forces were advancing in western and north-western fronts, and near main road connecting entity to Armenia, known as Lachin corridor. Baku 3 Aug launched military operation in NK, saying de facto NK forces killed Azerbaijani soldier in Lachin region during exchange of fire. Stepanakert same day said strikes killed two of its soldiers. Azerbaijan 5 Aug announced military had taken control of strategic Mount Buzdukh and adjacent heights. International community, including Brussels, Washington, Moscow and UN, 3-4 Aug urged parties to respect ceasefire. Azerbaijani defence ministry 4 Aug said tensions had eased. Following flare-up, de facto authorities in NK 5 Aug instructed Armenian residents from Lachin city and Zabukh village, located along Lachin corridor connecting NK with Armenia, to leave their homes by 25 Aug when area came under Azerbaijan's control as part of 2020 ceasefire agreement. Armenian PM Pashinyan day before told congress that 2020 truce agreement required Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia to establish joint "plan" for construction of new Armenia-Karabakh road before sections of existing Lachin corridor could be transferred to Azerbaijan's control; he said no plan had been drawn up despite agreement. Azerbaijan 15 Aug announced completion of its part of new road to replace existing Lachin corridor. EU Special Representative for South Caucasus Toivo Klaar 19 Aug

met with senior representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan in first senior bilateral meeting after escalation. Both countries' leaders 31 Aug met in Brussels for EU-mediated talks, which concluded without major announcement. European Council President Charles Michel nonetheless said talks were "open and productive", focused on humanitarian issues, transport links and border delimitation, and that both sides agreed "to step up substantive work to advance on the peace treaty".

➡ **Georgia Breakaway South Ossetia reopened crossing points with Georgia proper after three years, tensions with U.S. ambassador persisted, and EU published review of govt's progress on reforms needed for accession.** De facto South Ossetia security council 18 Aug decided to resume functioning of key crossings points with Georgia proper from 20-30 of each month using special passes; crossing points had been largely closed for almost three years following tensions over Tbilisi's decision in 2019 to install police outpost near South Ossetian village of Tsnelisi at line that separates entity from rest of Georgia. Georgian security service and EU monitoring mission 19, 22 Aug respectively praised opening of crossings, which remain vital for ethnic Georgians living in South Ossetia. New de facto President of South Ossetia Alan Gagloev continued new govt appointments; notably, 15 Aug named Akhsar Jioev de facto foreign minister; 23 Aug named former Russian military serviceman Marat Pavlov de facto defence minister. Tensions with U.S. persisted as Georgia's ruling party and its political allies continued verbal exchanges with U.S. Ambassador Kelly Degnan over former's accusations that Western countries wanted "to drag" Georgia into war with Russia; also accused Degnan and other U.S., EU diplomats of supporting opposition; notably, in statement published 11 Aug, four MPs allied with ruling party accused Degnan of backing "the radical agenda of the radical opposition". EU 13 Aug released Association Agreement implementation report, reviewing Georgia's implementation of reforms needed for EU accession. Report complimented country's progress toward closer economic integration but criticised its poor handling of 2021 local elections and other issues that "threaten to undermine the country's democratic foundations". Ruling party 30 Aug accused opposition of trying "their best to sabotage" implementation of EU conditions for candidate status. Syrian FM Faisal Mekdad visited breakaway Abkhazia 24-25 Aug, met with de facto president Aslan Bzhania, saying Abkhazia "relies on Syria's support to expand contacts with Middle East countries that maintain friendly relations with Syria"; Mekdad promised to work to further develop relations with Abkhazia.

➡ **Russia (Internal) Clampdown on opposition persisted, Ukraine continued attacks on Russian borderlands, and govt temporarily halted gas supplies to Europe.** Crackdown on opposition continued. Police 22 Aug detained 33 activists and journalists across capital Moscow, according to OVD-Info, in move likely aimed at preventing protests on Russia's National Flag Day; most detainees released that day. Kira Yarmysh, press secretary of imprisoned opposition leader Alexey Navalny, 23 Aug announced authorities had opened criminal cases against her and seven other associates of Navalny for spreading disinformation, or "fakes", about Russian army. Authorities 24 Aug detained former Mayor of Yekaterinburg city, Sverdlovsk region, and opposition figurehead Yevgeny Roizman for "discrediting" Russian army. Head of human rights group Agora 16 Aug said Russian authorities are investigating 85 criminal cases for "fakes" about Russian army. Authorities 19 Aug included three Canadian organisations in list of

“undesirable organisations”, which now includes 65 foreign NGOs. Darya Dugina, daughter of Russian philosopher and Putin ally Alexander Dugin, was killed 20 Aug in car bombing near Moscow. Authorities 22 Aug blamed Ukrainian special services for assassination; Ukrainian govt denied involvement. Ukrainian army continued attacks in Russian borderlands. In Belgorod region, authorities 9 Aug announced discovery of Ukrainian Lapestok mines in Shebekinsky district; ammunition depot 18 Aug caught fire near Timonoyo village, compelling authorities to evacuate civilians. Authorities 16 Aug accused Ukrainian “saboteurs” of repeatedly blowing up electricity pylons running from nuclear reactor complex in southern Kursk region. Elsewhere in Kursk, Ukrainian drones 18 Aug twice attacked Kucherov farmstead in Belov district, injuring one border guard. In Kaliningrad region, security forces 25 Aug announced they had thwarted planned terrorist attack on Russian Navy’s Baltic Fleet and Khrabrovo airport, and detained Russian citizen who allegedly supports Ukrainian Azov regiment. President Putin 25 Aug signed decree expanding size of Russian army, bringing total number of servicemen up from 1.9mn to almost 2.04mn. EU foreign ministers 30 Aug agreed to suspend visa travel agreement with Russia, which gave preferential treatment to Russian visa requests. Meanwhile, State-owned gas company Gazprom 31 Aug halted gas supplies to Europe for three days, claiming Nord Stream I pipeline needed repairs.

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➡ **Belarus Crackdown on dissent continued apace, air force conducted exercises with Russia, and govt agreed to strengthen economic ties with Iran.** Govt continued crackdown on independent media. Notably, court 3 Aug sentenced journalist Iryna Slaunikava, who works for Polish broadcaster Belsat TV, to five years in prison for “leading an extremist group” and “disrupting social order”. Poland next day summoned Belarus’s chargé d’affaires over case. Russia 9 Aug extradited activist Yana Pinchuk to Belarus despite repeated warnings that she risked torture upon return; govt has accused Pinchuk of inciting hatred and endangering national security. On two-year anniversary of disputed presidential election that prompted mass protests, opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya 9 Aug named “interim government”; according to Tsikhanouskaya, govt will be responsible for “transit of power from dictatorship to democracy”. Meanwhile, EU 8 Aug called for Belarus to respect “democracy and the rule of law”, while U.S. 9 Aug imposed visa restrictions on “100 regime officials”. Air force 9-11 Aug, 22-25 Aug held military exercise in Belarus and Russia respectively. China 17 Aug announced joint military drills “in near future” with Belarus, Russia, India, and others, insisting drills have “nothing to do” with international tensions. President Lukashenko 17 Aug approved draft agreement for military-technical cooperation on research, development and production of weaponry until 2025 with Russia. Belarus and Iran 27 Aug signed Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen economic relations, with one official saying “Iran and Belarus can put neutralisation of sanctions on their joint agenda”.

➡ **Ukraine Russian campaign in Donbas remained largely static, Ukrainian army announced counteroffensive in south as it stepped up attacks in Russian-occupied areas, and fears mounted over shelling at Zaporizhzhia power plant.** Russian forces made few advances in Donbas region

during month. In Dnipropetrovsk region (east), Russian forces 24 Aug struck train station in Chaplyne town, killing 25; in Kharkiv city (east), Russian shelling 17, 18 Aug left 17 dead. Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces 29 Aug announced offensive around southern city of Kherson. In weeks prior, strikes in Russian-occupied areas increased as Ukrainian forces attempted to weaken Russian rear. In Russian-annexed Crimea, explosions 9 Aug rocked Saki airbase near Novofedorivka village over 200km from nearest Ukrainian positions. U.S. media outlet *The New York Times* 11 Aug quoted senior Ukrainian official hinting attack had been executed with help of partisans. Second explosions 16 Aug occurred, notably at railway hub in Dzhankoi town and Hvardeiskoe airbase near regional capital Simferopol. In Kherson region, several assassinations of Russian-appointed officials occurred during month; unidentified assailants 6 Aug shot dead deputy head of administration in Nova Kakhovka city; 28 Aug killed deputy head of regional administration. Ukrainian forces repeatedly struck remaining bridges across Dnipro river near Kherson city and Nova Kakhovka city. In south-eastern Zaporizhzhia region, repeated shelling occurred throughout month at Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Enerhodar city following reports that Russian troops were using plant as military base; Ukraine and Russia blamed each other for attacks. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) 6, 19 Aug expressed concern for safety of workers and facility, requested inspection on which IAEA team embarked 29 Aug. President Zelenskyy 26 Aug said Russian shelling day before temporarily cut power plant's electricity supply, raising fears of nuclear disaster; Russian official 26 Aug blamed Ukrainian forces. In Luhansk region, Ukrainian forces 14 Aug reportedly destroyed headquarters of Kremlin-linked private military company Wagner Group in Popasna city. In Donetsk city, Russian-backed authorities 23 Aug said shelling struck apartment building, killing three. UN Humanitarian Agency 8 Aug said at least 17.7mn people in need of assistance since February. 27 ships carrying 670,000 tonnes of agricultural products left ports 1-20 Aug.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➡ **Cyprus** Türkiye continued hydrocarbon exploration in undisputed maritime zones north of island, while European energy companies announced major gas discovery south of island. Türkiye 9 Aug dispatched its fifth drillship Abdülhamid Han for hydrocarbon research and drilling in undisputed maritime zones north of Cyprus; Greek Cypriots have been alarmed by prospect of such activities moving into disputed zones. French energy company Total and Italian energy company Eni 22 Aug announced discovery of significant natural gas deposits at Cronos-1 well in Block 6, south of island; preliminary estimates indicate presence of 2.5 trillion cubic feet of gas. Republic of Cyprus energy ministry same day said govt and companies had already begun “processing ways to expedite and optimise use of this new discovery”. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan’s President Aliyev 9 Aug met with Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar in Türkiye on margins of Islamic Solidarity Games. Meeting drew harsh criticism from Republic of Cyprus officials, who 11 Aug said they were expecting “corrective steps” and threatened to veto Azerbaijan’s bid for partnership deal on energy supplies with EU; Greek Cypriot officials are concerned that such meetings could pave way for political recognition of Turkish Cypriot entity in north.

➡ **Türkiye Amid military operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), fighting escalated with Kurdish-led forces in Syria, while tensions persisted with Greece and govt restored ties with Israel.** In escalation in northern Syria, military launched strikes on Kurdish-led forces, who claimed attacks on army sites in Turkish border provinces that killed several Turkish soldiers (see Syria). Military also continued operations against PKK in Iraq and Türkiye's south east. In northern Iraq, Defence ministry 27 Aug said it killed nine PKK militants. In Türkiye's south east, military 8 Aug launched new anti-PKK operation in rural areas of Bitlis province. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu 19 Aug said only 124 PKK members remained within country's borders and "no terrorist will remain in the countryside" in 2023. Authorities detained at least 30 pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) officials. Police detained at least 125 individuals with alleged links to Islamic State (ISIS). Meanwhile, tensions persisted between Ankara and Athens. Media outlets 16 Aug reported Greek authorities mid-month transported group of 38 migrants stranded on islet on Evros/Meriç river along Türkiye-Greece land border since mid-July to mainland Greece; Turkish authorities throughout month accused Athens of pushing back migrants on border, while Greek officials countered that Turkish security officials forced them to cross. Defence ministry 28 Aug accused Greece of locking on to Turkish jets with S-300 air defence systems on 23 Aug, which Greek authorities denied on 29 Aug. On diplomatic front, FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 11 Aug announced brief exchange with Syrian FM Faisal Mekdad, in which former voiced need to reconcile regime and opposition, sparking speculation over potential shift in Syria policy. In similar vein, President Erdoğan 19 Aug mentioned potential "political dialogue or diplomacy" with Syrian regime. Erdoğan met Russia's President Putin and Ukraine's President Zelenskyy 5 and 18 Aug, respectively, as part of efforts to ensure safe grain passage from Ukraine. Ankara and Israel 17 Aug announced restoration of full diplomatic relations. Ankara, Sweden and Finland 26 Aug agreed to continue consultations over Nordic nations' NATO bid.

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## **Central Asia**

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➡ **Kyrgyzstan Authorities detained three alleged jihadists, while military participated in U.S.-sponsored exercises in Tajikistan.** Authorities 26 Aug detained three alleged jihadists in southern region of Batken, whom they accuse of engaging in activities aimed at raising money to support terrorist organisations operating in Syria and distributing propaganda material. Military participated in U.S.-sponsored military exercise, Regional Cooperation 22, 10-20 Aug in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe. U.S., Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Pakistan were all involved in military exercise designed to "enhance regional security and stability, increase national capabilities and commitment to interdict weapons of mass destruction, terrorist elements, and narcotics, [and] help develop regional defense forces in international peace operations and information sharing".

➡ **Tajikistan Human rights organisation condemned crackdown in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), as U.S.-sponsored military exercises took place in capital Dushanbe.** NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) 23 Aug issued statement calling on Tajik authorities to halt "wrongful

detention” of dozens of residents from restive GBAO, which saw violent anti-govt protests in May. HRW said authorities have detained over 200 people on charges “related to the protests and ensuing clashes” who now face “unfair trials behind closed doors without access to lawyers”. U.S.-sponsored military exercise, Regional Cooperation 22, took place 10-20 Aug in Dushanbe. Participants from U.S., Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Pakistan were all involved in military exercise designed to “enhance regional security and stability, increase national capabilities and commitment to interdict weapons of mass destruction, terrorist elements, and narcotics, [and] help develop regional defense forces in international peace operations and information sharing”.

➡ **Uzbekistan Calm prevailed in Karakalpakstan as President Mirziyoyev appointed new leader to head region following July’s deadly protests.** Following deadly protests early July in autonomous Karakalpakstan region in response to govt’s proposed constitutional amendments, govt 1 Aug closed public consultation period on proposed amendments; commission said parliamentary committee will review feedback and amend accordingly before referendum on constitution is held. President Mirziyoyev 26 Aug appointed Amanbai Orynbaev to lead Karakalpakstan, accusing region’s previous leadership of “failure to find solutions to individual socio-economic problems”, which he said were “at root of the events of two months ago”; predecessor Murat Kamalov same day stepped down, citing health issues. Military participated in U.S.-sponsored military exercise, Regional Cooperation 22, 10-20 Aug in Tajikistan’s capital, Dushanbe, alongside U.S., Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Pakistan (see Tajikistan).