

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

↓ **Bosnia** **Republika Srpska National Assembly passed controversial resolution in step toward secession, raising tensions and provoking international condemnation.** Despite warnings from international community and opposition boycotts, 49 of 83 Republika Srpska (RS) National Assembly MPs 10 Dec approved resolution – backed by Bosnian Serb state-level presidency leader Milorad Dodik and RS President Željka Cvijanović – to withdraw from Bosnian army, security services, tax system and judiciary; decision entails transferring powers away from central institutions and leaves six-month period to draft new laws on armed forces, judiciary and tax system. In response, opposition Serb Democratic Party leader Mirko Sarovic described move as “direct threat to peace” that would lead RS “into the spiral of war”. Western govts – namely Germany, UK, U.S., France, Italy – and EU labelled resolution “a further escalatory step” and threatened new sanctions; German FM Annalena Baerbock 13 Dec called for EU to impose sanctions on Dodik, but Dodik showed indifference and said sanctions would lead them to their “true friends”. Bosnian NGO Žene žrtve rata and Institute for Research of Genocide Canada 14 Dec filed charge against Dodik at State Prosecutor’s Office for “undermining the constitutional order and jeopardising the country’s territorial integrity” as well as for mutiny and illegal formation of military forces.

➔ **Kosovo** **EU and dozens of civil society organisations emphasised importance of continuing Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.** Deputy PM Besnik Bislimi 7 Dec alleged Serb’s “parallel structures [inside Kosovo] are now more powerful than before”, hindering progress in Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue; 47 civil society organisations from Kosovo and Serbia 10 Dec jointly demanded resumption of EU-led Belgrade-Pristina dialogue due to “deep concern for the deterioration of the situation on the ground”. EU and Kosovo 7 Dec held fourth meeting of Stabilisation and Association Council, agreeing on “importance of constructive engagement in the EU-facilitated Dialogue to negotiate and achieve a comprehensive legally binding normalisation agreement with Serbia”. Likewise, during EU-Serbia Accession Conference on 14 Dec, EU renewed condition of Serb-Kosovar normalisation for progress in Serbia’s EU accession. After leaders of Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia late Nov met for Open Balkans Initiative, Kosovo FM Donika Gervalla 3 Dec claimed initiative could obstruct Kosovo’s regional integration. Kosovo 9 Dec arrested Serbian citizen at border suspected of war crimes during Kosovo war.

Caucasus

↑ **Armenia** **Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders renewed diplomatic engagement, facilitating prisoners release and easing tensions; Turkey and Armenia took steps toward normalisation.** In positive sign, govt participated in meetings with Azerbaijani counterparts following late-Nov breakthrough when Russian President Putin, Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian PM Pashinyan agreed that bilateral commission on delimitation and

demarcation of state border should be set by Azerbaijan and Armenia. Armenian FM Ararat Mirzoyan 1 Dec and Azerbaijani FM Jeyhun Bayramov 2 Dec met Minsk Group Co-Chairs at Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Stockholm Ministerial Council. Reportedly with Russian mediation, Azerbaijan 4 Dec returned ten captured Armenian soldiers to Yerevan in return for landmines maps. European Council President Charles Michel 14 Dec hosted discussion with Pashinyan and Aliyev, announcing EU's readiness to offer technical assistance for border delimitation and demarcation, and praised agreement to restore communication channel between defence ministers, set up rail link and agree on "further tangible steps" ahead of planned launch of negotiations on delimitation and demarcation. Pashinyan and Aliyev 15 Dec informally met at French President Macron's initiative. Azerbaijan 19 Dec released ten Armenian detainees "with mediation of the European Union". Armenian soldiers 18 Dec detained two Azerbaijani servicemen after latter crossed into Armenian territory; Armenia 20 Dec returned soldiers. With mediation of Hungary, Azerbaijan 29 Dec handed over to Yerevan five Armenian soldiers detained during 16 Nov border clashes. Aliyev 14 Dec insisted Lachin corridor – which connects Russian peacekeepers stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia – and Azerbaijan-Nakhichevan corridor should have exactly same legal regime without customs controls; Pashinyan same day countered this would contradict earlier agreements. After Armenia and Azerbaijan in Sept filed cases against each other, International Court of Justice 7 Dec announced provisional decision for both "to refrain from any action" aggravating or extending dispute, to prevent racial hatred, and for Azerbaijan to protect Armenian prisoners and cultural heritage. Turkey and Armenia 13 Dec announced they will mutually appoint special envoys to discuss steps to normalise relations. Armenia 31 Dec lifted ban of Turkish imports in place since Oct 2020.

↑ **Azerbaijan Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders and FMs renewed diplomatic engagement, facilitating prisoner release and easing tensions.** In positive sign of increasing engagement and lowering tensions, govt participated in series of meetings with Azerbaijani counterparts following notable late-Nov breakthrough when Russian President Putin, Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian PM Pashinyan agreed that bilateral commission on delimitation and demarcation of state border should be set by Azerbaijan and Armenia. Armenian FM Ararat Mirzoyan 1 Dec and Azerbaijani FM Jeyhun Bayramov 2 Dec met Minsk Group Co-Chairs at Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Stockholm Ministerial Council. Reportedly with Russian mediation, Azerbaijan 4 Dec returned ten captured Armenian soldiers to Yerevan in return for landmines maps. European Council President Charles Michel 14 Dec hosted trilateral discussion with Pashinyan and Aliyev, announcing EU's readiness to offer technical assistance for border delimitation and demarcation, and praised agreement to restore communication channel between defence ministers, set up rail link and agree on "further tangible steps" ahead of planned launch of negotiations on delimitation and demarcation talks. Pashinyan and Aliyev 15 Dec also informally met at initiative of French President Macron. Azerbaijan 19 Dec released ten Armenian detainees "with mediation of the European Union". Armenian soldiers 18 Dec detained two Azerbaijani servicemen after latter crossed into Armenian territory; Armenia 20 Dec returned soldiers. With mediation of Hungary, Azerbaijan 29 Dec handed over to Yerevan five Armenian soldiers detained during 16 Nov border clashes. Aliyev 14 Dec insisted Lachin corridor – which connects Russian peacekeepers stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia – and Azerbaijan-Nakhichevan corridor should have

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➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh Despite deadly incidents along Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) contact line, sides renewed diplomatic engagement, facilitating prisoners release.** Insecurity persisted throughout month. Armenia 3 Dec alleged that local from Martuni province lost his way and was killed after Azerbaijani forces forcibly abducted him from neutral zone, labelling killing “gross violation of international humanitarian law”; Azerbaijan defence ministry 3 Dec confirmed civilian’s death, and said ethnic Armenian man had assaulted Azerbaijani soldier who subsequently fired warning shot and “rendered the provocateur harmless”. De facto NK authorities 5 Dec reported one soldier fatally shot; Azerbaijan 7 Dec denied killing Armenian soldier. De facto NK investigative committee 7 Dec alleged Azerbaijan fatally shot Armenian soldier in no-man’s land near Shusha town despite uncertainty over who fired first. Baku 8 Dec reported killing of Azerbaijani soldier in Kalbajar district; Armenian defence ministry 9 Dec reported two Armenian soldiers wounded after Azerbaijani fire in Armenia’s Gegharkunik region. On diplomatic front, meanwhile, there was much progress and diplomatic engagement between both sides during month (see Azerbaijan and Armenia). Notably, European Council President Charles Michel 14 Dec hosted trilateral discussion with Pashinyan and Aliyev, announcing EU’s readiness to offer technical assistance for border delimitation and demarcation, and praising agreement to restore communication channel between defence ministers and set up rail link. Aliyev 14 Dec insisted Lachin corridor – which connects Russian peacekeepers stationed in NK to Armenia – and Azerbaijan-Nakhichevan corridor should have “exactly the same” legal regime without customs controls; Pashinyan same day countered this would contradict earlier agreements.

➔ **Georgia Tensions between govt and opposition remained high, while breakaway Abkhazia’s political leadership faced new scandal and violent protest.** Detained former President Mikheil Saakashvili 2 Dec attended second hearing on corruption case, which he rejected. Prosecutor 10 Dec began investigation into former Deputy Interior Minister Giorgi Lordkipanidze for allegedly helping Saakashvili’s illegal border crossing. Large-scale protest 21 Dec gathered in capital Tbilisi, and opposition party United National Movement chairman called for “mass hunger strike” until Saakashvili’s release. Authorities 30 Dec moved Saakashvili from Gori military hospital to prison in Rustavi town. Opposition members 15 Dec held closed-door talks with ruling Georgian Dream party on constitutional amendments as part of EU-brokered April deal; President Zourabichvili 16 Dec hosted members of Georgian Dream and opposition, and called for political reconciliation. Following Oct scandal in breakaway Abkhazia, where former de facto Interior Minister Dmitry Dbar and police clashed with MPs and veterans over independence celebration, de facto President Aslan Bzhania 3 Dec reappointed Dmitry Dbar to head of de facto state security service. House searches of two alleged hosts of Facebook pages “insulting” officials 2-3 Dec resulted in street brawl, with de facto Deputy Tourism Minister Dato Kajaia reportedly firing gunshots

several times, injuring one. De facto authorities 3 Dec detained Kajaia and two alleged social media hosts, and dismissed officials, including Kajaia and de facto interior minister. Bzhania 6 Dec appointed former Russian official Valter Butba as new de facto interior minister. After de facto president 20 Dec warned protesters reportedly rallying against pandemic response and energy crisis, demonstrators 21 Dec violently clashed with security forces. De facto president met twice with representatives of opposition 21 Dec to discuss demands; Prosecutor's Office 23 Dec opened criminal investigation into protesters. Breakaway South Ossetia 1 Dec ratified agreement with Russia on dual citizenship; 16 Western states, including UK, U.S. and Canada, 3 Dec labelled agreement "step toward de facto annexation". South Ossetia 1, 9, 12, 23 and 27 Dec detained ten Georgian citizens for illegally crossing de facto border, and 3, 19 and 24 Dec released six.

➔ **U.S.-Russia Amid continued tensions over Ukraine, U.S. and Russia prepared to begin security talks in January.** Russian President Putin 1 Dec proposed negotiations on legally binding guarantees that NATO will not expand eastward. Putin 7 Dec accused NATO in phone call with U.S. President Biden of "making dangerous attempts to gain a foothold on Ukrainian territory and build up its military capabilities" near Russia's borders; Biden next day proposed NATO-Russia meeting. Head of Russian delegation to Vienna negotiations on military security and arms control Konstantin Gavrilov 21 Dec reiterated Moscow's determination not to allow NATO infrastructure in Ukraine and Georgia, though plans for such infrastructure not under way at time of writing. NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 21 Dec declared openness for "meaningful dialogue"; Russian FM Sergei Lavrov same day indicated U.S.-Russia talks will take place in Jan 2022; EU and U.S. next day agreed "that any discussion about European security will happen in coordination and with participation" of EU. U.S. Assistant Sec State Karen Donfried 23 Dec expected talks to "take place in January". Biden and Putin 30 Dec held phone call to discuss European security.

➔ **Russia (internal) Repression of dissent continued, notably with dissolution of longstanding human rights group Memorial; authorities reported arresting dozens of "pro-Ukrainian neo-Nazi group" members.** Supreme Court 28 Dec ordered liquidation of prominent human rights group Memorial after lawsuit filed by Prosecutor General's Office alleged systematic violations of law on foreign agents. In joint statement, EU, U.S., Australia, Canada and UK 31 Dec deplored court decision. Police 28 Dec detained former coordinators and employees of opposition leader Alexei Navalny's local headquarters in several Russian cities. Kislovodsk City Court 15 Dec imposed between seven and a half and nine years imprisonment on leaders of organisations in North Caucasus's Ingushetia for their role in Oct-Dec 2018 and March 2019 protests against change to administrative boundaries between Ingushetia and Chechnya; those sentenced included leaders of Ingush People Council of Teips, Ingush branch of Russian Red Cross, NGO Choice of Ingushetia, Council of Youth Organizations, association Opora Ingushetia and NGO Memorial. Nenets Autonomous Region court 19 Dec sentenced Yury Zhdanov, father of former director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, to three years suspended imprisonment; authorities accused leaders of creating extremist community and organising attacks on law enforcement. Meanwhile, Federal Security Service 13 Dec reported detention of what it described as 106

supporters of “Ukrainian neo-Nazi group M.K.U.” in 37 Russian regions, including two suspected of preparing attacks on educational institutions.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus Authorities continued crackdown on opposition and independent media while Western countries expanded sanctions.** Vyasna Human Rights Centre 1 Dec reported searches and hearings of over dozen activists and journalists; in separate case, authorities same day arrested 11 people for posting “blasphemous and insulting statements in various messengers and social networks”. Interior ministry 3 Dec designated Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s (RFE/RL) Telegram and YouTube channels “extremist”, making subscription punishable; RFE/RL same day rejected “ridiculous label”. Govt 23 Dec added RFE/RL’s Belarus Service to registry of extremist organisations. Court 14 Dec sentenced former presidential candidate and opposition figure Siarhei Tsikhanouski – husband of exiled opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya - to 18 years imprisonment; five other opposition activists and journalists same day received sentences between 14 and 16 years. Tsikhanouskaya same day described sentence as “revenge”; EU and U.S. criticised “unfounded and harsh sentences” and “politically motivated convictions”, respectively. Authorities 30 Dec designated Vyasna Human Rights Centre’s Telegram channel “extremist”. President Lukashenka 27 Dec published draft constitutional changes ahead of Feb referendum. Meanwhile, Poland 1 Dec renewed state of emergency at Belarus border for up to three months. Lukashenka same day repeated “serious” threat of closing Belarus gas route from Russia to EU. U.S., UK, EU and Canada in coordination 2 Dec adopted new sanctions for migration crisis; in response, foreign ministry 7 Dec issued six-month ban of mainly food products from EU, U.S., Canada, UK, Norway and other countries, starting in Jan. Border agency 4 Dec alleged violation of airspace by Ukrainian military helicopter; defence ministry next day summoned Ukrainian military attaché; Kiev 4 Dec denied accusation. Following forced landing of passenger aircraft in Belarus in May and arrest of Belarusian opposition journalist, Polish investigation 9 Dec concluded “there was no bomb threat”, contradicting govt’s claims. UK 9 Dec announced deployment of 140 military engineers to Poland to support “response to the pressures from irregular migration at the Belarus border”. During 12 Dec meeting with Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, EU increased financial support to civil society by “an additional 30 million euros”. Two Russian nuclear-capable bombers 18 Dec participated in joint air patrol at western border.

➔ **🇺🇦 Ukraine Amid growing concerns over potential Russian offensive, hostilities continued in Donbas conflict zone despite restoration of July 2020 ceasefire.** Fighting and shelling continued along Donbas contact line. Ukrainian military said three of its servicemen were killed in combat during month, while Russian-backed forces reported four fighters killed. Explosion in govt-controlled Krasnohorivka town located at contact line in Donetsk region 1 Dec injured civilian. Civilian 23 Dec sustained shrapnel injuries in non-govt-controlled Oleksandrivka locality near Donetsk. Ukraine and Russia 22 Dec negotiated restoration of July 2020 ceasefire agreement; fighting subsequently persisted, while sides did not agree on opening of civilian crossings. Head of Office of Ukraine’s President Andriy Yermak 21 Dec said Kyiv had shared ten-step plan with

Normandy Four countries and U.S. to unblock peace process; Russian media outlet Kommersant 24 Dec published plan, which provided for ceasefire, opening of checkpoints, prisoners' swap, negotiation of draft laws on special status, amnesty, decentralisation and setting special economic zone. According to 17 Dec U.S. media reports citing U.S. intelligence officials, Russia continued to amass troops near Ukraine. Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov 22 Dec said over 120,000 Russian troops are within 200km of Ukrainian border. Russian foreign ministry 17 Dec published proposals to legally guarantee against NATO's eastward expansion, including ruling out Ukraine's membership; proposals suggest banning any NATO military deployments on territory of states that were not NATO members in May 1997. Russian President Putin 21 Dec said Russia's proposals are no ultimatum, but stressed that Russia has nowhere to retreat over Ukraine; while talking about possible invasion, Putin said Moscow's actions will depend "on unconditional guarantees for Russia's security". Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov 31 Dec warned West over "aggressive line" in Ukraine crisis, said Moscow may be forced to "eliminate unacceptable threats to our security" (see Russia -U.S.). Russia 25 Dec announced more than 10,000 troops finished month-long drills near Ukraine. President Zelensky 21 Dec said govt seeks clear timeline in 2022 for eventual NATO membership, describing years of waiting as "unacceptable". State Investigation Bureau 20 Dec charged former President Petro Poroshenko with state treason and financing of terrorism.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus Progress on relaunching formal negotiations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots remained stalled, while tensions over sovereignty rights in disputed maritime zones continued.** In controversial comments, Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 1 Dec said Turkish Cypriots had more in common with Greek Cypriots than with Turkey and that "as long as they depend, and will depend on Turkey, they will suffer the same as the Turkish people". After assuming his post in early Dec, UN Sec-Gen's Special Representative and Head of UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus Colin Stewart 10 Dec met separately with Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar and Anastasiades; Tatar and Anastasiades 14 Dec met at UN reception, where Stewart applauded achievements of bicomunal Technical Committees established under UN auspices to facilitate interaction and understanding between island's two communities. Mitsotakis 7 Dec said Turkey demonstrated "continued intransigence and unacceptable behaviour, both on land and in the maritime zones of Cyprus" and stressed that any settlement in the fenced-off city of Varosha will "condemn any attempt for a mutually acceptable solution" of the Cyprus issue. Meanwhile, maritime tensions continued. Turkey 2 Dec criticised Greek Cypriots' attempts to issue exploration license in its claimed Exclusive Economic Zone to oil companies ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum. Republic of Cyprus Energy Minister Natasa Pilides 10 Dec signed natural gas exploration and production sharing contract with ExxonMobil and Qatar Petroleum, reiterating that Republic of Cyprus is "exercising its sovereign rights according to international law". "Ministry of Foreign Affairs" of "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") same day responded that contract is "clear usurpation of the rights of the Turkish Cypriot people" and "denial of Turkey's rights in the region". Turkish VP Fuat Oktay

15 Dec announced govt will respond to actions aimed at harming legitimate rights or interests of both Turkey and Turkish Cypriots. Following 2 Dec arson attack on Grand Mosque in Larnaca city in Republic of Cyprus, “TRNC” leader Tatar immediately condemned attack and Turkish President Erdoğan 6 Dec said attack “will not go unanswered” and those engaging in sabotage of places of worship “will pay a heavy price”.

➔ **Turkey Amid deepening economic strains, authorities continued military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and detained dozens of suspected Islamic State (ISIS) supporters.** Military operations against the PKK predominantly took place in northern Iraq (see Iraq), while some clashes occurred in country’s south east. Notably, clashes in south-eastern province of Tunceli 3 Dec killed Turkish soldier. Ground operations in south east during month were concentrated in rural areas of Tunceli, Mardin, Şırnak and Hakkari provinces; security forces 29 Dec launched counter-terrorism operation against PKK in south east’s Batman province. Security units continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) cells and operatives as police during month carried out more than 190 detentions of individuals allegedly linked with ISIS, majority of them foreigners; notably police 9 Dec conducted simultaneous raids in capital Ankara, detaining 22 foreign nationals, and same day detained 11 foreign nationals in Istanbul city; 28 Dec detained 16 people accused of ISIS links. Police 14 Dec also detained nine Iraqi nationals in central Anatolian province of Kırşehir, with many detainees suspected of allegedly planning attacks on New Year’s celebrations. Economy continued to face strains. President Erdoğan 2 Dec appointed new treasury and finance minister, Nureddin Nebati; 8 Dec called on citizens to be patient and trust Turkey’s new economic path, reaffirming commitment to low interest rates, which he said will boost investment, jobs, exports and growth. After hitting record lows in first half of the month, Turkish lira rebounded after Erdoğan’s 20 Dec announcement of new program to protect local deposits against currency fluctuations. Internationally, Turkey and Armenia 13 Dec announced they will mutually appoint special envoys to discuss steps to normalise relations (see Armenia, and Armenia/Turkey). Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu 13 Dec said Turkey “will act together with Azerbaijan at every step” and 27 Dec confirmed first meeting of special envoys, who will lead dialogue between Yerevan and Ankara, will take place in Russian capital Moscow. Turkey and Greece exchanged barbs over migrant pushbacks in Aegean Sea during month; Athens and Ankara officials also continued harsh rhetoric regarding Aegean dispute, dimming prospects for progress in “exploratory talks” relaunched between two sides in Jan 2021.

Central Asia

➔ **Kyrgyzstan Election authorities announced final results of late-Nov elections while opposition leader Omurbek Tekebaev was threatened as his supporters demanded new poll.** Following elections held on 28 Nov, Central Election Commission 15 Dec announced that Ata-Jurt Kyrgyzstan party secured 15 seats, Ishenim party 12 seats, and Yntymak party nine seats; Kyrgyz Supreme Court 17 Dec refused to consider claim on electoral fraud, said official deadline for complaints had expired. Unknown assailants 1 Dec attacked Omurbek

Tekebaev, leader of opposition party Ata-Meken, in capital Bishkek in what politician later called “the start of political terror”; hundreds of Tekebaev’s supporters and opposition activists had same day gathered at offices of Central Election Commission to demand new poll amid fraud accusations. President Japarov 1 Dec called for investigation into attack and Bishkek city police next day said they had arrested suspect in attack. Authorities 22 Dec said Tajik border guards had opened fire on truck driver near disputed border.

➔ **Uzbekistan Authorities engaged with Taliban and faced renewed scrutiny over country’s human rights situation.** In sign of tentative engagement with Taliban, govt 17 Dec announced it had sent technicians to Afghanistan to help repair airport in Mazar-e Sharif city. Six U.S. senators 6 Dec urged U.S. Biden administration to press Tashkent to embark on reforms related to human rights, noting “Uzbekistan remains among the world’s most repressive countries”. Following inaugural meeting of Strategic Partnership Dialogue, U.S. 13 Dec welcomed President Tokayev’s political reform efforts, including on human rights. NGO Human Rights Watch 9 Dec urged authorities to release Muslim blogger Fozilxoja Orifxojaev, who is facing eight-year prison sentence for “threatening public security over a social-media post”.