

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia Ruling parties lost ground in local elections as country marked 25 years since Dayton peace accord.** Local elections 15 Nov took place amid low turnout, at around 50 per cent; three ruling parties – Bosnian Serb Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, Bosnjak Party of Democratic Action and Croat Democrat Union – lost some municipalities and key mayoral positions in largest cities while winning majority of municipalities across country. Gunman 9 Nov killed convicted war criminal Marko Radic in southern town of Mostar, suspect same day detained by police; Radic had been released from 21-year prison sentence in Dec 2018, following controversial sentence reduction by Croatian court of initial conviction by Bosnian state court in 2011 for crimes against humanity against Bosniaks in Mostar area. Tensions 25 Nov publicly surfaced between Valentin Inzko, high representative of international body overseeing Dayton peace accord, and Bosnian Serb chair of Bosnian presidency Milorad Dodik during UN roundtable event to mark 25th anniversary of peace accord; Inzko reportedly accused Dodik of abusing accord and denying past war crimes.

➔ **Kosovo Amid ongoing tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, President Thaçi and three other former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) chiefs were indicted for serious international crimes.** Hague-based Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office 5 Nov confirmed war crimes and crimes against humanity indictment against Thaçi and three other former KLA chiefs, including current MP and head of opposition parliamentary group Vetevendosje, Rexhep Selimi, former parliament speaker and head of intelligence service, Kadri Veseli, and Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) party's national council chairman, Jakup Krasniqi. In response, Thaçi same day announced resignation citing need "to protect the integrity" of presidency, passing position temporarily to Speaker of Assembly Vjosa Osmani in accordance with constitution; Thaçi 9 Nov pleaded "not guilty" to war crimes and crimes against humanity charges. Specialist Prosecutor's Office 17 Nov released documents accusing those indicted of attempting to interfere with potential prosecution witnesses ahead of trial. Meanwhile, acting President Vjosa Osmani 10 Nov said that dialogue with Serbia should be suspended due to war crime indictment against former KLA chiefs-turned-politicians. PM Hoti 19 Nov met virtually with French President Macron to discuss Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and visa liberalisation. Serbian President Vucic 21 Nov requested to visit Kosovo after 16 Nov discovery of mass grave near Serbian town of Raska next to border with Kosovo; Kosovo FM 25 Nov said Vucic would not be granted entry into country until he apologised for "genocide" against Kosovo citizens; Serbian govt next day said trip had been cancelled. Govt 20 Nov signed contract with EU for €26.5mn in financial support to counter impact of COVID-19.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** **Violent protests erupted after PM Pashinyan signed Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement to end deadly fighting with Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone.** After Azerbaijani govt 8 Nov announced capture of Shusha, strategically significant city in NK, PM Pashinyan 10 Nov signed Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement with Russian President Putin and Azerbaijani President Aliyev; deal stipulates that Azerbaijan retain captured territories, including Shusha, while Armenia must hand over control of three adjacent areas – Agdam, Kelbajar and Lachin districts – with Russian peacekeepers being deployed to remaining Armenian-controlled parts of NK. PM Pashinyan 10 Nov publicly announced ceasefire, defending decision by saying army and de facto NK authorities had insisted on signing agreement. Announcement prompted national outcry as public had been largely unaware of dire realities of ongoing conflict: thousands 10-11 Nov gathered in Republican Square in capital Yerevan, with hundreds storming PM's office, parliament and other buildings, and protesters brutally beating parliament speaker. Scuffles 11 Nov took place between police and protesters in Freedom Square; police arrested six people for alleged illegal organisation of mass protests and attempt to overthrow constitutional order. Representatives of 17 opposition parties called for Pashinyan to step down, accusing him of heavy concessions in ceasefire deal, and 12-18 Nov organised series of demonstrations in Yerevan and other cities; National Security Service (NSS) of Armenia 14 Nov arrested three opposition members, including leader of Homeland opposition party and former NSS director Artur Vanetsian, on grounds of alleged attempt to overthrow Pashinyan and violating martial law rules (in place since late-Sept); both were released from custody day after arrest. In response to protests. Senior govt and party officials resigned, including FM and deputy FM 10 Nov and PM's special envoy 16 Nov, and five ruling party members left party or gave up parliamentary mandate in same week. President Armen Sarkissian 16 Nov called for Pashinyan to resign and snap elections; Pashinyan, however, 18 Nov refused to step down and responded with six-month action plan designed to ensure country's stability; based on Pashinyan's proposal, Sarkissian same day appointed Ara Ayvazyan as FM and 20 Nov Vagharshak Harutyunyan as new defence minister.

➔ **Azerbaijan** **Following deadly fighting with Armenia throughout Oct in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, Azerbaijan signed Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement.** Govt 8 Nov announced capture of Shusha, strategically significant city in NK. Two days later, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement along with Russian President Putin; President Aliyev 10 Nov called deal "glorious victory" amid celebrations nationwide. Deal stipulates that Azerbaijan retain captured territories, including Shusha, while Armenia must hand over control of three adjacent areas – Agdam, Kelbajar and Lachin districts (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Despite ceasefire deal only stipulating deployment of 2,000 Russian peacekeepers, govt 11 and 16 Nov also called for stationing of Turkish peacekeepers in NK; Turkish parliament 17 Nov overwhelmingly approved bill to deploy peacekeepers to Azerbaijan to monitor ceasefire deal.

↑ Nagorno-Karabakh Following deadly fighting throughout Oct in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, Azerbaijan and Armenia signed Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement recognising Azerbaijani gains.

Govt 8 Nov announced capture of Shusha, strategically significant city in NK; Armenian side 10 Nov signed Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement with Russian President Putin and Azerbaijani President Aliyev. Deal stipulates that Azerbaijan retain captured territories, including Shusha, while Armenia must hand over control of three adjacent areas – Agdam, Kelbajar and Lachin districts – by 15 Nov, 25 Nov and 1 Dec, respectively; deal also called for deployment of 2,000 Russian peacekeepers as well as return of internally displaced persons and refugees to NK and surrounding territories with support of UN High Commissioner for Refugees; deal did not include provisions to ensure safe evacuation of ethnic Armenians wishing to leave NK conflict zone and adjacent territories, nor to protect those staying. Announcement of deal sparked unrest in Armenia, with thousands 10-11 Nov taking to streets and hundreds storming govt buildings in Armenia’s capital Yerevan and calling for Pashinyan’s resignation (see Armenia entry); Azerbaijani President Aliyev 10 Nov called deal “glorious victory” amid celebrations nationwide. Russia 10 Nov launched deployment of peacekeeping troops and national aid agencies to NK, while Armenian army commenced removal of troops from adjacent territories. Azerbaijan regained control of Agdam district 20 Nov and Kelbajar 25 Nov. Despite deal only citing Russian peacekeepers, Azerbaijani govt 11 and 16 Nov called for stationing of Turkish peacekeepers in NK. Russian and Turkish defence ministers 12 Nov signed memorandum for establishment of joint monitoring centre in Azerbaijan; Russian govt 10 Nov stated that there was no agreement on positioning Turkish peacekeepers in NK. Turkish parliament 17 Nov overwhelmingly approved bill to deploy troops to Azerbaijan for peacekeeping mission to monitor ceasefire deal. Russian defence ministry 19 Nov confirmed establishment of 23 observation points around NK; also reported that around 23,510 people returned to Russian-controlled NK area by 28 Nov.

➔ **Georgia Ruling party won landslide parliamentary election victory, prompting widespread opposition protests.** Following first round of parliamentary elections late Oct, results early Nov showed ruling Georgian Dream party won overwhelming majority, gaining 74 seats in new parliament; eight opposition parties collectively won 60 seats, and former ruling United National Movement party received 36 seats. Ahead of official results, all opposition parties 1 Nov declared boycott of parliament, citing issues with ballot count; however, international monitoring mission led by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe same day stated that “fundamental freedoms were respected” in election; several local observers demanded vote recounts, several of which took place, but no results suggested ballot manipulation. As opposition and civil society leaders publicly voiced grave concerns, head of Central Election Commission 3 Nov alleged that most confusion over ballot count came from new regulation allowing COVID-19 patients to vote from places of self-isolation. Opposition 8 Nov held mass protest in Tbilisi’s central avenue, marching toward Election Commission; scuffles between riot police and protesters injured at least 19, mainly police. Amid opposition boycott of second round of parliamentary elections held 21 Nov, ruling Georgian Dream party secured victory in 13 single-seat constituencies, acquiring majority and allowing party to form new govt without alliances with opposition parties. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 18 Nov visited Georgia to meet ruling party officials. In Abkhazia, de facto leader Aslan Bzhania 14 Nov met with Russian President Putin in Sochi, Russia, to discuss plans for economic and pandemic-related cooperation; as of 27 Nov, entity recorded 5,798 cases, at least 79 coronavirus deaths and almost 2,127 active cases.

➔ **Russia (internal) Mass protests continued in Far East.** Mass demonstrations continued unabated in Khabarovsk city in South East to protest July arrest of former local governor and member of nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Sergei Furgal; protests held on 7, 14 and 21 Nov despite acting Khabarovsk governor Mikhail Degtyarev 6 Nov introducing new COVID-19 measures, including ban on mass gatherings. Police 6-16 Nov detained at least six journalists and bloggers who covered protests. Meanwhile, Moscow District Court 25 Nov extended Furgal’s detention until 9 March 2021.

➔ **U.S./Russia U.S. formally withdrew from Open Skies treaty.** After announcing its intention to withdraw in May, U.S. 22 Nov formally withdrew from Open Skies treaty – multilateral accord permitting signatories to undertake non-military reconnaissance flights over other countries – citing Russian imposition of limits in violation of treaty; Russia 22 Nov vowed tough response if remaining parties share information with U.S. In rare incident, Moscow 24 Nov accused U.S. Navy destroyer of violating its maritime border in Sea of Japan as Russian destroyer threatened to ram U.S. ship; U.S. rejected claim it had been expelled from area.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** **Mass protests continued throughout month following disputed Aug presidential elections.** Thousands of people throughout month demonstrated in capital Minsk, demanding President Lukashenka's resignation as police used teargas, water cannons and rubber bullets to disperse protesters; police 8 Nov arrested record 1,000 people who participated in mass demonstrations across country. Opposition supporter and children's art teacher Raman Bandarenka 12 Nov died in hospital after plain-clothed security forces previous day detained and reportedly beat him at opposition rallying point "Square of Changes" in Minsk; govt 13 Nov denied responsibility for Bandarenka's death, claiming it was result of street brawl. Thousands 12-15 Nov gathered in Bandarenka's memory, forming human chains and marching on streets; police 15 Nov used teargas and water cannons to disperse protesters. Hundreds of retirees 23 Nov protested against Lukashenka in Minsk, holding portraits of Bandarenka; more than 1,000 pensioners 30 Nov also gathered in capital as police detained a dozen. Belarus opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya 1 Nov called on EU to step up sanctions against Lukashenka regime. UK FM Dominic Raab 5 Nov called for fresh presidential elections in Belarus, following independent report confirming that Aug election was "falsified" and exposing human rights violations committed by Lukashenka regime; govt 9 Nov expelled from Belarus two British diplomats who observed Sunday street protests in Minsk; UK next day retaliated by expelling two Belarus diplomats. EU 13 Nov warned that it could expand its sanctions on Lukashenka following Bandarenka's death, describing Belarus authorities' actions as "outrageous and shameful". Lukashenka 27 Nov said he will resign when new constitution is adopted.

➔ **Ukraine** **Kyiv proposed new peace plan to Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), while July ceasefire largely held in Donbas conflict zone.** Ukrainian TCG representatives 5 Nov proposed new "Joint Steps plan" to demilitarise conflict zone in early 2021, allow Kyiv to regain control of eastern border and subsequently hold local elections on 31 March; newly-integrated areas would be offered special economic zone status for 30 years. Russian TCG representative Gryzlov 11 Nov called plan "another attempt to deceive people", while Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (D/LPR) de facto authorities 20 Nov rebuffed it as "awkward attempt to rewrite Minsk agreements", given that Minsk agreement states elections must precede Kyiv regaining control. Separately, TCG representatives 4 Nov agreed on four new disengagement areas in Donbas conflict zone: near Hryhorivka in Donetsk region, as well as Slovyanoserbbsk, Petrivka and Nyzhnoteple villages in Luhansk region. In Donbas conflict zone, July ceasefire largely held except for small flare-ups with military casualties on both sides; sniper fire 24 Nov killed one govt soldier in Donetsk region according to Ukrainian officials, while DPR armed groups lost at least two fighters on 6 Nov. Both sides sustained non-live-fire casualties throughout month, including five Ukrainian soldiers and five Russian-backed fighters; remnant explosives injured four civilians 10, 12 Nov. Govt 10 Nov reopened all Donbas checkpoints and introduced two new crossings for civilians across front line in Luhansk region; however, many corresponding crossings remained closed, preventing civilians from using them. Political crisis continued over Constitutional Court's Oct decision to overturn key provisions in anti-corruption legislation; President Zelenskyy 1 Nov said forces behind decision were

“a coalition of Russian proxies and some prominent Ukrainian oligarchs”; parliament 18 Nov established working group aimed at resolving crisis by 1 Dec. Authorities 25 Nov reported record daily number of 15,331 new COVID-19 cases after govt 13 Nov introduced weekend quarantine. De-facto republics reported modest rise in cases; mortality rate higher in LPR (about 8%) and DPR (about 10%) compared to govt controlled areas (1.7%).

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** **UN convened preliminary talks between Cypriot leaders while Turkish drilling activity continued to fuel tensions.** Following Oct victory of two-state solution advocate Ersin Tatar in “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (TRNC) elections, head of UN mission in Cyprus Elizabeth Spehar 3 Nov organised preliminary meeting between Tatar and Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades; both sides “expressed their determination to positively respond to the UN Secretary-General’s commitment to explore the possibility to convene an informal five-plus-UN meeting”; five-member format includes Greece, Turkey, UK and both Cypriot communities. During visit to “TRNC” celebrating 37th anniversary of declaration of independence, Turkish President Erdoğan 15 Nov said that “a two-state solution must be discussed and negotiated on the basis of sovereign equality”, as opposed to federal solution; Erdoğan also visited Varosha/Maraş town following partial reopening of its beachfront in Oct, prompting Republic of Cyprus presidency same day to say move could “torpedo the prospects for the creation of the appropriate climate” for UN talks to resume. Amid ongoing tensions related to hydrocarbon exploration in region (see Eastern Mediterranean), Turkey continued survey activity off south-western coast of Cyprus; Ankara 3 Nov extended exploration activities of Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa ship until 16 Feb 2021 and 13 Nov announced drillship Yavuz would resume its operations in contested waters around Cyprus.

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean** **Tensions between Greece and Turkey continued amid ongoing Turkish exploration activity.** Exchange of conciliatory diplomatic statements between Greek PM Mitsotakis and Turkish President Erdoğan following deadly 30 Oct earthquake off Samos island proved short-lived as Ankara 31 Oct and 11 Nov issued new advisories extending exploration activities of seismic survey vessel *Oruç Reis* in contested waters. Greek MFA 11 Nov condemned activities, saying they violated “international law of the sea and [are] undermining peace and stability in the region”; Turkish MFA same day responded that Greek statements were “based on Greece’s maximalist maritime boundary claims”. Greece and Republic of Cyprus continued to demand harsh EU sanctions against Turkish actions in eastern Mediterranean ahead of European Council summit scheduled for 10-11 Dec; EU Parliament 26 Nov passed non-binding resolution requesting EU leaders to “take actions and impose tough sanctions” on Ankara; Turkish MFA next day called parliament “disconnected from reality”. Turkey 30 Nov pulled back *Oruç Reis* after it completed exploration mission in disputed maritime zones south of Kastellorizo off the Turkish coast. Meanwhile, military exercises on both sides continued throughout month. During 11-12 Nov visit to Greece’s capital Athens, Egyptian President Sisi declared Egypt “will stand by Greece and in favour of its rights”. Defence ministers of Greece, Israel and Republic

of Cyprus 12 Nov agreed to deepen military and security ties, specifically regarding joint training programs, intelligence sharing and cybersecurity. Greece and United Arab Emirates 23 Nov signed security agreement which includes mutual defence clause, obligating each country to help other if its territorial integrity is threatened. Egypt, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus announced plans to conduct joint military drills in eastern Mediterranean early Dec.

➔ **Turkey Military operations continued against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in south-eastern Turkey and northern Iraq; authorities arrested dozens of suspected jihadists.** In south east, military carried out small-scale operations concentrated largely in rural areas of Bitlis and Hatay provinces; PKK militants 4 Nov killed three state construction workers in Hakkari's Derecik district. In northern Iraq, air raids targeting PKK positions continued throughout month; defence ministry 17 Nov announced national intelligence agency "neutralised" İrfan Akcan, PKK's so-called "customs officer" in Iraq's Sinjar district, who Turkey claimed was responsible for organising arms transfers between north-eastern Syria and northern Iraq (see Iraq). Govt continued efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP): police detained more than 100 HDP officials and members during month, including party's provincial co-chairs in Diyarbakır province. Govt continued operations targeting Islamic State (ISIS) throughout month; notably, police detained over 300 individuals for alleged links to ISIS, including 19 ISIS-linked suspects in Adana city 9 Nov for allegedly plotting attacks against security forces and abductions of politicians, high-ranking bureaucrats, businessmen and tourists. Meanwhile, tensions with Greece and Republic of Cyprus remained high (see Eastern Mediterranean), and parliament 17 Nov overwhelmingly approved bill to deploy troops to Azerbaijan for peacekeeping mission following Azerbaijani-Armenia ceasefire deal (see Nagorno-Karabakh). COVID-19 outbreak reached unprecedented levels and put additional strain on Turkey's economy; govt 30 Nov announced 31,219 new daily cases.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** **Opposition parties mobilised to boycott Jan 2021 parliamentary elections.** Hundreds of opposition Democratic Party supporters 14 Nov held rally in Almaty city to call for boycott of Jan 2021 parliamentary elections, in second opposition demonstration permitted by authorities since law was amended in May. All-National Social Democratic Party 27 Nov announced boycott of parliamentary vote during party conference, citing continued dominance by “the same political parties”. Meanwhile, govt continued to target opposition and civil society figures. Petropavl City Court in north 2 Nov sentenced opposition Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan activist Nurbol Onerkhan to one year of freedom limitation on charges of involvement in “extremist group”; Court also banned Onerkhan from any social or political activity. In line with Nur-Sultan court order on 19 Nov, police 23 Nov forcibly admitted journalist and govt critic Aigul Otepova to psychiatric clinic, reportedly for involvement in Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan opposition movement, labelled as extremist group by govt; Otepova was under house arrest since Sept. NGO Human Rights Watch 18 Nov said Otepova was “being prosecuted solely for the peaceful expression of her views”, urged govt to release her immediately.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** **Govt’s proposed constitutional changes to strengthen presidential powers ahead of presidential election in Jan 2021 sparked political backlash.** Acting President and PM Japarov 14 Nov resigned to become eligible in upcoming presidential elections scheduled for 10 Jan 2021; parliament chair Talant Mamytov same day took over as acting president, with Artyom Novikom as PM. Shortly after, govt 17 Nov released constitutional draft widening presidential powers, creating new executive body and congress, and reducing parliament size from 120 to 90 lawmakers. Proposal sparked wave of criticism; notably, former PM Feliks Kulov 18 Nov said changes sought to secure “absolute power for the president” while former President Roza Otunbayeva 20 Nov warned that proposal may violate international law. NGO Human Rights Watch 21 Nov said constitutional changes “significantly erode checks and balances on the executive” and that caretaker parliament did not have proper legitimacy to undertake them. Hundreds 22 Nov marched peacefully in capital Bishkek to protest against proposed constitutional changes. Japarov 24 Nov defended draft constitution and called for national referendum on proposed amendments to take place alongside presidential elections. Meanwhile, preparations continued for presidential and parliamentary elections postponed until 2021. Following approval by lawmakers last month, then PM Japarov 11 Nov signed amendments to electoral law, lowering vote threshold for political parties to enter parliament from 7% to 3% and reducing candidate registration fee. Parliament chair Kanatbek Isaev 4 Nov announced resignation to join presidential race; parliament same day voted in Talant Mamytov to replace Isaev. Constitutional Chamber 2 Nov announced it would reconsider appeal challenging amendment adopted last month that postponed parliamentary elections until 2021.

➡ **Uzbekistan** **Regional court launched trial of people involved in violent unrest in Sokh exclave in May.** Ferghana regional court in east 9 Nov started trial of 22 people on charges of blocking officials from carrying out security duties; defendants were involved in mass unrest in Sokh exclave within neighbouring Kyrgyzstan in May, where clashes between Sokh and Kyrgyz Kadamjai district residents over water dispute left several injured.