

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia And Herzegovina Concerns over secession continued as Republika Srpska (RS) moved to establish independent judicial body.**

Republika Srpska's parliament 1 Feb adopted resolution to reverse Bosnian Serb representatives' boycott of federal institutions imposed in July 2021, yet required representatives to follow RS policy. In further provocative measure and challenge to state's central authority, Republika Srpska assembly 10 Feb approved draft law to establish entity's own High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council to oversee appointment of judges and prosecutors; draft bill will undergo period of public consultation. Move immediately triggered international condemnation. Peace Implementation Council, international body established to oversee implementation of 1995 Dayton Peace Accord, 10 Feb said such law would create "unconstitutional body, jeopardizing fundamental legal rights of all Bosnia-Herzegovina citizens". U.S. embassy in Sarajevo same day said move would "allow criminals to prosper and corruption to flourish". EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 11 Feb urged Bosnia and Herzegovina's three main leaders to resume "serious and meaningful dialogue" and 20 Feb warned "situation in Bosnia is more worrying than ever". Croatian National Parliament 19 Feb threatened to boycott Oct elections and start process of forming autonomous region unless electoral law is amended to strengthen Croat representation and comply with court rulings. EU's peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina 24 Feb added 500 troops as a "precautionary measure" citing risks of spreading "instability to Bosnia and Herzegovina" amid threats to European security (see Ukraine).

➔ **Kosovo Country marked 14th anniversary of statehood and govt expressed willingness to resume dialogue with Serbia.**

Ahead of country's National Day on 17 Feb, which marks 14th anniversary of statehood for Kosovo, U.S. President Biden 15 Feb congratulated country on its "independence"; at ceremony in parliament, PM Kurti 18 Feb declared "Europe is where we belong, while NATO is a condition for peace for all of us", same day asked EU for "more funds" to continue reform process. Following meeting with EU High Representative Josep Borrell, Kurti 20 Feb affirmed willingness to dialogue with Serbia "if there is the same will from the Serbian side". After Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov 18 Feb alleged mercenaries were recruited from Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia to fight in Ukraine in order to "destabilize Russia" (see Ukraine), authorities 21 Feb rejected "false" Russian allegations. Kosovo's and Serbia's negotiating teams 23 Feb engaged with dialogue facilitators in Belgian capital Brussels in attempt to resume dialogue; meeting ended without decisive progress.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia Armenia and Azerbaijan continued diplomatic engagement as number and scope of skirmishes between their armed forces slightly reduced.** Month witnessed reduction in number and geographic

range of skirmishes between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces along international state border, with direct clashes shifting to Armenian populated areas in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijani defence ministry however said its positions in Tovuz district on Armenian border 18 Feb came under fire and its positions in Lachin district 23 Feb faced intermittent fire from Armenia's Goris town; Armenian defence ministry denied latter report and called on Azerbaijani side "to refrain from spreading obviously false information" on border situation. PM Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Aliyev, French President Macron and European Council President Charles Michel 4 Feb held video conference at French initiative; govt and Azerbaijan same day announced agreement on UNESCO mission "to both countries", Baku also reported exchanges on "humanitarian issues, confidence-building", landmines, communications, as well as border delimitation and demarcation. In positive sign, Azerbaijan 7 Feb returned eight detainees to Yerevan, explaining handover was in return for information about Azerbaijanis missing in 1990s' first Karabakh war; Pashinyan 9 Feb clarified that, since 2020 war, Armenia had handed over remains of 108 people to Azerbaijan without any preconditions and would hand over remains of two more people in near future. Special envoys of Armenia and Turkey for normalisation talks 24 Feb met in Austrian capital Vienna and reiterated their countries' commitment to normalise relations; special envoys exchanged views on possible steps that can be taken to achieve normalisation and agreed to take measures to continue the process without preconditions.

➡ **Azerbaijan Armenia and Azerbaijan continued diplomatic engagement as number and scope of skirmishes between their armed forces slightly reduced.** Month witnessed reduction in number and geographic range of skirmishes between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces along international state border, with direct clashes between armed forces shifting to Armenian-populated areas in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Defence ministry however said its positions in Tovuz district on Armenian border 18 Feb came under fire and its positions in Lachin district 23 Feb faced intermittent fire from Armenia's Goris city; Armenian defence ministry denied latter report and called on Azerbaijani side "to refrain from spreading obviously false information" on border situation. President Aliyev, Armenian PM Pashinyan, French President Macron and European Council President Charles Michel 4 Feb held video conference at French initiative; govt and Azerbaijan same day announced agreement on UNESCO mission "to both countries", Azerbaijan also reported exchanges on "humanitarian issues, confidence-building", landmines, communications, as well as border delimitation and demarcation. In positive sign, Azerbaijan 7 Feb returned eight detainees to Yerevan, explaining handover was in return for information about Azerbaijanis killed in 1990s Karabakh war; Pashinyan 9 Feb clarified that since 2020 war, Armenia had handed over remains of 108 people to Azerbaijan without any preconditions and remains of two more people would be handed over in near future. Following Aliyev's Dec criticism of unfair division of EU funds between Baku and Yerevan, EU Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi during visit to capital Baku 4 Feb announced financial package worth €2bn for Azerbaijan. Parliament 1 Feb ratified June 2021 declaration on alliance with Turkey. Aliyev and Russian President Putin 22 Feb signed Declaration on Allied Cooperation.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Skirmishes persisted in conflict zone, while diplomatic engagement between Azerbaijan and Armenia led to humanitarian gesture on detainees and information on 1990s war.**

Incidents erupted at line between Armenian-populated Karabakh and Azerbaijani-controlled area in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone. Notably, Azerbaijan's defence ministry 6 Feb claimed de facto NK troops fired at its military near Qapanli village in Tartar district; de facto NK authorities same day reiterated commitment to ceasefire and accused Azerbaijan of truce violation by firing large-calibre machine gun at locals. Azerbaijan's defence ministry 15 Feb claimed its forces prevented "Armenian illegal armed groups" from building fortifications in NK allegedly under guise of agricultural work; de facto authorities same day accused Azerbaijani troops of opening fire on farmers carrying out agricultural work in Khramort village, who "managed to escape thanks to the intervention of Russian peacekeepers". De facto authorities same day reported serious wounding of soldier in truce violation at area of same village; Azerbaijan 15 Feb denied incident. Azerbaijani defence ministry 19 Feb said that Azerbaijani army positions in Taghavard village had come under fire; de facto NK authorities same day said Azerbaijani troops fired at residential houses in Taghavard 18 Feb; Azerbaijani defence ministry denied report. Despite skirmishes, Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian PM Pashinyan 4 Feb attended virtual meeting under French and EU mediation (see Azerbaijan and Armenia); engagement led to Azerbaijan 7 Feb returning eight detainees to Yerevan, arguing handover was in return for information about Azerbaijanis killed in 1990s Karabakh war; Pashinyan 9 Feb clarified that Armenia handed over remains of 108 people to Azerbaijan since ceasefire of 2020 war. Tensions also resurfaced over cultural heritage in NK. Azerbaijani Culture Minister Anar Karimov 3 Feb announced research working group on Caucasian-Albanian heritage in territories regained in 2020 war; Armenia 8 Feb condemned move. Official of Azerbaijani Prosecutor General's Office 15 Feb said that Baku was seeking to arrest de facto leader of NK Arayik Harutyunyan over missile attacks on Ganja, Azerbaijan's second largest city, during 2020 war; Armenian justice minister next day said there were no legal grounds for move.

➡ **Georgia Georgians demonstrated in support of Ukraine following Russian invasion, while breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia expressed hope for recognition by Belarus.**

Parliament 1 Feb adopted resolution in support of Ukraine amid Russia's military build-up around country (see Ukraine); resolution did not label Russia "aggressor" as demanded by opposition MPs. Following Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 Feb, thousands of Georgians protested in solidarity with Ukraine. Protests increased after 25 Feb remarks of Georgian PM Irakli Gharibashvili about non-alliance with Western sanctions against Russia. Abkhazia 25 Feb announced its recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, Ukraine's breakaway regions. After Tbilisi City Court in Jan convicted founders of political party Lelo for fraud, parliament 15 Feb terminated mandates of three opposition parliamentarians, leaving Lelo party without leader at legislature. Belarusian President Lukashenko 6 Feb indicated possibility of recognising independence of breakaway states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia "as soon as I see [the need]". Abkhazia's de facto foreign ministry 8 Feb declared interest "in establishing official contacts with the Republic of Belarus", while South Ossetia's de facto leader Anatoly Bibilov 12 Feb argued "in moral terms, Belarus can recognize

us”. Georgia’s foreign ministry 8 Feb insisted that “Belarus is committed to the fundamental principles of international law” and that such recognition “is not on the agenda”. De facto ruling party One Ossetia in breakaway South Ossetia 8 Feb nominated incumbent Anatoly Bibilov as candidate for April’s de facto presidential elections; Bibilov 26 Feb dismissed Defence Minister Ibragim Gassiyev for supporting opposition candidates in upcoming elections.

➡ **Russia (internal) Invasion of Ukraine sparked countrywide protests and opposition as Western states imposed unprecedented sanctions; authorities brought new charges against imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny.** Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (see Ukraine), thousands rallied at anti-war demonstrations in 103 cities countrywide, resulting in police arresting 6,640 people; most people were detained in capital Moscow (3,126) and in Saint-Petersburg city (2,084). In notable instances of dissent, girl 24 Feb threw Molotov cocktail in direction of security forces on Pushkin Square in Moscow; man 27 Feb drove car with anti-war slogans into roadblock on Moscow’s Pushkinskaya Square and then set car on fire. EU and member states, UK and U.S. late Feb imposed range of crippling and unprecedented economic sanctions, while also blocking Russian planes from accessing much of European airspace. U.S. 28 Feb approved departure of all non-emergency staff from U.S. embassy in Moscow, citing “security and safety issues” regarding war in Ukraine. Following allegations of fraud in Dec 2020 and contempt of court in May 2021, authorities 15 Feb initiated two new criminal cases against jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Pokrov penal colony in Vladimir region. Supreme Court 28 Feb upheld ban of human rights organisation Memorial under foreign agents law. In North Caucasus, Chechen officials, including Chechen Vice-PM Abuzaid Vismuradov and other high-level officials, 1 Feb threatened to kill and behead family of Abubakar Yangulbayev, former lawyer of human rights organisation Committee Against Torture, in social media video circulated by Vismuradov. European Court of Human Rights 14 Feb ordered Russia to provide information every two weeks about health of Zarema Musayeva, wife of former federal judge and mother of Yangulbayev; security services reportedly abducted Musayeva in Jan.

Eastern Europe

➡ **Belarus Western powers imposed sanctions in response for Minsk’s role in Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine; crackdown on dissent continued.** Belarus and Russia 10 Feb launched joint military training exercises; French FM Jean-Yves Le Drian same day dubbed “extremely massive” drills as “a gesture of great violence”. Russia 15 Feb announced return of some troops; UK and U.S. 16 Feb argued contrary was true, as Western media mid-Feb circulated satellite images allegedly showing heavy weaponry in “military buildup” in Belarus. Following meeting between French President Macron and Russian President Putin, Macron 8 Feb indicated agreement with Russia on non-prolongation of exercises in Belarus. Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin 20 Feb announced indefinite prolongation of exercises, citing “increase in military activity near the external borders”. As Russia 24 Feb invaded Ukraine, partly via Belarus territory, U.S. same day sanctioned 24 Belarusians, targeting “military and financial

capabilities”; EU next day announced sanctions on those Belarusians “who facilitated the Russian military aggression”; G7 27 Feb agreed on “massive and coordinated sanctions, including on Belarus”. Opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya 26 Feb declared herself “national leader”, accusing President Lukashenko of “treason” by participating in Russia-Ukraine war. International media 28 Feb cited U.S. Defence Dept official accusing Belarus of preparing to join Russian forces in military operation in Ukraine. Authorities 27 Feb declared 65.2% voted in favour of constitutional referendum, strengthening powers of presidency and scrapping country’s non-nuclear status. Meanwhile, authorities continued crackdown on dissent. Notably, Minsk court 16 Feb sentenced opposition United Civic Party activist Andrey Kudzik to two years’ imprisonment for activities related to disrupting civil order; Kudzik rejected accusation and refused testimony. U.S. State Dept 1 Feb warned U.S. citizens of travel to Belarus due to “arbitrary” law enforcement; U.S. 4 Feb introduced sanctions against “Belarusian nationals for their involvement in serious, extraterritorial counter-dissident activity”. EU 9 Feb claimed authorities detained 1,040 people as “political prisoners” and called “for their immediate and unconditional release”.

↓ 🇷🇺 **Ukraine** Moscow launched multi-pronged invasion, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee as hostilities with Ukrainian forces killed hundreds of civilians and possibly thousands of military personnel; with no end in sight, conflict escalation looms. Russia 24 Feb launched full-scale military assault, involving significant portion of some 200,000 military personnel amassed in recent months on Ukraine’s borders and deploying wide range of land, sea and air military assets; offensive began with Russian missile strikes across country before Russian troops invaded from annexed Crimea region, Belarus and Russian territory, as well as Donbas. Russian forces approached and besieged number of key regional centres such as Kherson, Sumy, Chernihiv, Kharkiv and capital Kyiv; numerous reports indicated fierce military and local resistance as well as logistical and other challenges that have hampered Russian progress. Notably, Russian troops attempted to encircle and seize Kyiv, leading to fierce battle for Hostomel airfield north east of city 24-27 Feb; govt claimed it repelled attack and inflicted heavy Russian casualties. Russian forces 28 Feb began indiscriminately bombarding Karkhiv city in east and continued to advance. As of 28 Feb, hostilities killed 352 civilians, including 14 children, and injured 1,684, according to interior ministry. Kyiv claimed Russian forces suffered 5,710 casualties, and that it held 200 Russian soldiers prisoner; Ukrainian forces reported 137 service personnel killed with over 300 injured as of first day of invasion. Over 660,000 people sought refuge in EU countries and Moldova, according to UN refugee agency. On diplomatic front, Russia 26 Feb blocked UN Security Council resolution demanding end to attack; UN General Assembly 28 Feb began Emergency Special Session on war. Ukrainian leadership 28 Feb signed request to join EU under simplified procedure; European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen previous day expressed support for accession. EU and member states, UK and U.S. imposed crippling economic sanctions, while also blocking Russian planes from accessing European airspace; U.S., Canada and numerous European countries, notably UK, France, Germany and Sweden, continued to provide arms and military equipment to Ukraine. Russian and Ukrainian delegations 28 Feb held negotiations in Homel city, Belarus; while talks did not stop hostilities, sides agreed to continue dialogue.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus Prospects for relaunching formal negotiations between Turkish and Greek Cypriots remained dim.** Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 2 Feb received UN Sec-Gen's Special Representative in Cyprus Colin Stewart in Lefkoşa, de facto capital of Turkish Cypriot north of island. Following meeting, Stewart said that they were focused on steps such as intercommunal contact, trade relations and peace education to facilitate dialogue toward settlement. UN in Cyprus 8 Feb announced that Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Tatar agreed on action plan developed by Technical Committee on Gender Equality to ensure "women's full, equal and meaningful representation in the settlement process in Cyprus". New "coalition government" to be headed by Faiz Sucuoğlu 21 Feb formed in unrecognised Turkish Cypriot north between three right-wing parties.

➔ **Turkey Military continued operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq and south east Turkey, while President Erdoğan urged support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion.** Military operations against PKK remained concentrated in northern Iraq, with occasional clashes in south east and at Turkey-Syria border. Notably, military 2 Feb launched simultaneous cross-border aerial campaign (dubbed "Winter Eagle"), with airstrikes in northern Syria's Derik city, and Sinjar and Makhmour regions in northern Iraq. Ground operations in south east during Feb were concentrated in rural areas of Şanlıurfa, Bingöl and Muş provinces. Security units' operations against Islamic State (ISIS) cells/operatives across country continued, leading to detention of more than 85 individuals with alleged ISIS links. High inflation led to rising energy prices and ignited discontent. Notably, 11 mayors from main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), including Istanbul's mayor, 8 Feb released joint statement calling for govt to ease "unbearable" burden of energy prices on local administrations. Detention of businessman and human rights advocate Osman Kavala remained point of tension with western allies; Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers 2 Feb referred Kavala case to European Court of Human Rights, which will determine whether govt, by not releasing Kavala, violated European Convention on Human Rights; Erdoğan 3 Feb dismissed decision as "biased". Tensions persisted with Greece in eastern Mediterranean. FM Çavuşoğlu 10 Feb said that if militarisation of islands close to Turkey's mainland continues, "sovereignty of these islands will be discussed". Erdoğan 16 Feb stated that govt will make the highest-level warning if Greece "continues with its provocations" because it is "not possible" to remain silent on military activities carried out on islands which ought to be demilitarised. Turkish and Greek officials 22-23 Feb met for round of "exploratory talks" in Greek capital Athens that led to no substantial progress. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (see Ukraine), Erdoğan 24 Feb called attack "serious blow to peace and stability" and "unacceptable"; Erdoğan next day criticised NATO and EU for not taking more decisive steps in support of Ukraine. Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 28 Feb announced that Turkey closed Bosphorus and Dardanelles waterways to passage of "all warships".