

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Bosnia And Herzegovina Republika Srpska held controversial celebrations marking 30th anniversary of its creation, while Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik indicated possible return to federal institutions.** Following moves toward separatism in recent months, U.S. Treasury Dept 5 Jan imposed new sanctions on Milorad Dodik, Dodik-linked media outlet Alternativna Televizija, and two other officials for “significant corruption and destabilizing activities”. Bosnian Serbs 9 Jan celebrated 30th anniversary of Republika Srpska’s creation in 1992 in defiance of international pressure and two Constitutional Court rulings declaring holiday unconstitutional. During celebrations, which counted guests from Russia, China, Serbia and France’s National Rally far-right party, police parade marched through Banja Luka town; reports surfaced of riots, Bosnian Serbs singing nationalist and Islamophobic songs as well as gunfire near mosques. In response, EU 10 Jan condemned leaders’ “negative, divisive and inflammatory rhetoric” and threatened possible sanctions; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 12 Jan warned against “all acts that carry the potential to incite conflict”, while UN high commissioner for human rights 14 Jan said UN was “deeply concerned”. After Dodik met Serbian President Vučić 14 Jan, who urged him to participate in state institutions, Dodik announced that Republika Srpska National Assembly would consider return to institutions next month. Vučić and Turkish President Erdoğan 18 Jan agreed to broker Bosnian talks after Serbia’s April election. Separately, protesters 10 Jan rallied in 35 cities across 14 countries demanding international community prevent Bosnia’s break up.

➔ **Kosovo Assembly banned international organisations from facilitating voting in Serbia’s referendum on Kosovo territory, prompting criticism from Serbia and Western countries.** Assembly 15 Jan passed resolution to ban international organisations from facilitating voting on Kosovo territory in Serbia’s constitutional referendum that took place next day; referendum seen as effort to strengthen independence of judiciary and enhance rule of law institutions in Serbia. Ban prompted Kosovo authorities to confiscate ballots, prevent setting up of polling stations, and deny entry to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) planning to recover ballots. Director of Serbia’s Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Petar Petković, 15 Jan accused Kosovo of “open confrontation with the Serbian people”; France, Germany, Italy, UK, U.S. and EU 14 Jan expressed regret over decision to prevent OSCE from collecting ballots of eligible voters and urged Kosovo and Serbia to “engage constructively in the EU-facilitated Dialogue”. After govt late Dec expelled Russian official from UN Mission in Kosovo for alleged “harmful activity”, UN Sec-Gen Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric 1 Jan stated that designation of persona non grata “is not applicable to United Nations personnel”; Russian foreign ministry 4 Jan called expulsion “continuation of the provocative line for aggravation of interethnic relations”. Opposition Social Democratic Party 29 Jan called for protests over spiking energy prices; thousands reportedly gathered in capital Pristina, which led to scuffles with police. U.S. Special

Envoy Gabriel Escobar and EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajcak 31 Jan visited PM Kurti in Pristina in effort to reinitiate dialogue with Serbia.

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## **Caucasus**

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➔ **Armenia Deadly clashes with Azerbaijan along state border resumed, jeopardising international efforts to reduce tensions, while authorities deployed peacekeepers to Kazakhstan.** Azerbaijani defence ministry 8 Jan claimed that Azerbaijani positions in Kelbajar region were “subjected to fire”; Armenian defence ministry same day alleged accusation “does not correspond to reality”. Foreign ministry 11 Jan accused Azerbaijani forces of violating ceasefire using artillery and UAVs against positions in Gegharkunik region in clashes that killed three Armenian and one Azerbaijani soldiers; Azerbaijani defence ministry same day said Armenia “bears full responsibility”. Azerbaijani President Aliyev 12 Jan warned Armenia against not recognising Azerbaijani “territorial integrity”, said Baku would respond in kind. Russian FM Sergey Lavrov 14 Jan announced Armenia had submitted proposal on process of demarcation and delimitation of Armenian-Azerbaijani border, which he would share with Azerbaijan, and underscored importance of establishing agenda of priority issues. However, differences surfaced between Yerevan and Baku as FM Ararat Mirzoyan 19 Jan underlined need for “border stability and security”, and preventative mechanisms, whereas Azerbaijani FM Ceyhun Bayramov same day called Armenian preconditions “absolutely unacceptable”. In response, Armenian foreign ministry 20 Jan said that Yerevan had no preconditions for border demarcation. Regarding agreed corridor connecting Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan, Aliyev 12 Jan said main condition in negotiations with Armenia is that highway follow “shortest route” and remain “open in all seasons”. As current chair of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Armenia 7-14 Jan deployed around 100 peacekeepers to Kazakhstan following Nur-Sultan’s request for CSTO assistance; parliamentary opposition bloc Gegham Nazaryan 7 Jan argued that “no Armenian serviceman should have left for that country” due to Kazakhstan’s alleged support to Azerbaijan (see Kazakhstan). Special envoys of Armenia and Turkey 14 Jan held first meeting for normalisation negotiations; after talks, foreign ministry described “positive atmosphere” and Turkish FM announced agreement “to continue negotiations without preconditions”. Armenian President Sargsyan 23 Jan announced his resignation, said he did not have “the necessary tools” to influence country’s domestic and foreign policies.

➔ **Azerbaijan Clashes with Armenia along state border resumed, jeopardising international efforts to reduce tensions.** Azerbaijani defence ministry 8 Jan claimed that Azerbaijani positions in Kelbajar region were “subjected to fire”; Armenian defence ministry same day alleged accusation “does not correspond to reality”. Armenian foreign ministry 11 Jan accused Azerbaijani forces of violating ceasefire using artillery and UAVs against positions in Gegharkunik region in clashes that killed three Armenian and one Azerbaijani soldiers; Azerbaijani defence ministry same day said Armenia “bears full responsibility”. President Aliyev 12 Jan warned Armenia against not recognising Azerbaijan’s “territorial integrity”, said Baku would respond in kind. Russian FM Sergey Lavrov 14 Jan announced Armenia had submitted proposal on process of demarcation and

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➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan remained high amid skirmishes, as Baku protested visits to Nagorno-Karabakh by French and Russian politicians.** As tensions at Armenian-Azerbaijani state border flared up mid-Jan amid series of deadly clashes (see Armenia and Azerbaijan), de facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities 10 Jan claimed Azerbaijani troops fired shots in Krasny Bazar (Karmir Shuka) village in Martuni region, and firefighters arriving at scene near kindergarten came under fire; Azerbaijani defence ministry same day denied claims of Azerbaijani troops firing at civilians or civilian facilities. Following Dec visit to Nagorno-Karabakh by Russian MP from ruling United Russia party, Azerbaijani President Aliyev sent letter to United Russia Chairman Dmitry Medvedev “strongly objecting” to visit that he said lacked Baku’s permission. In reaction to Nagorno-Karabakh visit by French presidential candidate Valérie Pécresse, Aliyev 12 Jan said Baku would not have let Pécresse leave if it knew about visit in advance; French FM Jean-Yves Le Drian 18 Jan protested “unacceptable” comment, while noting with regret that Pécresse did not consult French govt beforehand.

➡ **Georgia Relative calm returned to domestic politics amid criticism over controversial law.** After former President Mikhail Saakashvili and his supporters agreed to cease hunger strike in Dec, political tensions eased off; hearings of Saakashvili’s corruption case continued during month. Leadership of main opposition party United National Movement (UNM) 10 Jan changed key positions, vacating party chair. Irakli Kobakhidze of ruling party Georgian Dream 17 Jan said ruling party consolidated as ever. UNM 31 Jan ended its boycott of parliament, seeking commission to investigate treatment of Saakashvili and warning of “fierce Spring protests”. President Zourabichvili 13 Jan signed off controversial law amendment that abolished State Inspector’s Office, govt body that had launched investigation into alleged violations of penitentiary office related to imprisonment of Saakashvili; move prompted criticism from UN country team and numerous Georgian NGOs as well as U.S., which 3 Jan said amendment “undermined government accountability” and “damaged Georgia’s aspirations for NATO and European Union membership”. Amid U.S.-Russia negotiations on European security architecture, FM David Zalkaliani 6 Jan spoke to U.S. Deputy Sec State Wendy Sherman, insisting on Georgia’s freedom to “pursue an independent foreign and security policy”; FM 17-18 Jan visited NATO headquarters in Belgian capital Brussels to reiterate Georgian aspiration to join NATO. Meanwhile, head of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and special representative of OSCE chairperson-in-

office for South Caucasus 20 Jan jointly facilitated 104th meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, format bringing together Georgian and Russian officials along with de facto authorities and foreign mediators; participants “focused on ongoing detention cases”, also discussed impact of “protracted closure of crossing points” while co-facilitators “noted with concern the increased number of detentions in recent weeks”. Following Dec violence around opposition rally in breakaway Abkhazia, de facto Prosecutor’s Office 8 Jan detained at least four individuals; opposition People’s and Patriotic Union of Abkhazia, group uniting several key opposition groups that led Dec protests and opposition lawmakers, 8 Jan condemned detentions, which it said are politically motivated.

➡ **Russia (internal) Crackdown on opposition supporters and other forms of dissent continued across country.** Govt financial agency Rosfin monitoring 14 Jan included opposition leader Alexei Navalny associates Leonid Volkov and Ivan Zhdanov on extremist and terrorist organisations list, blocking their bank accounts; Rosfin 25 Jan also listed Navalny and 11 of his associates. Interior ministry 26 Jan issued wanted notice for Oleg Navalny, younger brother of Alexei Navalny, after authorities asked court to replace Oleg Navalny’s suspended sentence with real one. One-year anniversary of Alexei Navalny’s return to Russia 17 Jan saw rallies in multiple countries including U.S., Canada, Australia, Germany and France to demand his release; EU same day reiterated condemnation of “incomprehensible” prosecution, and called for release of Navalny as well as ex-chief of Navalny Support Group Lilia Chanysheva, detained last Nov. Armed men from Chechnya 20 Jan abducted Zarema Musayeva, wife of former federal judge and mother of lawyer working for human rights organisation Committee against Torture, from flat in Nizhny Novgorod city; Musayeva was told she was witness in fraud case and taken to Chechnya, where she was detained for 15 days. Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov 21 Jan declared that “this family is waiting either in prison or underground”, and declared entire family “terrorist accomplices”; EU 22 Jan demanded release of Musayeva, “end to the prosecution of human rights defenders” and investigations into violations such as extrajudicial executions and torture.

↓ **U.S./Russia Diplomatic row between Moscow and Washington over Russian military build-up in Ukraine and European security more broadly escalated.** As U.S. and Russia continued negotiations during month, notably in swiss city Geneva 10 Jan, Moscow continued to demand legally binding guarantees from U.S. and NATO against Ukraine’s accession to NATO and that alliance pull back forces from Eastern Europe. Tensions persisted amid growing Russian military build-up near Ukraine (see Ukraine). U.S. Deputy Sec State Wendy Sherman 18 Jan warned “Russia could launch military attack at any time”; Russian armed forces 18 Jan arrived in Belarus ahead of joint military exercises in country due to run until 20 Feb. U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 19 Jan said Russia could attack Ukraine “on very short notice” and warned again of tough sanctions; Moscow 19 Jan claimed it had no intention “to attack, strike or invade Ukraine”, while Head of Russian delegation to Vienna talks on military security and arms control Konstantin Gavrillov warned that “West either accepts our proposals or other ways will be found to ensure Russia’s security”. As Russian FM Sergey Lavrov and Blinken 21 Jan met in Geneva, Russia 21 Jan requested foreign NATO troops withdraw from Romania and Bulgaria. U.S. 24 Jan announced 8,500 soldiers in state of alert ready to be deployed on European soil and Biden same day said he would “personally

sanction Russian President Putin” if Russia invades Ukraine; Kremlin next day said sanctions would not be “painful”. U.S. 26 Jan formally rejected Russia’s demand to bar Ukraine from NATO and pushed for diplomatic solution “to maintain and defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine”.

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➡ **Belarus President Lukashenko scheduled constitutional referendum and announced forthcoming military exercises with Russia in Feb, stoking international tensions.** Lukashenko 20 Jan scheduled referendum on constitutional amendments for 27 Feb; amendments would allow Lukashenko to remain in office until at latest 2035, establish immunity for former president(s), and introduce govt-friendly All-Belarus People’s Assembly as second legislative body. Western media mid-Jan reported arrival of Russian military equipment, as Lukashenko 17 Jan announced joint military drill with Russia at western and southern borders lasting from early Feb to 20 Feb; U.S. same day described troop movements as “extremely dangerous”, while Lithuania 19 Jan warned of “direct threat” (see Russia-U.S.). Tensions with neighbours continued. Govt 5 Jan expelled Polish consul following border crisis in recent months. Lithuania 13 Jan cancelled contract on delivering fertilisers to Belarus. Iraqi foreign ministry 16 Jan announced return of 4,000 Iraqi citizens “trapped” at Belarusian-EU border. UN Aviation Agency 18 Jan finalised report on Ryanair aircraft incident with “further action” pending agency’s council members meeting scheduled for 31 Jan; agency 18 Jan concluded that official information on bomb threat was “deliberately false”. Regarding incident, U.S. 20 Jan charged four govt officials. U.S. and EU 27 Jan called for immediate and unconditional release of “1,000 political prisoners.”

➡ 🇺🇸 **Ukraine U.S. rejected Russian demands for legal guarantees prohibiting NATO expansion, while tensions over Russian military build-up continued ahead of planned military exercises in Feb.** After Moscow 15 Dec proposed to U.S. draft agreement on security guarantees that included provision not to expand NATO eastward, U.S. 26 Jan provided written response rejecting demand after coordinating with Ukraine and European allies; U.S. urged Russia to dismantle its military build-up near Ukraine and continue diplomatic path; rejection followed 21 Jan meeting between U.S. Sec State Blinken and Russian FM Sergey Lavrov that ended without breakthrough (see Russia-U.S.). Meanwhile, Russia continued military build-up. Significant number of Russian personnel and equipment, including Iskander short-range ballistic missiles, during month arrived in Belarus ahead of “Allied Resolve” joint military exercises that will last until 20 Feb; Blinken 19 Jan said Russia may attack Ukraine at “very short notice”, while President Zelenskyy same day said risks of invasion have not increased. Zelenskyy 20 Jan suggested, however, Russia may attempt to occupy Kharkiv city under pretext of protection of Russian-speaking population. Amid tensions, Ukraine has been receiving significant military assistance from U.S., UK and other European countries. Situation in Donbas conflict zone remained relatively calm as shelling decreased compared to Dec; no civilian casualties from live-fire reported while govt sources reported one serviceman killed by live fire, two killed by explosive device detonations, seven injured in Jan; two Russian-backed armed group members were killed during month, one from live fire, and one fighter was injured. Despite tensions, Kyiv continued seeking new Normandy summit with leaders of

four countries (Germany, France, Russia, Ukraine). Political advisers of leaders 26 Jan met in French capital Paris; Dmitry Kozak, deputy chief of staff of the Presidential Executive Office, said sides agreed that July 2020 ceasefire agreement in Donbas should be adhered to unconditionally; advisers agreed to meet in German capital Berlin in two weeks to discuss discrepancies over political part of the Minsk agreements. Govt 25 Jan decided to withdraw from parliament its transition policy law that defined Russia as aggressor state and described Kyiv's vision of how to reintegrate territories seized by Russia's proxies.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus UN Sec-Gen Antonio Guterres warned about diminishing prospects of negotiated solution.** UN Security Council 17 Jan discussed two new reports on Cyprus submitted by UN Sec-Gen Guterres on 3 Jan in three-hour long meeting, during which Special Envoy Colin Stewart told members that UN mission is now focused on building trust and respect between two communities to foster better environment for building peace; in reports, Guterres had warned “without decisive action, continuing dynamics in and around Cyprus and electoral timelines could render future efforts to reach a mutually agreeable settlement to the Cyprus issue unattainable” and noted “further deepening of mistrust” between communities. In response to reports, Republic of Cyprus 4 Jan voiced disappointment for “downplaying the Turkish side's aggressive conduct” while Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 7 Jan emphasised importance of “institutional cooperation on the basis of sovereign equality and an equal international regime”, adding that opening of Maraş/Varosha in Oct 2020 was done in accordance with civil rights and does not go against relevant UN resolutions. In his annual meeting with ambassadors of EU member states, Turkish President Erdoğan 13 Jan asserted that solution can only be reached by “acknowledging the sovereign equality and equal international status of the Turkish Cypriot people”; he also accused EU of acting as “mouthpiece” for Greek Cypriot side. In snap elections held in de facto Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on 23 Jan, right-wing National Unity Party won with around 40 per cent of vote; voter turnout was at record low of just under 58 per cent. UN Security Council 28 Jan renewed mandate of UN's peacekeeping force on Cyprus until 31 July 2022, but expressed regret over lack of progress in restarting formal negotiations.

➔ **Turkey Military operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party continued in south east and northern Iraq, while security forces detained over 100 Islamic State-linked suspects.** Military operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) remained concentrated in northern Iraq, but some clashes took place in Turkey's south east. Notably, IED explosion 8 Jan killed three Turkish soldiers in Şanlıurfa's Akçakale district on Turkey-Syria border; military in subsequent days responded with operations targeting PKK members in border area. Ground operations in south east were concentrated in rural areas of Tunceli, Mardin and Şanlıurfa provinces. Air operations in northern Iraq and northern Syria continued targeting higher-ranking members of PKK. In Syria, bomb attacks targeting Turkish security forces and Ankara-backed rebels in Turkish-controlled Afrin, al-Bab and Azaz mid-month prompted Turkish military retaliation (see Syria). Govt 4 Jan submitted request to parliament to lift legislative immunities of 24 pro-

Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party MPs, including party's current Co-Chair Pervin Buldan. Security units' operations against Islamic State (ISIS) continued during month. Police detained around 100 individuals with suspected links to ISIS across country. Notably, in significant raid on 12 Jan, police detained 21 individuals, including ten Syrian and four Iraqi nationals, in southern Mersin province. Maritime tensions in eastern Mediterranean with Greece continued. Greek FM Nikos Dendias 4 Jan said Turkey's rhetoric against Greece "has reached a level we have not seen for years"; Defence Minister Hulusi Akar 8 Jan accused Greece of undermining NATO by attempting to form alliances within bloc. Fifth meeting of the Turkish-Greek Joint Economic Committee 26 Jan commenced in Greek capital Athens for first time since 2010; Turkey and Greece signed Fifth Term Protocol to enhance bilateral trade relations and cooperation in several fields at Committee meeting. Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar same day said Turkey was ready to engage with Greek side in fourth round of military-to-military talks on confidence-building measures. Meanwhile, Ankara and Yerevan continued steps to normalise relations. Armenia 1 Jan lifted embargo on Turkish goods; Turkish Special Envoy Serdar Kılıç and Armenia's Special Envoy Ruben Rubinyan 14 Jan met for first time in Russian capital Moscow in "positive and constructive atmosphere".

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## Central Asia

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↓ **Kazakhstan Localised protests over fuel price turned into nationwide rioting heavily repressed by security forces, killing over 200 people.** Protesters 2 Jan flooded streets of petroleum-producing city of Zhanaozen in west after govt doubled fuel prices; protests spread rapidly across country, first in other oil- and mineral-producing regions and then to most regions. In Almaty city, thousands of demonstrators 5 Jan shouted "Old man out" in reference to former President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who led country until 2019 and retained position of head of National Security Council thereafter. In response to unrest, govt 5 Jan resigned and President Tokayev same day removed Nazarbayev from security council position, as well as senior intelligence official Karim Masimov. Protesters 5 Jan took control of Almaty's airport. Amid unrest, Tokayev 5 Jan requested regional alliance Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to send forces to guard govt facilities in capital Nur-Sultan; Russia 7 Jan announced regional forces, comprising notably Russian and Armenian troops, retook Almaty's airport. Tokayev 11 Jan announced beginning of departure of CSTO forces on 13 Jan. Media reports indicated authorities detained up to 12,000 people and officials reported 225 deaths during unrest, with over 2,000 requiring hospital treatment. Last four Russian military transport aircraft with Russian CSTO peacekeepers on board 19 Jan departed from Nur-Sultan.

↓ **Kyrgyzstan Deadly clashes erupted along disputed border with Tajikistan.** Clashes along disputed border between Tajikistan's north-western Sughd province and Kyrgyzstan's south-western Batken province 27-28 Jan killed two civilians and injured ten people – six servicemen and four civilians – on Tajik side, while 11 were injured on Kyrgyz side; clashes reportedly forced some 1,500 local residents to flee before ceasefire was agreed 28 Jan. Commander of Russia's Central Military District Alexander Lapin 24 Jan announced Russia will reinforce its military bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with new weapons and equipment.

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➡ **Uzbekistan** **Authorities detained suspected members of proscribed group.** Police in capital Tashkent 26 Jan announced detention of dozens of alleged members of Islamist group Katiba al-Tawhid wal-Jihad that authorities banned in 2016. Media reports 19 Jan revealed Uzbek and Russian security officers detained individual from Uzbekistan in Russia for attempting to join militants in Syria.