

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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↓ **Bosnia and Herzegovina International High Representative for Bosnia imposed ban on genocide denial, prompting Bosnian Serb representatives to announce boycott of state institutions.** In one of his final acts in office, outgoing head of Bosnia's Office of the High Representative (OHR), Austrian diplomat Valentin Inzko, 23 July imposed change in Bosnian criminal law, outlawing denial of 1995 Srebrenica genocide and imposing up to five years imprisonment for genocide denial and glorification of war criminals; OHR is mandated with implementation of 1995 Dayton peace agreement and empowered to enact laws and remove elected officials. Bosnian Serb leader and member of joint presidency Milorad Dodik same day rejected decree and reportedly threatened "dissolution" of Bosnia. Bosnian Serb political representatives from all political parties in Republika Srpska's National Assembly 27 July began boycott of joint presidency, parliament and govt until withdrawal of decision. Republika Srpska parliament 30 July passed laws blocking approval of Inzko's decision and permitting up to 15 years imprisonment for "violating the reputation of the Republika Srpska". Previously, Russia in draft resolution co-sponsored by China called for UN Security Council to abolish OHR by July 2022; resolution 22 July failed to pass. Meanwhile, police 14 July arrested intelligence chief Osman Mehmedagic for alleged money laundering, abuse of office and document forgery; hundreds next day protested in front of State Prosecutor's Office in capital Sarajevo in show of support for Mehmedagic.

➔ **Kosovo EU-led Belgrade-Pristina talks continued in Brussels, concluding without significant progress.** Following talks in June, PM Kurti and Serbian President Vučić 19 July participated in their second face-to-face meeting as part of Belgrade-Pristina dialogue hosted by EU in Belgian capital Brussels; dialogue focused on missing persons and other issues. After closing of talks, EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčak 20 July said "very little progress" had been made, with both parties accusing other of unwillingness to make compromise; parties agreed to resume talks in Sept. Vučić 20 July told media that Serbia had accepted points in EU proposal reportedly refused by Kurti, such as bolstering efforts to identify remains of missing persons, refraining from destabilising actions, and holding monthly meetings to prepare for high-level talks; Kurti same day stated, however, that Vučić had rejected his six-point "Declaration of Peace" along with request for elimination of alleged barriers to free trade. Parliament 7 July adopted resolution condemning 1995 Srebrenica massacre and recognising it as genocide; representatives from Serb party boycotted vote.

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## Caucasus

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↓ 🇦🇲\* **Armenia** **Tensions with Azerbaijan rose along state border with deadliest clashes since Autumn 2020 war; fighting could intensify in coming weeks.** On international border, despite striking second deal to exchange prisoners and mine maps (see Nagorno-Karabakh), Armenia and Azerbaijan traded unprecedented number of accusations of ceasefire violations during month as exchanges of fire occurred almost daily, primarily in Gegharkunik/Kelbajar and Yeraskh/Nakhchivan regions of state border of two republics. Fighting 6-26 July killed at least one Azerbaijani and one Armenian, and wounded three Azerbaijanis and five Armenians (one of whom remains in critical condition). Azerbaijan 14-15 July also claimed that Armenian forces inside conflict zone had fired at their positions in Shusha town. Deadliest clashes since Autumn 2020 escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh 27-28 July erupted on international border; Armenian foreign ministry accused Azerbaijani armed forces of infiltrating its territory and attacking its military positions; Baku confirmed incident left two Azerbaijani soldiers wounded and Yerevan said three Armenian soldiers were killed and six wounded. Armenian defence ministry 28 July confirmed Russian peacekeepers brokered ceasefire, which remained in force by end of month despite continued exchanges of fire; concerns remained that fighting could resume in August. Earlier in month, Armenia objected to Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) secretary general's 3 July characterisation of standoff with Azerbaijan as "border incident", thus ruling out triggering of CSTO's collective defence clause; Armenian Security Council Secretary Armen Grigoryan 6 July responded that "border incidents cannot last two months". PM Pashinyan 7 July met with Russian President Putin to discuss security concerns along border. President of European Council Charles Michel 18 July said EU was ready to support border demarcation efforts. Meanwhile, after opposition bloc Armenia Alliance 2 July requested Constitutional Court to overturn June parliamentary election result, court 17 July upheld Central Election Commission's decision to award election victory to PM Pashinyan's Civil Contract party; opposition parties decided to take their seats in new parliament, due to hold its first session on 2 August.

↓ 🇦🇲\* **Azerbaijan** **Tensions with Armenia rose along state border with deadliest clashes since Autumn 2020 war; fighting could intensify in coming weeks.** On international border, despite striking second deal to exchange prisoners and mine maps (see Nagorno-Karabakh), Armenia and Azerbaijan traded unprecedented number of accusations of ceasefire violations during month as exchanges of fire occurred almost daily, primarily in Gegharkunik/Kelbajar and Yeraskh/Nakhchivan regions of state border of two republics. Fighting 6-26 July killed at least one Azerbaijani and one Armenian, and wounded three Azerbaijanis and five Armenians (one of whom remains in critical condition). Azerbaijan 14-15 July claimed that Armenian forces inside conflict zone had fired at their positions in Shusha town. Deadliest clashes since Autumn 2020 escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh 27-28 July erupted on international border; Armenian foreign ministry accused Azerbaijani armed forces of infiltrating its territory and attacking its military positions; Baku confirmed incident left two Azerbaijani soldiers wounded and Yerevan said three Armenian soldiers were killed and six wounded. Armenian defence ministry 28 July confirmed Russian peacekeepers brokered ceasefire, which

remained in force by end of month despite continued exchanges of fire; concerns remained that fighting could further resume in August. Earlier in month, President Aliyev 7 July signed decree to re-organise economic regions establishing new regions “Karabakh” – including territories partly controlled by Russian peacekeepers and areas not under Azerbaijani control such as Stepanakert and Khojaly cities – and “East Zangezur”. Since 20 June Armenian election that handed victory to PM Pashinyan, Baku intensified calls for peace deal with Armenia and mutual recognition of territorial integrity and borders; Aliyev 14 July warned it would be “a very big mistake” for Armenia to refuse peace negotiations.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to second deal exchanging Armenian detainees for landmine maps amid ongoing diplomatic tensions and border hostilities.** In second deal of its kind since June, talks under Russian auspices led Baku 3 July to release 15 Armenian detainees in exchange for Armenian landmine maps of Fuzuli and Zangilan districts. Tensions with Yerevan rose, however, after Azerbaijani govt 10 July organised visit with diplomatic delegations and international organisations in Azerbaijan to Shusha town; Azerbaijani pro-govt media and social media accounts immediately criticised absence of U.S., French and Russian ambassadors from visit, said it proved failure of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group to make diplomatic progress. Armenian foreign ministry 13 July praised U.S., France and Russia for not joining trip, stated that it deemed visit to Shusha – which it called “occupied territory” – unacceptable. Azerbaijan 14-15 July claimed that Armenian forces inside conflict zone had fired at their positions in Shusha town. Hostilities and tensions rose along state border as both sides claimed unprecedented number of ceasefire violations including regular exchanges of fire throughout July (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Meanwhile, Azerbaijan welcomed U.S. participation in peace process; in letter to U.S. President Biden, Azerbaijani President Aliyev 3 July invited U.S. to help establish lasting peace and trust between Baku and Yerevan, adding: “We would like to see U.S. companies as partners” in reconstruction work in Nagorno-Karabakh. OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs 13 July called for resumption of high-level political dialogue; Aliyev next day warned it would be “a very big mistake” for Armenia to refuse peace negotiations and Armenian PM Pashinyan 15 July responded that Yerevan was ready to resume peace talks under auspices of OSCE Minsk Group, while accusing Azerbaijan of “destructive actions and statements”. President Aliyev 7 July signed decree establishing new economic regions that include territories not under Azerbaijani control (see Azerbaijan).

⚡ **Georgia Far-right mob attacks at Pride event in capital Tbilisi undermined political reconciliation deal; engagement between Tbilisi and breakaway territories displayed some positive signs.** Pride march 5 July held in capital Tbilisi, but quickly sparked backlash from far-right demonstrators who clashed with pro-LGBTQ+ participants, leaving over 50 journalists injured; organisers same day cancelled march in light of near-absent police protection and far-right attacks. PM Gharibashvili same day claimed “radical opposition” led by former President Saakashvili was behind march to spread unrest; authorities’ failure to prevent violence sparked international criticism, including from Western embassies, along with EU and UN representatives. Political tensions heightened further after confirmation that cameraman Aleksandre Lashkarava had died 11 July from injuries suffered during 5 July disorder; 19 civil society

organisations immediately called on Gharibashvili and Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri to resign, while hundreds 11-12 July protested in Tbilisi, and smaller protest took place in Black Sea port city Batumi, demanding PM's resignation; in Tbilisi, scuffles 12 July broke out between govt and opposition MPs in parliament. Reconciliation deal between govt and opposition faced further strains after govt 12 July appointed six Supreme Court judges in contravention of April agreement, sparking criticism from EU and U.S. officials 14-15 July. Amid growing political turmoil, ruling Georgian Dream party 28 July announced that it considers EU-brokered April deal "annulled". Meanwhile, following 53rd round of Geneva International Discussions held late June, Inguri crossing between breakaway Abkhazia region and Tbilisi-controlled territory 5 July reopened after 478-day closure due to COVID-19. Georgian and South Ossetia representatives 8 July agreed technical solution to cross-line water supply issues. As part of exchange of detainees, South Ossetian de facto leader Anatoly Bibilov 14 July pardoned Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze who was detained in July 2020.

➡ **Russia (internal) Authorities continued crackdown on independent media and opposition, and launched security operations against jihadist networks.** Authorities continued to impose restrictions on independent media and NGOs operating inside country. Notably, Prosecutor General's Office 15 July declared independent media outlet Proekt "undesirable organization", making it first media outlet to receive status. Independent association of lawyers and journalists Team 29 18 July announced its closure, fearing criminal prosecution after authorities blocked its website; Team 29 had represented in court imprisoned opposition figure Alexei Navalny's organisations as well as former journalist Ivan Safronov, accused of treason. At request of Prosecutor General's Office, federal agency for mass media (Roskomnadzor) 26 July blocked access to websites associated with Navalny, citing "promotion" of "prohibited extremist activities"; agency also requested Google to block YouTube channels of Navalny's associates. Meanwhile in North Caucasus, security forces 3 July launched security operation in Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, killing total of five militants. Elsewhere, security forces 7 July reported on late June-early July operations in Penza, Ufa and Chelyabinsk cities, which led to capture of four leaders and 11 members of international jihadist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami. Security forces 9 July arrested suspected Islamic State militant plotting attack in Moscow region and 15 July arrested individual allegedly plotting attack in capital Moscow.

➡ **Russia-U.S. Moscow and Washington voiced concerns about hypersonic missiles; senior officials held first strategic stability dialogue meeting.** Russian defence ministry 19 July reported successful launch of Zircon hypersonic missile; U.S. Department of Defence same day called weapon "potentially destabilising" and warned that it is "compatible with nuclear weapons". Russian embassy in Washington D.C. next day warned U.S. against deploying the as yet non-existent American hypersonic missiles in Europe, which it said would be "extremely destabilising". U.S. Deputy Sec of State Wendy Sherman and Russian deputy defence minister 28 July met in Geneva, Switzerland, for start of U.S.-Russia bilateral Strategic Stability Dialogue, established following June summit between Presidents Biden and Putin; Putin's spokesman same day said it was "very positive sign" that talks were taking place.

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## Eastern Europe

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➡ **Belarus Opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya sought greater U.S. support as govt stepped up crackdown on independent media.** Opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya visited U.S. capital Washington and 28 July met U.S. President Biden who declared U.S. “stands with the people of Belarus in their quest for democracy and universal human rights”; earlier, Tsikhanouskaya 19-20 July met U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken and U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, said she had requested U.S. “to be the guarantors of our independence” and “politically pressure the regime”. Meanwhile, authorities 8-9 July raided offices of multiple media outlets, reportedly arresting 32 individuals. NGO Human Rights Watch 15 July accused govt of “massive, unprecedented raids and detentions against the Belarus human rights community” after authorities arrested at least 12 activists across ten cities previous day. Belarusian Association of Journalists, largest media association in country, 21 July said ministry of justice had filed lawsuit at Supreme Court in attempt to “liquidate” organisation. Court 27 July labelled Polish-funded news channel Belsat “extremist”, ordering its website and social media accounts be blocked. Lithuanian FM Gabrielius Landsbergis 2 July accused govt of seeking “to weaponize migration to weaken our resolve for sanctions” and Lithuanian PM Ingrida Šimonytė 7 July accused Belarusian govt of offering migrants from third countries flights to capital Minsk in order to transit across border into Lithuania; in letter to EU member states publicised 29 July, EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson described developments on border as “unacceptable instrumentalization of people for political purposes”; Lithuania border services 27 July revealed that over 2,300 migrants had been detained in July along border with Belarus, bringing number of detained migrants since Jan 2021 to 3,027 – compared to 81 in 2020.

↓ **Ukraine Deadly fighting intensified in Donbas conflict zone, while Kyiv expressed frustration over U.S. and German handling of Nord Stream II gas pipeline.** In Donbas conflict zone, fighting escalated. Notably, Ukrainian side reported shelling of its command posts in Donetsk and Luhansk regions with heavy weapons, killing three and injuring 11 servicemen on 13 and 26 July; armed groups reported seven fighters killed by Ukrainian army shelling on 28 and 30 July. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe special representative 22 July noted sustained increase in use of heavy weapons. Death toll and number of casualties also rose compared to previous months: Ukrainian govt forces suffered eight combat deaths and 32 injuries throughout July, per official sources; Russian-backed forces lost ten fighters and 14 suffered injuries, per reports from de facto officials; two civilians received shrapnel injuries per de facto and Ukrainian reports. Meanwhile, U.S.-German talks on Nord Stream II pipeline provoked controversy among Ukrainian officials as U.S. officials formally ended opposition to new pipeline, which is nearly completed, and is due to bypass existing Ukrainian pipeline and reduce associated Ukrainian revenues from transit of Russian gas. U.S. and Germany 20 July issued joint statement in which Berlin committed “to utilize all available leverage to facilitate an extension of up to ten years to Ukraine’s gas transit agreement with Russia, including appointing a special envoy to support these negotiations”; Berlin also pledged “to establish and administer” over \$1bn Green Fund for Ukraine to support Kyiv’s transition away from fossil fuels. In

response, FM Dmytro Kuleba next day released joint statement with Polish counterpart calling unnamed “proposals” to tackle potential security fallout from pipeline insufficient; in open letter, Parliament Speaker Dmitry Razumkov 22 July urged U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to maintain all pertinent sanctions as well as possibly levying new ones to prevent “completion and commissioning” of pipeline. Washington 21 July announced that first meeting between Presidents Biden and Zelenskyy would take place 30 August, when Zelenskyy is expected to press for larger U.S. role in Donbas peace process. Arsen Avakov, Ukraine’s longest-ever serving interior minister, 14 July resigned following years of corruption allegations. President Zelenskyy 27 July dismissed Commander of Ukrainian Armed Forces Ruslan Khomchak.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➡ **Cyprus Turkish Cypriot leader announced plan to take civilian control of area under Turkish military since 1974, sparking widespread international opposition, while maritime tensions continued.** Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 20 July announced that Turkish military would hand over 3.5-sq km section of sealed-off quarter of Varosha/Maraş to civilian “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (TRNC) control and Greek Cypriot property owners could apply to Turkish Cypriot administration for reparations. Announcement sparked international criticism: Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades called plan “illegal and unacceptable” and Greek MFA 20 July condemned action “in the strongest terms”, while UK, U.S., Germany and EU 20-22 July voiced strong opposition; UN Security Council 23 July unanimously called for “immediate reversal” of steps. EU 27 July condemned “Turkey’s unilateral steps”, prompting Turkish foreign ministry same day to call EU position “biased”. President Erdoğan 19-20 July visited “TRNC”, announcing plans to construct new govt complex for political leadership of “TRNC”. In maritime domain, Turkish Petroleum Corporation 9 July applied for new exploration licence in three areas off coast of Silifke in Mersin province, in zone that also includes significant parts of Greek Cypriot-claimed Exclusive Economic Zone. Tensions rose after Greek Cypriot police 16 July accused Turkish Cypriot Coast Guard vessel of firing warning shots at Greek Cypriot Coast Guard patrol in island’s northern gulf of Morphou, while allegedly violating Greek Cypriot territorial waters; Greek Cypriot official Marios Pelekanos said: “There is no excuse for this behaviour by the Turkish vessel”, while “TRNC” Security Forces Command called incident “fake news”. Meanwhile, Turkey and “TRNC” intensified efforts to secure diplomatic recognition of “TRNC”. Consular team of Pakistan embassy in Turkey 11 July conducted official three-day visit to de facto administration in north while Azerbaijani parliamentarians 16 July visited “TRNC”. UN Security Council 29 July extended mandate of UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus for six months until 31 Jan 2022.

➡ **Eastern Mediterranean Positive overtures between Greece and Turkey were tainted by diplomatic spat over cancelled football fixture amid ongoing maritime tensions.** Signs of conciliation between Greece and Turkey surfaced during month. Greek PM Mitsotakis 4 July appeared hopeful on short-term prospects of Greek-Turkish relations, stating: “I’m sure the summer of 2021 will be quieter than the summer of 2020 [...] what we have done is to clearly

delineate what our lines are”. In reference to feasibility of drilling in maritime zones contested with Greece, Turkish Energy Minister Fatih Dönmez 13 July said: “We do not drill where there is no possibility of finding anything”. Tensions rose, however, after Turkish football team Galatasaray 12 July cancelled match against Greek team Olympiakos due to take place in Greece after Greek authorities requested additional COVID-19 test upon arrival in country. Dispute escalated when Turkish foreign ministry 12 July said incident “shows [Greece’s] intolerance towards our country”, Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 13 July communicated Turkish discontent to Greek FM Nikos Dendias, and Turkish foreign ministry same day summoned Greek ambassador to convey “strong protest”; Greek officials maintained they were merely following public health rules. Meanwhile, Turkey’s Antalya Station announced advisory for gunnery exercises just north of Greece’s Rhodes island for 6-9 of July, while Greece’s Heraklion Station announced French vessel Nautical Geo – leased by Greece, Cyprus and Israel – started scientific research in north of Greece’s Crete island, from 14 July “until further notice”.

► **Turkey President Erdoğan made rhetorical overtures to Kurds, while military continued operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK); authorities arrested dozens of suspected jihadists.** President Erdoğan 9 July visited majority-Kurdish province of Diyarbakır, announcing govt had “launched the solution process” and promising “no more blood would spill”; Erdoğan also announced new project to turn Diyarbakır prison – infamous site where thousands of Kurds allegedly suffered torture during early 1980s – into cultural centre, provoking criticism from ultra-nationalist voices. Constitutional Court 1 July ruled that rights of unseated pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) MP Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu had been violated after parliament in March stripped him of MP status; police forcefully dispersed HDP protests in front of his prison complex before his 6 July release; parliament 16 July reinstated his MP status. Gunman 14 July attacked HDP’s district office in southern district of Marmaris; authorities in following days detained alleged gunman and four other suspects. Meanwhile, Turkish military continued operations against PKK in northern Iraq. Notably, Turkish media 26 July reported so-called Hakurk logistics area manager of PKK was killed in northern Iraq’s Hakurk region late June; PKK had not yet confirmed his death by end of month. In northern Syria, defence ministry 24 July confirmed two Turkish soldiers were killed and two wounded in People’s Protection Units (YPG)/PKK-attributed attack on their armoured vehicle in Turkish-controlled territory; NGO Syrian Observatory for Human Rights same day reported death of three Turkish soldiers from alleged YPG shelling in rural Aleppo. Security forces continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) across country. Police detained more than 140 individuals, most Syrian and Iraqi, for alleged ISIS ties throughout July. Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu 14 July announced that since July 2016 coup, authorities had “neutralised” 1,523 ISIS members and foiled three attacks in 2021.

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## Central Asia

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➡ **Kyrgyzstan Skirmishes broke out on Kyrgyz-Tajik border amid concerns over border security with Afghanistan.** Kyrgyz and Tajik forces 8 July reportedly exchanged gunfire along border in Leilek district, Batken region, killing one Kyrgyz border guard; guards 24 July reportedly exchanged fire on border between Batken oblast and Tajikistan's Sughd region. Kyrgyz authorities 29 July reportedly confirmed that in recent meetings with Tajik counterparts, sides delimited/demarcated additional 40km of border. Collective Security Treaty Organization Parliamentary Assembly 1 July convened in Tajik capital Dushanbe and expressed concern over intensity of fighting in Afghanistan. State Committee for National Security head Kamchybek Tashiev 8 July said withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan posed risks to country, particularly as "terrorist organizations have moved to an active phase of their activities in the Central Asian countries".

➡ **Tajikistan Skirmishes broke out on Tajik-Kyrgyz border while instability in Afghanistan continued to raise security concerns.** Tajik and Kyrgyz forces 8 July reportedly exchanged gunfire along border in Leilek district, Batken region, killing one Kyrgyz border guard; guards 24 July reportedly exchanged fire on border between Sughd region and Kyrgyzstan's Batken oblast. Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Parliamentary Assembly 1 July convened in capital Dushanbe and expressed concern over intensity of fighting in Afghanistan. FM Sirojiddin Muhriddin 1 July met U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in U.S. capital Washington where pair discussed situation in Afghanistan and Blinken "affirmed the U.S. commitment to Tajikistan's security, stability, and territorial integrity". President Rahmon 5 July ordered 20,000 reserve officers to Afghan border. After Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 7 July expressed willingness to use capabilities of Russian military base on Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan "to prevent any aggressive impulses", govt same day requested CSTO support and assistance to strengthen Tajik-Afghan border, two thirds of which govt says is under Taliban control. Deputy head of emergencies committee 23 July said govt was preparing to receive up to 100,000 Afghan refugees.

➡ **Uzbekistan Govt considered U.S. request to accept Afghan refugees following high-level meeting that reaffirmed shared interests.** FM Abdulaziz Kamilov 1 July met U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken in U.S. capital Washington, after which Blinken said: "We have strong shared interests when it comes to security in the region, particularly with regard to Afghanistan". Senior official 22 July said there existed no legal basis to agree to U.S. request to accept Afghan refugees who had cooperated with U.S., saying matter "cannot be decided immediately".