

# Europe and Central Asia

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## Balkans

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➔ **Bosnia International body implementing Dayton Peace Accord appointed new high representative.** Steering Board of Peace Implementation Council, international body established to oversee implementation of 1995 Dayton Peace Accord, 27 May named German politician Christian Schmidt as high representative with term starting 1 August; Russia dissented from decision and its embassy same day said Schmidt would not be legitimate without UN Security Council approval; Republika Srpska also denied legitimacy of appointment.

➔ **Kosovo Tensions persisted between Kosovo and Serbia at regional summit while Pristina announced intention to file genocide lawsuit against Belgrade.** During summit of Western Balkan nations in Slovenia, dispute between Serbian President Vučić and Kosovo President Osmani 16 May surfaced over wording of resolution on sanctity of state borders; Vučić reportedly opposed resolution as it would indirectly recognise borders of former breakaway province of Kosovo. At summit, Osmani declared that “Republic of Kosovo as a sovereign and independent country is a permanent project” while Vučić commented that Kosovo “would like to interpret the borders as it wishes”. Kosovo PM Albin Kurti 7 May confirmed that Kosovo intends to file genocide lawsuit against Serbia in International Court of Justice. Osmani 19 May dismissed 12 of country’s ambassadors following foreign ministry proposal to recall those who were political appointees of former govt. EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary and Special Representative for Western Balkans Matthew Palmer 31 May began visits to Kosovo; talks with PM Kurti, Osmani and other leaders aimed at preparing for dialogue with Serbia in June.

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## Caucasus

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↓ **Armenia In most significant escalation since Autumn 2020 war, border tensions with Azerbaijan turned deadly; meanwhile, preparations for 20 June snap elections proceeded.** Border tensions rose throughout month. Armenia 12-13 May reported advance of three Azerbaijani military groups in areas close to southern section of its state border, between Azerbaijani-controlled Kelbajar region and Armenian-controlled southern provinces of Syunik and Gegharkunik; Yerevan 27 May claimed up to 1,000 soldiers entered its territory, while Baku countered that new military positions were inside Azerbaijan. In most significant escalation and crisis since ceasefire that ended 2020 Autumn war, Armenian defence ministry 25 May said fighting with Azerbaijani forces along border of Armenia’s eastern Gegharkunik district killed one Armenian soldier; Baku same day said death had “nothing to do with the Azerbaijani side”. Azerbaijani defence ministry 27 May reported detention of six Armenian soldiers after their alleged attempt to cross to Kelbajar district; Yerevan same day said detention took place in its controlled territory. Azerbaijan defence ministry 28 May reported one Azerbaijani soldier wounded in exchange of fire with Armenian military at central

location of state border with Azerbaijan's exclave Nakhchivan; Yerevan denied involvement. After trip to border area, Armenian PM Pashinyan 27 May called on Azerbaijan to create demilitarised zone monitored by international observers or peacekeepers; Armenian FM Ara Ayvazyan same day announced his resignation over disagreements with PM. Prior to escalation, Armenia and Azerbaijan 12-18 May joined Russian-mediated talks aimed at demarcating border. Moscow 18 May proposed establishment of joint demarcation commission to look into border issues. Meanwhile, with political campaigning already under way in recent months, President Sarkissian 10 May signed official decree enabling snap parliamentary elections, scheduled for 20 June. After announcing candidacy, former president Robert Kocharyan (also former leader of de facto Nagorno-Karabakh) 9 May held mass rally in capital Yerevan, during which he claimed to be sole candidate able to guarantee Nagorno-Karabakh's future. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 19 May officially opened observation mission in Yerevan.

↓ **Azerbaijan** In most significant escalation since Autumn 2020 war, border tensions with Armenia turned deadly. Armenia 12-13 May reported advance of three Azerbaijani military groups in areas close to southern section of its state border, between Azerbaijani-controlled Kelbajar region and Armenian-controlled southern provinces of Syunik and Gegharkunik; Yerevan 27 May claimed up to 1,000 soldiers entered its territory while Baku countered that new military positions were inside Azerbaijan. In most significant escalation and crisis since ceasefire that ended 2020 Autumn war, Armenian defence ministry 25 May said fighting with Azerbaijani forces along border of Armenia's eastern Gegharkunik district killed one Armenian soldier; Baku same day said death had "nothing to do with the Azerbaijani side". Azerbaijani defence ministry 27 May reported detention of six Armenian soldiers after their alleged attempt to cross to Kelbajar district; Yerevan same day said detention took place in its controlled territory. Azerbaijan defence ministry 28 May reported one Azerbaijani soldier wounded in exchange of fire with Armenian military at central location of state border with Azerbaijan's exclave Nakhchivan; Yerevan denied involvement. After trip to border area, Pashinyan 27 May called on Azerbaijan to create demilitarised zone monitored by international observers or peacekeepers. Prior to escalation, Armenia and Azerbaijan 12-18 May joined Russian-mediated talks aimed at demarcating border. Moscow 18 May proposed establishment of joint demarcation commission to look into border issues. Separately, President Ilham Aliyev 7 May signed decree declaring recently controlled city of Shusha inside Nagorno-Karabakh territory as Azerbaijan's cultural capital.

➔ **Georgia** Govt and opposition focused on implementing EU and U.S.-brokered April agreement that ended political crisis. In line with EU and U.S.-brokered deal last month that concluded months-long political stalemate following Oct 2020 elections, main opposition parties and civil society representatives throughout May discussed amendments of electoral code – including provisions to consider more opposition representatives in top leadership of Central Election Commission and installation of video cameras at all electoral precincts ahead of local elections. Authorities 10 May released opposition United National Movement (UNM) leader Nika Melia from his pre-trial detention. EU and U.S. lawmakers throughout month continued to call on European Georgia and UNM opposition parties to relinquish their hard-line positions, sign brokered agreement

and enter parliament; European Georgia party 18 May said it would continue boycott of parliament, although most party members had already joined parliament in their individual capacity. Ending months-long boycott, UNM 30 May decided to join parliament.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh Despite rising border tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia, NK conflict zone remained largely stable.**

Russian FM Sergey Lavrov 5-6 May visited Armenia's capital Yerevan and 10-11 May Azerbaijan's capital Baku, discussing issues with post-war processes and calling for release of Armenian prisoners of war and detainees as well as for access of international organisations to Nagorno-Karabakh (NK). Azerbaijani President Aliyev 10 May criticised Armenia for refusing to allow transport corridor through Armenia's southern region of Syunik. After Armenia 12-13 May reported advance of three Azerbaijani military groups in areas close to southern section of its state border, rising tensions on state border turned deadly, as one Armenian soldier killed, in most significant escalation since ceasefire that ended 2020 Autumn war (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Inside NK, de facto General Prosecutor's Office 17 May reported shooting at military positions of local Armenian forces located close to Sos village, south of line of contact of 2020 war. Defence ministry of Azerbaijan 26 May reported shooting at its soldiers located in Shusha city; Armenia's defence minister next day denied reports. Meanwhile, three opposition parties of NK's de facto parliament 20 May called on president Arayik Harutyunyan to resign; Harutyunyan had promised in Dec 2020 to call for snap elections when situation stabilised in de facto entity. NK's de facto Minister of State and Minister of Finance Grigori Martirosyan 28 May resigned saying that he took decision months ago, but decided to stay in post to help with response to post-war crisis.

➔ **Russia (internal) New legislation could further restrict space for opposition; meanwhile, authorities arrested ISIS supporter in North Caucasus.**

Lower chamber of parliament 18 May passed first reading of three bills which could further restrict space for civil society and opposition. Notably, third bill intends to target individuals associated with activities of civil society and religious groups later declared as "extremist" or "terrorist", with sanctions preventing them from running for parliament for several years; two other bills broaden the scope of "undesirable" organisations by banning participation in activities abroad. NGO Amnesty International same day called on parliamentarians to reject bills which include "new muzzles on individuals who criticize the government", said bills constitute "brazen attack" against movement led by opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who currently faces charges of fraud. Lower chamber 26 May however adopted third bill; third bill needs to be approved by upper chamber Federation Council and signed by president to become law. Navalny 25 May said authorities had opened three new criminal investigations against him. In North Caucasus, security forces 15 May detained former member of Chechen militant group accused by Russian authorities of past involvement in armed rebellion and attempted murder of security forces in Yessentuki, Stavropol region. Security services 25 May reported detention of suspected Islamic State (ISIS) supporter in Stavropol region in previous month for allegedly planning terrorist attack.

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## Eastern Europe

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➔ **Belarus** **Amid ongoing repression of opposition and independent media, authorities sparked international condemnation after forcibly diverting passenger flight to arrest critic.** Authorities 23 May scrambled fighter jet to forcibly divert passenger flight headed for Lithuania to land in capital Minsk, citing bomb threat; upon landing, security forces detained opposition activist and journalist Raman Pratasevich, sparking international outcry and condemnation from U.S., NATO, UK and EU and its member states, among others; in response, EU heads of state 24 May imposed new sanctions on President Lukashenka's govt while U.S. 28 May announced forthcoming sanctions. Russia's refusal to allow flights bypassing Belarus to enter its airspace fuelled speculation that Moscow might be mulling ban in support of Minsk that would risk escalating incident into larger East-West standoff; President Putin's spokesman 28 May said Russian air traffic controllers were working to resolve what was technical issue. Meanwhile, Chyhunachny district court 4 May sentenced four associates of exiled opposition leader *Sviatlana* Tsikhanouskaya to six-and-a-half years imprisonment for role in organising 2020-2021 anti-govt protests. Authorities targeted independent media, arresting and, in numerous instances, sentencing journalists to prison terms. Notably, police 19 May raided office of well-known independent news site Tut.by and homes of several of site's editors, accusing organisation of avoiding tax; Tsikhanouskaya 18 May called arrests "planned attack on our journalists & media" while U.S. State Dept same day said raids were "systematic effort to stifle independent voices and punish journalists". Opposition continued efforts to rally international support. Tsikhanouskaya 6 May called on U.S. to "use its diplomacy to further isolate Lukashenko" and 9 May urged Finland to take lead in initiating roundtable talks between govt and civil society.

➔ **Ukraine** **Donbas ceasefire continued to falter and peace process remained stalled, while fears of large-scale Russian invasion subsided.** Fighting continued throughout month in Donbas conflict zone: shelling killed one civilian, live fire left one injured and mines injured three more. Ukrainian and Russian-backed forces suffered four and 12 fatalities, respectively. Ukraine's foreign ministry 13 May said "the threat of military provocations remains unchanged". After sides failed to agree on recommitment to terms of July 2020 ceasefire in late April when Russian envoys to Minsk Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) demanded that Kremlin proxies in so-called People's Republics be included in agreement, sides revisited prospect of recommitting to ceasefire at 19-22 May TCG meeting but made no progress. At same meeting, sides struck preliminary agreement to greenlight opening of new civilian front-line checkpoints in Luhansk oblast through providing security guarantees for staff and civilians; it however remains unclear whether so-called republics will assent to checkpoints' opening absent direct negotiations with Kyiv. Meanwhile, military tensions with Russia continued to slowly decline following Moscow's late April announcement that it would withdraw some of its troops stationed near Ukraine's borders. In his second annual presidential press conference, President Zelenskyy 20 May expressed hopes for "direct talks with the President of the Russian Federation" as well as "the inclusion of the US in this discussion"; while he did not specify format for these talks, he rebuffed idea that peace would be impossible until current Russian regime collapses. Zelenskyy 20 May

called U.S. decision previous day to waive some sanctions related to Nordstream 2 pipeline “a serious political victory” for Moscow; Ukraine’s parliament 21 May voted in landslide for resolution calling on U.S. congress to override decision and use all legal means to “completely and irreversibly stop” pipeline’s construction. Kremlin 20 May confirmed that discussions on Zelenskyy-Putin meeting were in motion. Following Belarusian authorities’ forceful diversion of passenger flight on 23 May, Kyiv 26 May announced cessation of air travel with its neighbour (see Belarus).

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus** **President Anastasiades urged Turkish Cypriots to abandon two-state solution while Republic of Cyprus held parliamentary elections.** Following late April 5+1 informal meeting between UN, leaders of two Cypriot communities and three guarantor powers Greece, Turkey and UK, gap between positions of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots remained wide in terms of desired outcome for Cyprus settlement. Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 27 May reacted harshly to conditions put forth by Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades during his visit to Brussels, which included that Turkish Cypriots should abandon their two-state solution proposition. In parliamentary elections held in Republic of Cyprus 30 May, ruling conservative DISY party emerged in first place but fell short of outright majority. UN Special Envoy for Cyprus Jane Hall Lute, due to visit Greek capital Athens, Turkish capital Ankara and Republic of Cyprus capital Nicosia next month to seek common ground for new round of talks.

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean** **Greek and Turkish foreign ministers held second meeting on regional dialogue while both parties resumed new round of military talks.** Following talks in Greek capital Athens between Greek FM Nikos Dendias and Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, sides 31 May announced steps to deepen commercial ties through 25 economic cooperation programs; Greek and Turkish leaders now due to meet on sidelines of NATO summit in June. Ahead of meeting with Turkish counterpart, Greek FM Dendias 14 May said: “We have to find a way to resolve issues with Turkey. And if we cannot find a solution, at least we could find a way to manage our differences”. Turkish and Greek military delegations held videoconference on confidence-building measures 26-27 May; sides could not agree on new measures or recommit to old ones, but announced they would hold next round of military-to-military talks in Turkish capital Ankara in coming months. Maritime tensions persisted. Athens issued advisories for live-fire exercises in disputed waters south-east of Katpathos 14-21 May, prompting Ankara to state that Greece did not have jurisdiction to make such announcements. Starting on 25 May, Turkey carried out large-scale military drill in Aegean and eastern Mediterranean with participation of more than 25,000 personnel. U.S. and Greek air forces 28 May began joint exercises. Turkey and Greece continued diplomatic engagement in region. Notably, Turkish and Egyptian diplomats 5-6 May held talks in Egyptian capital Cairo for first time in eight years; sides discussed Eastern Mediterranean and other regional issues. Greek FM Dendias 18 May visited Israel, Palestinian territories and Jordan, as well as Egypt 20 May.

➔ **Turkey Authorities continued military operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in country's south east and in northern Iraq, and pursued crackdown on suspected ISIS supporters.** In south east, military mostly targeted PKK militants and hideouts in Tunceli, Mardin and Ağrı provinces. In northern Iraq's Duhok area, air raids and ground operations intensified as Turkish forces advanced into Amedi district. Despite objections from Baghdad, govt early May announced new base in Iraq's Kani Masi sub-district in Duhok. President Erdoğan 17 May said that military operation in northern Iraq killed high-ranking PKK militant who allegedly ordered killing of 13 Turkish captives during Gara incident in Feb; PKK by month's end had yet to confirm his death. Govt continued efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP); Turkish security units detained more than 100 individuals affiliated with HDP during month, mostly in country's south-eastern provinces. Notably, authorities 26 May sentenced former co-mayor of Iğdır province to seven years and six months in prison for "membership to a terrorist organisation". Security forces continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) operatives; police throughout month detained some 70 individuals with suspected ISIS links. Notably, police 20 May detained 18 ISIS-affiliated foreign nationals, suspected of plotting attacks, across ten districts in economic capital Istanbul. Turkey-U.S. ties were further strained this month by series of statements from senior Turkish officials condemning Israeli actions amid outbreak of fighting with Gaza-based Palestinian armed factions (see Israel-Palestine). Notably, U.S. 18 May condemned Erdoğan for "anti-Semitic comments regarding the Jewish people" and said it found them "reprehensible"; Turkish foreign ministry 19 May replied that statement was "unfounded".

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kyrgyzstan Tentative calm returned to Kyrgyz-Tajik border following last month's deadly fighting; President Japarov signed into law constitutional amendments which strengthen presidential powers.** Following deadliest fighting in years on Kyrgyz-Tajik border last month that killed dozens, officials in Kyrgyzstan's Batken region 18 May said security forces established joint checkpoint between Kyrgyz village of Ak-Sai and Tajikistan's Vorukh district. Announcement followed previous day's incident in which Kyrgyz authorities claimed three of their citizens beaten in Tajik custody along border; Tajik officials reportedly agreed to hold perpetrators accountable. Authorities 24 May announced "temporary" restrictions from 21 May on entry and exit of individuals and goods from Tajikistan. Batken region officials 14 May said minor skirmishes broke out along border between residents of Kyrgyz village of Sai and Uzbek village of Chashma. Meanwhile, President Japarov 5 May signed into law constitutional amendments which were endorsed in April referendum; new amendments provide for greater powers for president and reducing number of lawmakers from 120 to 90.

➔ **Tajikistan Tentative calm returned to Kyrgyz-Tajik border following last month's deadly fighting.** Authorities in northern Sughd region 6 May confirmed that last month's deadly fighting on Tajik-Kyrgyz border killed dozens. Officials in Kyrgyzstan's Batken region 18 May said security forces established joint checkpoint between Kyrgyz village of Ak-Sai and Tajikistan's Vorukh district. Announcement followed previous day's incident during which

Kyrgyz authorities claimed three of their citizens beaten in Tajik custody along border; Tajik officials reportedly agreed to hold perpetrators accountable.

➔ **Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev pardoned prisoners affiliated to proscribed groups.** Marking end of holy month of Ramadan, President Mirziyoyev 12 May released, pardoned or commuted sentences of over 100 inmates, including 52 people convicted for taking part in activities of banned groups. Ahead of Oct presidential election, opposition politician mid-May said justice ministry rejected his application to register Truth and Development Social Democrat Party, citing insufficient signatures.