



## Europe and Central Asia

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### Balkans

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↑ **Kosovo** Authorities reached deal with Belgrade over license plates, ending nearly two-year dispute that had fuelled worrying rise in tensions.

Pristina and Belgrade 23 Nov struck European Union (EU)-brokered deal to end license plate dispute amid growing concerns of possible violence. According to EU High Representative Josep Borrell, “Serbia will stop issuing licence plates with Kosovo cities’ denominations”, while Kosovo will cease demands to re-register vehicles with Serbian plates. Borrell added that priority is now Franco-German proposal “on the normalisation of their relations”, details of which were leaked by news agency Euractiv 9 Nov. Deal came as tensions peaked during first part of month. Interior Minister Xhelal Sveçla 3 Nov suspended northern Kosovo’s police chief for refusing to issue warnings of fines to drivers with Serbia-issued license plates, as per govt plan. In protest, hundreds of Serb lawmakers, judges and police officers 5 Nov resigned, while reportedly thousands next day rallied in northern Mitrovica city. EU mid-Nov deployed 130 police officers from Poland and Italy to take over patrols in northern Kosovo after resignation of some 600 police officers. NATO 7 Nov urged “both to refrain from unilateral action” while EU and U.S. 21 Nov urged Kosovo to “immediately suspend” next phase of license plate plan. Kurti same day agreed to “48-hour postponement” of fines before parties reached final deal two days later.

### Caucasus

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➔ **Armenia** Tensions with Azerbaijan persisted amid numerous reports of shooting along border and in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), efforts to reach peace deal continued, and CSTO summit took place in Yerevan.

*Armenia and Azerbaijan traded accusations of shooting along border.* Situation at Armenia-Azerbaijan border remained fragile following Sept clashes, with both sides reporting shooting along front line during month. Kremlin 7 Nov called on parties to refrain from actions that could spark “escalation”, while U.S. State Dept 12 Nov said it was “deeply concerned” by reports. Meanwhile, tensions simmered in NK conflict zone, with de facto authorities reporting one civilian and at least two servicemen killed 10, 28 Nov respectively (see Nagorno-Karabakh).

*Support for bilateral diplomacy continued, but Azerbaijan contested French efforts.* U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 7 Nov hosted Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs in U.S.

capital Washington, praising “courageous steps” toward peace. French President Macron and PM Pashinyan 19 Nov highlighted importance of “strengthening stability and security in the South Caucasus” during Summit of International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) in Tunisia; according to Pashinyan’s press office, PM also “stressed the need to eliminate the consequences of Azerbaijani aggression”. Azerbaijan same day criticised OIF members’ “anti-Azerbaijani position” while country’s President Aliyev 25 Nov cancelled Dec meeting with Pashinyan over Armenian request to involve Macron. Meanwhile, Pashinyan 10 Nov made public Armenian proposal to establish demilitarised zone along state border after Azerbaijani troops withdraw from Armenian territory; Baku had not responded by end of month.

*Armenia hosted CSTO summit.* Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit 23 Nov took place in capital Yerevan for discussions on international and regional security issues. Pashinyan refused to sign declaration on “joint measures on providing assistance to Armenia”, saying it did not address Yerevan’s concerns regarding CSTO’s “lack of a clear political assessment” on conflict with Azerbaijan.

➡ **Azerbaijan Tensions with Armenia persisted amid numerous reports of shooting along border and in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK); diplomatic efforts to reach peace deal continued.**

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*In other important developments.* President Aliyev 16 Nov signed decree endorsing program for reconstruction and resettlement in territories recaptured during 2020 war; under program, known as “The Great Return”, Azerbaijan plans to return 34,500 displaced families between 2022-2026. Parliament 18 Nov approved decision to open embassy in Israel, which has had an embassy in capital Baku since 1992.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijan and de facto Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) authorities accused each other of targeting military positions and**

**civilian areas in NK; disagreements over format of future NK negotiations continued.**

*Azerbaijan and de facto NK authorities traded accusations of ceasefire violations.* Reports of sharp increase in attacks at military positions and nearby civilian areas along front line in NK conflict zone drew accusations and denials from Azerbaijan and de facto authorities in equal measure. Notably, Stepanakert 10 Nov said Azerbaijani shooting injured one farmer; Azerbaijan's defence ministry 26 Nov reported downing of quadcopter allegedly used by de facto forces for surveillance purposes; Stepanakert 28 Nov said Azerbaijani forces injured two soldiers with mine launchers. Russian peacekeepers' reports of stepped-up shootings aggravated tensions with Baku, which 24, 25 Nov accused mission of partial and biased reporting. Meanwhile, situation at Armenia-Azerbaijan border remained fragile following Sept clashes, with both sides reporting shooting along front line during Nov (see Armenia, Azerbaijan).

*Azerbaijan accused Armenia of planting mines in NK conflict zone.* Azerbaijan 23 Nov invited military attachés of several foreign states to observe hundreds of mines, reportedly produced in Armenia in 2021 and discovered around Sarybaba heights near Lachin corridor after being captured by Azerbaijani troops during Aug escalation. Baku also invited Russian peacekeeping mission and Russian-Turkish observation centres, mandated to prevent transportation of any weapons from Armenia to NK, to site. Yerevan and Stepanakert 24 Nov denied planting mines in area and accused Baku of staging it as pretext for provocation.

*Stepanakert and Baku disagreed over format of future NK negotiations.* Russian businessman Ruben Vardanyan 4 Nov became de facto state minister of NK; Azerbaijani President Aliyev 17 Nov ruled out possibility of negotiations with Vardanyan, who he said was sent from Moscow "with a very clear agenda". In same statement, Aliyev confirmed willingness to speak with "Armenians who live in Karabakh" but excluded talks with de facto NK authorities; de facto FM Davit Babayan next day reiterated readiness to negotiate with Azerbaijan but only in "internationally recognised" format, namely "the OSCE Minsk Group".

**➡ Georgia Authorities took further steps to align with European Union's (EU) candidacy status demands and expressed concerns over "illegal" arrests in breakaway Abkhazia.**

*Georgia and Western actors sought closer cooperation.* European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi 15-16 Nov visited Tbilisi, underscoring EU's interest in strengthening energy and security cooperation; leadership viewed visit as new chapter in Georgia-EU relations. Following trip, parliament 28 Nov paused adoption process for law on de-oligarchisation – one of EU's demands as precondition for candidate status – to hear suggestions from Council of Europe's Venice Commission amid pressure from EU officials; EU 28 Nov welcomed decision, saying it is "important to consult international standard setters and implement their recommendations". Meanwhile, NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 21 Nov called for "more support" from Western defence alliance to Georgia, which he said is "vulnerable" to "Russian coercion and aggression"; NATO Allies 30 Nov agreed to "step up tailored support" to Georgia.

*De facto authorities in breakaway Abkhazia detained more Georgian citizens.* De facto security service 4 Nov detained Asmat Tavadze in Gali district on charges of illegal drug purchase and storage; de facto authorities also reported seizing Georgian

flag and other Georgian state symbols found in her apartment. Georgia 5 Nov condemned de facto Abkhaz security forces for illegal detention and said “work was underway to release” her. Tbilisi 8 Nov announced another arrest of Georgian citizen in same area with similar charges.

➡ **Russia (Internal) Authorities introduced new laws on military service as tensions within army surfaced, Ukrainian shelling continued, and ties with Iran deepened.**

*President Putin gave updates on mobilisation drive, authorised new laws on military service.* Following Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu’s announcement late Oct that 300,000 people had been mobilised for war in Ukraine, Putin 4 Nov said additional 18,000 soldiers had been mobilised and that 49,000 were engaged in combat activities. No official decree has been issued to end mobilisation despite reaching declared goal of 300,000 soldiers, enabling future mobilisation drives. Putin 4 Nov signed law allowing authorities to mobilise citizens convicted of serious crimes, including murder and robbery; decree exempts crimes such as espionage, terrorism and sexual crimes against minors. Putin 14 Nov signed additional decree allowing foreign citizens to be drafted.

*Russian army faced backlash over poor leadership and logistical problems.* Over 100 people 1 Nov held protest in western Ulyanovsk city against lack of payments to conscripts, following day announced “total strike” until payments are made. Videos 5 Nov emerged showing soldiers in south-western Kazan city decrying poor conditions and lack of proper training, uniforms and weapons. Soldiers from southern Tomsk city 18 Nov held rally, criticising commanders’ lack of leadership and poor training. Meanwhile, members of Council of Mothers and Wives, which demands return of mobilised relatives from front lines, 14 Nov held protest rally in St. Petersburg city, 22 Nov proposed meeting with Putin; Putin 25 Nov held meeting, but did not invite any member who opposes war and criticises military leadership.

*Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory persisted.* Shelling continued near border with Ukraine throughout Nov. Notably, authorities in Belgorod region 15 Nov reported two killed in Shebekino town, 18 Nov said shelling killed one in Valuiki city. Ukrainian naval drone 18 Nov attacked Sheskhari oil terminal and naval base in Novorossiysk.

*In other important developments.* Media outlet The Washington Post 19 Nov reported that Moscow had struck deal with Tehran to produce Iranian drones in Russia. U.S. 10 Nov revoked Russia’s market economy status, European Union 23 Nov designated Russia a state sponsor of terrorism, and UK 30 Nov sanctioned 22 Russian officials.

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➡ **Belarus Crackdown on political opposition continued apace; Western powers threatened Minsk over its support for Russia’s war in Ukraine.**

*Authorities handed down prison sentences to opposition leaders.* Court 3 Nov sentenced leader of opposition United Civic Party to 30 months in prison and two

associates to 18 and 12 months in prison for actions that disrupted civil order. Similarly, trade union leader Alyaksandr Mishuk 15 Nov received 30-month prison term for “actions against national security”. Trial against ten members of Workers’ Movement, indicted for high treason, 9 Nov began in Homel city. Meanwhile, authorities 29 Nov transferred leading opposition figure Maryya Kalesnikava, sentenced Sept 2021 to 11 years in prison, to hospital where she was placed in intensive care.

*G7 warned Belarus against deepening support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.* G7 4 Nov urged Belarus to “stop enabling Russia’s war of aggression” and warned that “more direct” Belarusian involvement would see G7 impose “overwhelming additional costs on the regime”. President Lukashenko 23 Nov dismissed rumours of military involvement in Ukraine during Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization summit in Armenia, saying “it is not Belarus’ role”. Meanwhile, Canada’s govt 22 Nov imposed new sanctions on 22 Belarusian officials and 16 companies for “facilitating and enabling” Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

➔ **Ukraine Ukrainian forces sustained counteroffensive in east and south, recapturing Kherson city; Russian airstrikes on energy infrastructure left millions without electricity.**

*Russian forces retreated from Kherson city amid Ukrainian counteroffensive.* Ukrainian forces’ counteroffensive advanced further in southern Kherson region as they closed in on Kherson city and surrounding area on right bank of Dnipro River. Russian authorities 9 Nov announced retreat from Kherson city to more defensible positions along river’s left bank; Ukrainian troops 11 Nov took back control, marking strategic and symbolic victory as Kherson constituted only regional capital Russian troops occupied since Feb invasion. In east, Ukraine’s counteroffensive ground on slowly amid reports of heavy losses on both sides; fierce fighting notably reported around Kreminna and Rubizhne cities in Luhansk region, and around Bakhmut city in Donetsk region. President Zelenskyy 20 Nov accused Russian forces of launching “almost 400 artillery strikes in the east” in one day. In Zaporizhzhia region, Moscow and Kyiv 21 Nov traded blame for shelling at nuclear power plant.

*Russian strikes on energy infrastructure aggravated humanitarian crisis.* Zelenskyy 1 Nov announce that Russian air strikes had damaged around 40% of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure, as strikes on energy systems continued unabated throughout month. Notably, Russia 15 Nov fired over 90 missiles and drones into country; during raid, missile struck village in NATO member Poland, killing two and fuelling fears of escalation; however, Polish officials and NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg next day said Ukrainian missile had likely fallen in Poland accidentally while intercepting Russian missiles. Attacks during month left millions without electricity, water or heating as temperatures fell below zero, bringing country to brink of winter crisis and prompting Kyiv 21 Nov to advise civilians from Kherson and Mykolaiv regions to evacuate.

*In other important developments.* Following Russia’s withdrawal late Oct from UN-brokered Black Sea Grain Deal, Russia and Ukraine 17 Nov agreed to extend deal for 120 days. UN General Assembly 14 Nov adopted resolution calling for Russian war reparations to Ukraine; 94 countries voted for resolution, 14 voted against and 73 abstained.

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## Western Europe/Mediterranean

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### ➔ **Cyprus**    **Organization of Turkic States admitted “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) as observer member.**

“TRNC” acquired observer status at Organization of Turkic States. Türkiye 11 Nov announced “TRNC” was awarded observer status at Organization of Turkic States, which includes Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan. Republic of Cyprus same day called move “meaningless”, claiming Ankara had to downgrade observer status to “entity” rather than “state” to win support. European Union 12 Nov called move “regrettable”, while U.S. 15 Nov said decision was inconsistent with principles of territorial integrity and UN Charter.

*In other important developments.* Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders 17-18 Nov met UN Assistant Sec-Gen Miroslav Jenča and peacekeeping head Colin Steward to discuss prospects for progress on Cyprus issue. European Council 8 Nov agreed to extend framework of sanctions (in place since Nov 2019) against Türkiye in response to its “unauthorised drilling activities” in waters around Cyprus until 12 Nov 2023. Meanwhile, following 7 Nov meeting with Republic of Cyprus FM Ioannis Kasoulides, Greece’s FM Nikos Dendias warned “any attempt to create fait accomplis either in Greece or in Cyprus will result in a European response” and noted being “on the verge of resuming talks between Cyprus and Lebanon on the delimitation of an Exclusive Economic Zone”.

### ↓ **Türkiye**    **Govt blamed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and Syrian affiliate for deadly Istanbul bombing that killed six, launching strikes in Syria and Iraq and threatening new ground operations.**

Govt attributed Istanbul attack to PKK and Syrian affiliate People’s Protection Units (YPG). In first street bombing targeting civilians since 2017, explosion 13 Nov in bustling Istanbul street killed six and injured at least 81 civilians; officials immediately blamed “the [PKK and YPG]”. Security forces 14 Nov announced arrest of alleged bomber and Syrian national Ahlam Albashir and 49 other suspects; PKK and YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces 14 Nov separately denied involvement. Govt 28 Nov claimed new evidence linking plot to YPG.

*Military announced new operations in Syria and Iraq.* Following bomb attack, military 20 Nov began “Operation Claw Sword”, conducting airstrikes in northern Syria and Iraq against scores of alleged PKK and YPG targets (see Syria and Iraq). President Erdoğan next day signalled possible ground incursions in both countries and 28 Nov stated govt was “determined to root out the PKK” in both; threat of ground incursion in northern Syria appeared more likely than in Iraq, and could trigger displacement and fuel escalatory cycle of violence with YPG (see Syria). Retaliatory cross-border attacks from northern Syria increased: notably, rocket attack 21 Nov killed three civilians in Gaziantep province. Earlier, operations against PKK within country concentrated on rural areas of Bitlis, Tunceli and Hakkari provinces.

*Tensions with Greece remained elevated.* Erdoğan 16 Nov reiterated threats that Türkiye “can come suddenly one night” and criticised Greece’s alleged militarisation of Aegean islands; Greece’s FM Nikos Dendias same day condemned threat.

Meanwhile, Greek military 10 Nov reported Turkish armed drone flew over Greek islet of Kandeloussa. Turkish Oil Exploration Company 25 Nov said drillship was planning new mission in eastern Mediterranean, triggering uproar in Greek media.

*In other important developments.* Security forces arrested at least 90 individuals countrywide with alleged links to Islamic State. Ruling party officials 6 Nov met Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), signalling manoeuvring ahead of 2023 elections. Ankara continued efforts to normalise relations with Israel, Armenia and Egypt.

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## Central Asia

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### ➔ **Kazakhstan Amid limited space for political campaigning, President Tokayev won landslide victory in snap election before reaffirming ties with Russia.**

*Re-election of Tokayev paves way for seven-year term.* Kazakhs 20 Nov headed to polls to vote in snap presidential election, which incumbent President Tokayev won in landslide victory, securing over 80% of vote. Victory allows Tokayev to extend his presidential term by seven years under country's new term limits. Tokayev's Sept announcement to hold election gave his opponents little preparation time, raising concerns around lack of competition. Notably, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe observer mission 21 Nov said "early presidential election took place in a political environment lacking competitiveness, and while efficiently prepared, the election underlined the need for further reforms (...) to ensure genuine pluralism".

*Tokayev reaffirmed ties with Russia in first foreign visit since election.* Tokayev 28 Nov met Russian President Putin in Moscow amid public disagreements over Ukraine; notably, Tokayev had declined to recognise Russia's declared annexation of four Ukrainian regions. Still, Tokayev reaffirmed bilateral relations, saying "Russia is and has always been a strategic partner" while Putin hailed "special" relations between Moscow and Astana.

### ➔ **Kyrgyzstan Authorities signed agreements with Uzbekistan on border delimitation amid ongoing local opposition.**

FM Jeenbek Kulubaev and Uzbek counterpart Vladimir Norov 2 Nov signed agreements on border delimitation in capital Bishkek, including deal on joint management of Kempir-Abad water reservoir, vital water source that lies between Osh region and Uzbekistan's Andijan region. Kyrgyz lawmakers 17 Nov ratified deal giving Uzbekistan ownership of reservoir in return for 19,000 hectares of land elsewhere along border; Uzbek Senate following day approved agreement. Both countries' presidents must give final approval before deal is authorised. Govt's decision to cede control of reservoir to Uzbekistan has however ignited anger among border communities, whose protests in Oct prompted authorities to detain 20 activists and politicians. Detainees 1 Nov made public their letter to Uzbek President Mirziyoev, urging him to suspend signing deal until issue of reservoir is resolved within Kyrgyzstan.

➡ **Tajikistan Authorities targeted activists in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO); govt deepened military cooperation with China.**

*Crackdown on GBAO activists persisted.* In wake of May anti-govt protests in GBAO that turned violent amid heavy-handed response, Supreme Court 23 Nov handed down life sentences to five activists; eight other defendants were sentenced to between ten and 30 years in prison.

*Govt strengthened military cooperation with China.* Authorities 21 Nov published agreement committing Dushanbe to joint anti-terrorism drills with Chinese forces every two years.

➡ **Uzbekistan Authorities signed agreements with Kyrgyzstan on border delimitation; trial against Karakalpak activists began.**

*Uzbek and Kyrgyz authorities signed border delimitation deal.* FM Vladimir Norov and Kyrgyz counterpart Jeenbek Kulubaev 2 Nov signed agreements on border delimitation in Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, including deal on joint management of Kempir-Abad water reservoir, vital water source that lies between Andijan region and Kyrgyzstan's Osh region, and flashpoint for domestic Kyrgyz opposition (see Kyrgyzstan). Kyrgyz lawmakers 17 Nov ratified deal giving Uzbekistan ownership of reservoir in return for 19,000 hectares of land elsewhere along border; Uzbek Senate following day approved agreement. Both countries' presidents must give final approval before deal is authorised.

*Karakalpak activists arrested during July protests went on trial.* Bukhara provincial court 28 Nov began hearings in trial of 22 people charged with inciting deadly July protests in autonomous Karakalpakstan region against proposed constitutional amendments. Meanwhile, ombudsman's office 1 Nov announced release of 35 activists arrested during July protests; 516 people were arrested at time, of which 107 have been released.