

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Kosovo** EU-led Kosovo-Serbia dialogue remained on hold while discord surfaced over implementation of previous agreements. Following postponement of EU-led Kosovo-Serbia talks in Sept due to COVID-19, PM Hoti 1 Oct said that govt remained open to dialogue but would not discuss Kosovo Association of Serb Municipalities (ASM) – provision of 2013 and 2015 Brussels agreements that would enable Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo to form self-governing association – which 2015 Constitutional Court ruling mandated be formed in accord with constitution. EU Special Representative for Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák throughout month urged govt to establish ASM. PM Hoti 13 Oct said govt would not implement ASM before reaching final settlement that includes mutual recognition with Serbia; Serbian President Vučić 15 Oct expressed readiness to continue dialogue, while insisting on full implementation of association agreements. Following meeting with Vučić in Serbia’s capital Belgrade, Lajčák 16 Oct said “dialogue will continue” and next step will be negotiations on status of Association in Brussels. Meanwhile, Serbian govt 14 Oct operationalised Merdare Common Border Crossing Point with Kosovo, thus finalising implementation of 2011 Integrated Border Management deal; U.S. Special Envoy Richard Grenell same day welcomed move. Hoti 19 Oct hosted U.S. delegation to discuss implementation of economic normalisation deal with Serbia signed in Washington D.C in Sept; govt next day adopted 16-point plan for further implementation of deal. State Coordinator Skender Hyseni 29 Oct met with Serbian delegation for another round of EU-led dialogue in Brussels to discuss financial claims and property issues. Following Sept arrest, former Kosovo Liberation Army commander Salih Mustafa 28 Oct pleaded not guilty to war crimes at Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague, Netherlands.

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## Caucasus

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↓🇦🇲 **Armenia** **Deadly fighting with Azerbaijan worsened in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) with attacks extending to Armenia's border regions; deadly attacks could further intensify and spread in Nov.** Largest-scale fighting since 1994 ceasefire continued following Azerbaijani military's late Sept offensive on line of contact in NK conflict zone: fighting reportedly killed and wounded thousands of military personnel on both sides; civilian areas inside conflict zone suffered continued attacks, killing at least 39 civilians and injuring over 100 (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Missile and drone attacks late Sept-early Oct also spread to Armenia's regions near NK area, with at least three civilians reported killed and tens injured. After attacks at border regions, PM Pashinyan 31 Oct sent official appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin for military support in line with Russia-Armenia mutual assistance agreements from 1997 and 2006. In interview with Russian state-owned news agency, Pashinyan 19 Oct confirmed readiness to cease fighting and start peace negotiations on condition that settlement be based on "compromise, not capitulation". Armenia prosecutor's office 31 Oct said two Syrian fighters detained in NK; in video testimony, one detainee said Turkish officials recruited and transported him to fight along with Azerbaijani troops.

↓🇦🇿 **Azerbaijan** **Deadly fighting with Armenia escalated in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), with attacks extending to Azerbaijani cities; deadly attacks could further intensify and spread in Nov.** Largest-scale fighting since 1994 ceasefire continued following Azerbaijani military's late Sept offensive on line of contact in NK conflict zone: fighting reportedly killed and wounded thousands of military personnel on both sides (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Since early Oct, Azerbaijani offensives advanced in direction of Jebrail and Zangelan, near border with Iran, progressing north along border with Armenia towards Lachin district, which hosts main road connecting Armenia with NK. Fighting throughout month reached Azerbaijani cities near line of contact, particularly Barda town, but also areas further away, including Absheron peninsula, Mingachevir town and Ganja city. Authorities reported that ballistic missiles struck Ganja on 4, 8, 11 and 16-17 Oct, resulting in 25 civilians killed and 125 more injured. Missiles 27-28 Oct also killed 26 civilians and wounded over 70 in Barda; NGO Amnesty International next day said cluster bombs used by Armenia for first time during attack. In interview with Russian state-owned news agency, President Ilham Aliyev 19 Oct confirmed govt's readiness to cease hostilities and start peace negotiations on condition that Armenia accept basic settlement principles developed by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, cease fighting and start immediate withdrawal of troops from NK. COVID-19 cases continued to rise despite govt measures to halt spread in place throughout month, including education institutions closed and two thirds of public sector employees working at home.

↓🇦🇲 **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict** **Fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani troops left hundreds killed and tens of thousands displaced; deadly attacks could further intensify and spread in Nov.** Clashes took place in all parts of NK conflict zone, involving artillery, missile, and drone strikes on Armenian positions. Fighting reportedly killed thousands of Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers. Civilian areas on both sides near front line also suffered continued attacks, resulting in over 100 civilians killed and hundreds injured on both

sides. Armenian-controlled NK capital Stepanakert and other towns and villages throughout month faced Azerbaijani artillery, missile and drone attacks, decimating infrastructure and displacing some 90,000 people (out of estimated total population of 150,000). NGO Amnesty International 5 Oct revealed M095 DPICM cluster munitions appeared to have been fired by Azerbaijani forces into Stepanakert; NGO Human Rights Watch 23 Oct confirmed Azerbaijan used cluster munitions four times in NK. Fighting also hit Azerbaijani cities near line of contact, killing dozens of civilians (see Azerbaijan), and spread to Armenian regions close to NK border (see Armenia). Meanwhile, Russia, France, U.S. 1 Oct called for immediate cessation of hostilities and resumption of dialogue; 10, 17 and 26 Oct brokered humanitarian ceasefire agreements, but failed to stop progression of Azerbaijani military in NK as both sides accused other of violating terms. Both Baku and Ankara repeatedly denied Armenian accusations that Turkey had deployed military advisers and provided intelligence; France and Russia 1 Oct corroborated reports that Turkish-backed Syrian National Army fighters had been deployed in support of Baku. President Aliyev and Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan 19 Oct confirmed readiness to cease hostilities and start peace negotiations under certain conditions; Aliyev raised need for Armenia to accept basic settlement principles developed by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, cease fighting and start immediate withdrawal of its troops from NK, while Pashinyan said that any settlement should be based on “compromise, not capitulation.”

➔ **Georgia Amid rising COVID-19 cases, political tensions subsided in lead-up to 31 Oct election.** Tensions emerged ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for 31 Oct: small-scale scuffles, which started late Sept, 1 Oct continued between ruling Georgian Dream party and opposition United National Movement (UNM) supporters in Kvemo Kartli region, particularly in areas mainly populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis; no reported casualties. Meanwhile, COVID-19 pandemic continued to spread across country, with average of over 1000 new daily reported cases throughout month; govt 16 Oct tightened restrictive measures to fight virus, including prohibition of public gatherings of more than ten people. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights 11 Oct stated that it will limit election observation mission deployment to core teams of experts and long-term observers due to pandemic. Central Elections Commission (CEC) 31 Oct reported preliminary results, which gave significant lead of over 40% to ruling Georgian Dream party, with opposition United National Movement taking over 20% of votes; some opposition parties called elections illegitimate and planned street protests; according to CEC, more than 46% cast vote in elections. In Abkhazia, amid sharp rise of COVID-19 cases, members of opposition early Oct criticised de facto authorities for apparent lack of sufficient measures to combat pandemic. De facto President Aslan Bzhania 13 Oct introduced additional restrictive measures, such as ban on mass gatherings and closure of schools and kindergartens. In South Ossetia, press service of de facto President Anatoly Bibilov 17 Oct confirmed he had fallen ill with COVID-19; 30 Oct reported he had fully recovered. At request of de facto leadership, Russia deployed military and opened field hospitals to treat COVID-19 in Abkhazia 19 Oct and South Ossetia 27 Oct.

➔ **Russia/North Caucasus Weekly mass protests continued in Far East, while security forces led counter-terrorism operations in North Caucasus.** In Far East, thousands of protestors in Khabarovsk city rallied on

Saturdays throughout Oct to protest July arrest of former local governor and member of nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Sergei Furga for alleged involvement in murders of businessmen in 2005-2006; baton-wielding police 10 Oct cracked down on protest for first time, detaining 25 people for alleged illegal attempt to erect protest tents in central square. Authorities 5 Oct reportedly charged son of detained former Khabarovsk Governor Anton Furgal with organising illegal protests. In North Caucasus region, National Anti-Terrorism Committee confirmed counter-terrorism operations in Chechnya and Republic of Ingushetia. Special forces 11 Oct led anti-terrorist operation near border of Sernovodsk district, in Chechnya, and in Sunzha district, in Ingushetia, killing two alleged militants; clash between special forces and alleged militants 13 Oct killed three officers and four militants in Oktiabrsky district in Grozny city, Chechnya. Kremlin 5 Oct announced that President Putin had accepted Dagestan leader Vladimir Vasilyev's request to "relieve him from his duties."

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➔ **Belarus** **Mass demonstrations continued following disputed Aug presidential elections, resulting in clashes with police and large-scale arrests.** Mass protests of thousands of people, including more than 100,000 on 4 Oct, 11 and 18 Oct demanded resignation of President Lukashenka and freedom for political prisoners, at which police turned water cannon, used tear gas, fired rubber bullets into air; hundreds arrested. In unprecedented move, Lukashenka 10 Oct visited detained opposition members in prison, talking with them over period of four hours; opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya same day said "event is a result of our pressure." Interior ministry 12 Oct permitted police to use firearms against protesters "if need be". After Tsikhanouskaya next day threatened mass workers' protest if Lukashenka refused to resign by 25 Oct, over 100,000 anti-govt protesters 25 Oct marched in capital Minsk. Lukashenka next day ignored ultimatum, prompting factory workers, business owners and students to go on strike while thousands continued to rally in Minsk; dozens of factory workers and students subsequently fired and expelled for joining strikes. Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev 7 Oct announced that Russia put Tsikhanouskaya on its wanted criminals list for "criminal charge". Meanwhile, EU member states 1 Oct agreed to impose sanctions on about 40 govt officials, excluding Lukashenka, on grounds of flawed presidential election; in response, govt 2 Oct accused EU of "striving towards deterioration of relations", announced retaliatory sanctions and cancelled accreditation of all foreign journalists. After Lukashenka 9 Oct demanded Poland and Lithuania scale down their diplomatic missions, eight European countries, including UK and Germany, 5-9 Oct recalled ambassadors from Minsk in solidarity. European Parliament 22 Oct awarded Sakharov Prize for human rights to democratic opposition in Belarus, led by Tsikhanouskaya.

➔ **Ukraine** **Local elections took place across country, excluding some communities and separatist-held areas in east, while July ceasefire in Donbas largely held.** First round of local elections 25 Oct organised nationwide; in setback for President Zelenskyy, incumbent mayors in major cities held off challenges from his Sluha Narodu party. Separatist-held areas in east excluded from

vote as per parliament's July decree, many residents near front line also excluded for security reasons. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers praised vote as well organised but raised concerns many residents near front line in East could not vote despite absence of direct hostilities in years. In conflict zone, July ceasefire largely held although two govt servicemen were killed and two injured, according to Ukrainian officials; both sides sustained non-live-fire casualties, including at least one Ukrainian soldier injured, according to military authorities, and 11 Russian-backed fighters killed, according to social media reports. Landmines injured one man 4 Oct, two boys 6 Oct, and three male civilians 9 Oct. OSCE Special Monitoring Mission Chief Monitor Yaşar Halit Çevik 8 Oct noted that de facto authorities continued to hamper movements of ceasefire monitors in non-govt-controlled areas. In Luhansk region, govt 12 Oct announced closure of civilian crossing Stanytsia Luhanska until 30 Oct due to quarantine; hundreds of civilians trapped at closed checkpoints; armed forces 28 Oct extended closure to 15 Nov. Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (D/LPR) de facto authorities reported significant rise in COVID-19 cases, while de facto DPR Health Minister Aleksandr Opryshenko 15 Oct admitted true rate of infection higher than official one and testing capacity lacking; de facto DPR head Denis Pushilin 16 Oct cancelled public sporting events. In blow to ongoing anti-corruption reforms, Constitutional Court 27 Oct abolished criminal liability for inaccurate asset declaration by govt officials, prompting thousands 30 Oct to rally in capital Kyiv, and Zelenskyy to call for Constitutional Court's judges to be fired. EU-Ukraine Summit memorandum 5 Oct noted "Ukraine's constructive approach in the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group", calling on Russia to ensure OSCE ceasefire monitors can access parts of non govt-controlled areas near Russian border.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus Turkish Cypriots elected new "presidential" leader Ersin Tatar.** "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC) govt 6 Oct collapsed after coalition partner People's Party withdrew in protest of 8 Oct govt decision to partially reopen beachfront strip in Maraş/Varosha, town that has remained closed to visitors after Turkish military seized it in 1974; President Erdoğan 14 Oct described move as "historical milestone for Cyprus"; Greek PM Mitsotakis 7 October called it "a clear violation of the United Nations Security Council resolution" while Republic of Cyprus presidency 8 Oct condemned opening. In second round of TRNC "presidential" election, Ersin Tatar 19 Oct defeated Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı; election of Tatar could further complicate ongoing UN efforts to relaunch reunification talks given Tatar favours "two-state solution" over bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. UN 27 Oct said Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders will meet in UN mission in island's buffer zone on 3 Nov.

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean Tensions remained high between Greece and Turkey.** Tensions in Eastern Mediterranean continued. NATO 1 Oct established deconfliction mechanism that includes hotline between Greece and Turkey for use in event of crisis. Greek and Turkish FMs 8 Oct met in Bratislava, Slovakia, and agreed on date to relaunch exploratory talks, but subsequent developments overshadowed positive step: Turkey continued with gas explorations in Greek and Republic of Cyprus-claimed waters while both Greece and Turkey

continued to carry out small-scale military exercises, including in contested waters in the Aegean, throughout month. Ankara 9 Oct issued advisory for exploration activities east of Cyprus until 9 Nov. Tensions rose significantly after Ankara 11 Oct issued advisory for exploration activities of *Oruç Reis* drillship in Greek-claimed waters south of Kastellorizo. Greek FM 13 Oct slammed decision and said talks are not possible while drillship remains within “Greek continental shelf”; Turkish defence minister next day said *Oruç Reis* “is not a threat to anybody”. Turkish decision prompted German FM Heiko Maas to cancel trip to Turkey and 15 Oct condemn move alongside French counterpart, while U.S. State Dept 13 Oct said it “deplores” decision. In response, Turkish MFA 11 Oct published report accusing Greece of escalating tensions. NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 23 Oct announced that Greece and Turkey decided to cancel military exercises planned for following week. Following 30 Oct earthquake in Izmir, Turkey, that killed at least a dozen and injured hundreds, Greek PM Mitsotakis same day telephoned Turkish President Erdoğan to offer condolences; Erdoğan same day thanked Mitsotakis, saying “that two neighbors show solidarity in difficult times is more valuable than many things in life”.

➔ **Turkey Military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) continued in northern Iraq and south/south east Turkey, while Ankara turned focus to Eastern Mediterranean and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.** In Turkey’s south east, military operations focused on rural areas of Şırnak and Hatay; PKK 29 Oct claimed 26 Oct suicide bomb attack that targeted police station in Iskenderun in Hatay province, injuring two; attack coincided with intensified military operations against the PKK in Hatay’s Amanos mountains. Air raids targeting PKK positions in northern Iraq also continued throughout month. Ankara welcomed 9 Oct agreement between Baghdad and Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government on security of Sinjar (see Iraq), in hope deal will help remove PKK-affiliated groups competing for control since town was liberated from Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014. Govt also continued efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish political opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP): police detained more than 100 HDP members and activists throughout month, including Ayhan Bilgen, HDP’s provincial mayor in Kars city, on charges of inciting violence during Oct 2014 Kobani protests; HDP now runs only 5 of 65 municipalities it had won in 2019 local elections. Govt continued operations targeting ISIS: police detained over 150 individuals for alleged links to ISIS, the majority of them foreigners (mostly Syrian and Iraqi nationals). Meanwhile in eastern Mediterranean, renewed drilling activity and military drills fuelled tensions with Greece, despite establishment of NATO deconfliction mechanism 1 Oct (see Eastern Mediterranean). Amid ongoing hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan (see Nagorno-Karabakh), Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 6 Oct visited Baku in show of solidarity and urged Armenia to withdraw from Azerbaijani territory. EU Commission’s 2020 Progress Report on Turkey 6 Oct warned of “serious backsliding in the areas of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and the independence of the judiciary”; Turkish MFA same day said report reflected “the EU’s prejudiced, unconstructive and double-standard approach”.

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## Central Asia

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↓ **Kyrgyzstan** **Contested parliamentary elections results sparked violent protests, prompting president to step down.** Following parliamentary elections held 4 Oct amid complaints of voter intimidation, opposition parties same day said they would not recognise official results due to suspicious preliminary figures granting large majority to pro-govt parties; opposition supporters immediately gathered in rallies in capital Bishkek and north-western Talas city in protest. Demonstrators next day reportedly attempted to break into govt headquarters in Bishkek, prompting security forces to use teargas, rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse crowds; clashes killed one protester and injured hundreds. Electoral commission (CEC) 6 Oct annulled parliamentary election results and announced rerun of election; CEC 24 Oct scheduled presidential elections for 10 Jan 2021. Anti-govt protesters 6 Oct stormed Kyrgyz govt buildings, freed imprisoned former President Atambaev and opposition politician Sadyr Japarov; President Jeenbekov same day called for calm and restoration of “law and order” and PM Kubatbek Boronov resigned. Parliament 6 Oct nominated Japarov as PM candidate; popular anger quickly followed announcement with protesters calling for “clean” generation of politicians and mob storming hotel where govt meeting took place, forcing Japarov to flee. Jeenbekov 9 Oct ordered nationwide state of emergency and reportedly deployed army onto Bishkek streets amid clashes between supporters of different parties. Parliament next day officially voted in Japarov as new PM in session attended by 51 MPs, less than majority; Jeenbekov 13 Oct rejected Japarov’s appointment citing lack of parliamentary majority present at voting session, asked parliament to conduct second vote. Following unexpected resignation of Jeenbekov as president 15 Oct, Japarov same day claimed “all power” was in his hands; parliament next day approved transfer of presidential powers to Japarov, making him de facto acting president until Jan 2021 elections. After CEC 24 Oct scheduled presidential elections for 10 Jan 2021, interim President Japarov next day announced plans to step down in Dec to become eligible to run in elections due to law prohibiting acting presidents from seeking office; Supreme Court 29 Oct refused to hear CEC’s appeal to rerun parliamentary elections in Dec, reportedly for procedural reasons.

➔ **Tajikistan** **President Rahmon won fifth presidential term amid reports of voting irregularities.** Following presidential elections on 11 Oct, Central Election Commission 12 Oct announced President Rahmon’s victory with 90.92% of votes, securing his fifth term in office. Amid media reports of ballot stuffing and electoral irregularities, EU same day said elections were “peaceful and orderly” but failed to implement previous EU recommendations, including media independence and political plurality. Rahmon 30 Oct was sworn in during presidential inauguration ceremony.

➔ **Turkmenistan** **Suspected COVID-19 outbreak reported in prison.** Amid continued govt denial of COVID-19 cases, independent media RFE/RL 16 Oct reported major disease outbreak, suspected to be COVID-19, in women’s prison in northern Dashoguz region, with several inmates reportedly in critical condition. Pro-govt media outlet 25 Oct praised “effectiveness of the Turkmen model of response to the COVID-19 pandemic”.

➔ **Uzbekistan Construction workers stormed gas company offices in anger over unpaid salaries.** Thousands of workers 21 Oct protested at Enter Engineering gas plant administrative offices in southern Qashqadaryo region over unpaid wages. In response, authorities reportedly deployed security forces, while prosecutor general's press secretary said incident would be investigated; company 22 Oct said worker salaries had been paid. Two former political prisoners, Chuyan Mamatqulov and Elyor Tursunov, early Oct filed unprecedented lawsuit demanding govt compensation for "unjust convictions" and harm caused during detention in notorious Jaslyk prison in north west; prison was closed in 2019 following public outcry at abusive practices and reports of torture; Qashqadaryo regional court 9 Oct ruled govt should compensate Mamatqulov for illegal imprisonment.