

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** With formation of state-level govt still stalled twelve months after Oct 2018 elections, Bosnia's international partners including U.S., EU and Turkey reiterated calls for members of tri-partite presidency to end deadlock. European Court of Human Rights 29 Oct ruled that govt must amend electoral law in line with 2010 Constitutional Court ruling to allow municipal elections in Mostar, which has not held vote since 2008.

➔ **Kosovo** Vetevendosje ("Self-Determination") party won 6 Oct snap parliamentary elections with preliminary results giving it 25.9% of vote; Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) came second with 24.9%, and Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK, in govt for twelve years) third with 21.3%; voter turnout some 44%. Vetevendosje and LDK started coalition talks 10 Oct. EU Observation Mission said elections "well-administered and transparent", but criticised "uneven playing field" and reports of intimidation in Serb-majority areas. Election commission 6 Oct suspended vote counting after officials reported health problems after opening ballot boxes containing votes cast in Serbia; Belgrade claimed allegations were attempt to ban ethnic Serb Srpska Lista party. During his confirmation hearing at European Parliament, new EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell stated that development of an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia will be priority for new European Commission, and announced that his first official visit will be to Pristina.

↓ **North Macedonia** European Council 18 Oct decided not to begin formal accession talks with North Macedonia (and Albania) following French veto, in move widely criticised for undermining EU influence and credibility in Western Balkans, and prompting frustration in Skopje, where it is feared rejection will weaken PM Zaev's reformist govt. Amid calls from opponents for his resignation, PM Zaev 19 Oct called for snap elections, saying "we are victims of the EU's historic mistake", and that electorate will "decide the road we are going to take"; poll set for April 2020. European Parliament 24 Oct passed resolution calling decision a "strategic mistake" and called for European Council to unanimously back opening of accession talks at its next meeting. NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 21 Oct confirmed North Macedonia's NATO accession process "well on track".

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Armenia's year-long chairmanship of Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union ended with summit in Yerevan early Oct where member states, plus observers Iran and Singapore, finalised treaties on closer economic cooperation. PM Pashinyan welcomed resolution passed in U.S. House of Representatives 30 Oct recognising mass killings of Armenians in Ottoman Empire in early twentieth century as genocide.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Dozens detained during opposition-organised protests in capital 8 and 19 Oct, prompting criticism of excessive police tactics and govt reshuffle. Umbrella opposition group National Council of Democratic Forces (NCDF) 8 Oct organised demonstration in Baku calling for freedom of assembly, reportedly attended by several hundred people; authorities had sanctioned rally attended by up to 50 people; police reported seventeen protesters detained. NCDF 19 Oct organised unsanctioned protest in central Baku, calling for release of political prisoners and lower energy prices; before and during rally, police detained opposition leaders and some 300 protesters and forced others out of city centre. Amid reports that two opposition leaders were tortured by police, EU and U.S. embassy criticised excessive use of force by police – denied by govt – and called for investigation. Pro-govt news channel 20 Oct distributed leaked recording of conversations about protests between opposition member Gultekin Hajibeyli and EU and U.S. diplomats, prompting govt criticism of outside interference, and accusations that govt had violated Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Responding to anti-govt sentiment, President Aliyev 21 Oct dismissed two deputy PMs and called for all officials over the age of 70 to step down; also dismissed influential head of Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehdiyev; opposition called changes cosmetic. Aliyev also dismissed PM Mammadov 8 Oct, replacing him with economic adviser Ali Asadov.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Month saw relative calm in conflict zone, but harsher rhetoric between Baku and Yerevan amid signs of frustration over lack of progress in talks related to settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia reported incidents involving civilians in Qazakh/Tavush section of international border: Azerbaijani State Border Service 2 Oct said Armenian military shot dead civilian in Qazakh district; Armenian Defence Ministry denied report, blaming Azerbaijani side for wounding Armenian civilian in Tavush area, and 3 Oct reported death of one Armenian soldier in same section of border. Baku and Yerevan exchanged harsh rhetoric and blame for lack of progress in talks, including Armenian foreign ministry early Oct blaming Azerbaijan's "maximalist stance" as "main and essential threat to the peace process". Azerbaijan and Armenian leaders continued personal interactions; Armenian PM Pashinyan and Azerbaijan's President Aliyev clashed in speeches during Commonwealth of Independent States summit 11 Oct, but afterward discussed NK over dinner together. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs visited region 14-17 Oct to prepare possible meeting of Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs in margins of annual OSCE Ministerial Council early Dec.

➡ **Georgia** Tensions continue around separation line of breakaway republic South Ossetia following Aug crisis, with both sides reporting new problems mid-Oct. Geneva International Discussions (GID) participants meeting 8-9 Oct failed to reach agreement over contested Georgian police outpost in Tsnelisi village; armed South Ossetian security actors briefly held EU Monitoring Mission patrol in area of tensions 25 Oct. GID co-chairs also reiterated calls to reopen crossings, closure of which has led to reported food shortages and health problems for local ethnic Georgian population; one woman reportedly died 28 Oct due to lack of timely emergency support. Govt 15 Oct reported new attempts at borderisation along separation line; de facto South Ossetian authorities 16 Oct reported increased presence of armed police officers near Tsnelisi police outpost.

➔ **Russia/North Caucasus** Police 2 Oct raided HQ of independent Dagestani newspaper Chernovik, in move criticised by international media watchdog Reporters Without Borders as “witch-hunt”; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) also expressed concern. Search reportedly linked to investigation of reporter Abdulmumin Gadzhiyev, arrested in June on terrorism financing-related charges which Human Rights Watch has condemned as move to silence govt critics. Dagestan court 15 Oct extended Gadzhiyev’s pre-trial detention to 13 Nov. Human rights organisation Memorial expressed concern over fate of Chechen man Ramzan Shaikhayev, whose family reported he was abducted from his home outside Grozny 9 Sept, citing fears he may have been abducted by security services. In Ingushetia, authorities mid-Oct reportedly searched homes of three activists opposed to controversial land deal between Insughetia and Chechnya. Reports emerged of repressions in which Chechen govt officials were imprisoned in apparent purge that started with arrest of Argun mayor Ibragim Temirbayev.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Ukraine** Kyiv’s efforts to unlock long-stuck negotiation process with Russia-backed separatists prompted significant public backlash, but yielded tentative progress toward new Normandy summit and bilateral troop disengagement along front line, where security situation remained precarious. President Zelenskyy 1 Oct announced Kyiv had agreed to withdraw some troops from front line and signed on to so-called Steinmeier Formula for implementing the 2014-2015 Minsk agreements, opening door to long-awaited Normandy summit with Russia, Germany and France. Steinmeier Formula seeks to elide Kyiv and Russia/separatists’ disagreement on when “self-governing status” element of Minsk should take effect – after Ukrainian govt resumes control of its eastern border with Russia and holds elections under Ukrainian law (Kyiv’s vision) or before elections (Moscow and the separatists’ vision); Steinmeier stipulates special status and local elections must happen simultaneously. Domestic political opposition claim Steinmeier legitimises separatist regimes and amounts to surrender. Protesters gathered periodically with some 13,000 marching “against capitulation” 14 Oct; Kyiv attributed protests to communication failures. Disengagement did not proceed as planned 7 Oct; Kyiv blamed other side for ceasefire violations, while Russia and separatists blamed Kyiv’s inability to control armed far right, some of whom had begun an ongoing protest at one of the slated withdrawal zones, Zolote. Kyiv 14 Oct announced disengagement “postponed”; next day, Trilateral Contact Group parties cut short scheduled meeting involving discussion of plans to exchange prisoners and renew social services in separatist-held areas. Following controversial 27 Oct argument between Zelenskyy and right-wing activists in Zolote, national police announced activists had removed weapons from their front-line HQ. Sides announced start of disengagement at Zolote 29 Oct. Meanwhile, number of ceasefire violations well above Sept average. Ukrainian govt forces lost eight servicemen and one servicewoman (mostly due to sniper fire), while LDNR forces lost at least ten fighters; fourteen civilians injured 28 Sept - 30 Oct, all on separatist-held territory, eleven due to unexploded ordinances and mines. In positive news, Ukrainian authorities opened temporary bypass bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska, used by 10,000-12,000 people crossing front line daily.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ **Cyprus** UN continued efforts to rejuvenate stalled Cyprus reunification talks, while tensions grew over gas drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı 6 Oct expressed desire for tripartite meeting with UN Secretary-General and five-party conference with guarantor powers by year-end; Republic of Cyprus govt 12 Oct announced willingness to hold tripartite meeting with UN Secretary-General and Akıncı. Leaders agreed to UN Secretary-General Guterres' proposal for informal tripartite meeting to be held in Berlin 25 Nov. Following 5 Oct arrival of Turkish drilling vessel Yavuz at area the Republic of Cyprus claims is within its Exclusive Economic Zone, govt demanded Turkey "immediately cease illegal actions" and threatened to issue international arrest warrants for workers on vessel. Two French frigates en route to Syria 12 Oct conducted naval manoeuvres with Republic of Cyprus military.

➡ **Northern Ireland (UK)** Amid uncertainty over UK's planned departure from EU, assistant Northern Ireland police chief 16 Oct warned parliamentary committee that dissident republicans may use Brexit as "clarion call or rallying cry" and target any future "infrastructure", while head of police 23 Oct warned of loyalist "public disorder" if proposed UK-EU deal threatens union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

➡ **Spain** Tensions flared over issue of Catalonia independence, with hundreds injured as protesters clashed with police. Supreme court 14 Oct sentenced nine pro-independence Catalan leaders to prison terms of between nine and thirteen years for sedition and other offences related to Oct 2017 independence referendum deemed illegal by constitutional court, fining another three for disobedience. In response, thousands of protesters marched to Barcelona airport, and next day attempted to enter govt offices, leading to clashes with police. Estimated hundreds of thousands rallied in Barcelona 18 Oct, with further clashes with police. Over 600 injured in protests 14-20 Oct, including some 280 police; 130 reportedly arrested. Both pro- and anti-independence supporters staged mass demonstrations late Oct.

➡ **Turkey** Turkish military incursion into north east Syria increased tensions with Kurdish movement in Turkey and with allies, heightening concerns it could fuel Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency and enable resurgence of Islamic State (ISIS) threat. Turkish forces 9 Oct launched "Operation Peace Spring" against Kurdish-led People's Protection Units (YPG) in north east Syria, following phone call between President Erdoğan and U.S. President Trump, and U.S. announcement that it would remove its forces from border areas (see Syria). Stated goals of Turkish operation, conducted alongside Sunni rebel Syrian National Army proxies, included removing YPG from border area (some 30/32km by 440km), combatting "terrorists" and establishing "safe zone" for resettling Syrian refugees; ten Turkish soldiers reported killed in operation by end-Oct, and twenty civilians in Turkish border towns by YPG shelling/shooting. U.S. 15 Oct also briefly imposed sanctions calling for Ankara to halt incursion; Ankara and Washington 17 Oct agreed deal for Turkey to halt offensive for 120 hours to allow YPG forces to withdraw. Erdoğan and Russian President Putin 22 Oct reached agreement giving YPG forces until 29 Oct to withdraw 30km from border to create "safe zone", with Russian and Syrian govt forces facilitating withdrawal of YPG fighters in border areas outside Turkish

control; Turkish military with its Sunni rebel proxies now controls 140km along border from west of Tel Abyad to Ras al-Ayn. International community strongly condemned Turkish incursion, with several European states and Canada suspending arms exports. Military operations inside Turkey against PKK tapered off slightly following start of Syria incursion, while air and land operations against PKK in northern Iraq continued. Govt maintained efforts to criminalise Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) through ongoing detentions and arrests of HDP figures on terrorism-related charges, particularly around launch of Syria incursion which prompted HDP-organised protests. Police continued crackdown on suspected ISIS operatives. Erdoğan condemned U.S. House of Representatives resolution 30 Oct recognising early twentieth century mass killings of Armenians in Ottoman Empire as genocide.

Central Asia

➡ **Kazakhstan** Amid ongoing tensions over continued political influence of former president Nursultan Nazarbayev, President Tokayev 21 Oct issued decree handing Nazarbayev more power: stipulates president must consult Nazarbayev before appointing chiefs of state institutions (including Committee for National Security (KNB)) and ministers. Decree came days after Nazarbayev 11 Oct gave interview on state television downplaying his influence and condemning “traitors” for stoking unrest. Police arrested more than three dozen people involved in attempted anti-govt protests in capital Nur-Sultan, Almaty and other cities 26 Oct against govt business ties with China and calling for release of political prisoners. Trial began 22 Oct of fourteen repatriated citizens accused of fighting with ISIS in Syria, facing charges including involvement in terrorist activities, recruitment and promoting terrorism; KNB earlier reported 595 citizens have been returned from Syria in 2019, including more than 400 children.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Trial began in absentia 15 Oct of former President Atambayev, whose Aug arrest led to deadly violence between his supporters and security forces, on charges of illegal release in 2013 of high-profile convicted criminal Aziz Batukayev, after he twice refused to attend; Atambayev denies charges.

➡ **Tajikistan** Supreme Court early Oct ruled that National Alliance of Tajikistan (PMT), group comprising several opposition movements and parties based in EU, is a terrorist and extremist organisation. Some 2,000 prisoners released late month in mass amnesty, including some sentenced for “liking online extremist posts”.

➡ **Turkmenistan** President Berdymukhammedov 1 Oct fired Interior Minister Isgender Mulikov, who had been accused of corruption and abuse of power.