

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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↓ **Bosnia Republika Srpska leadership took steps to undermine federal institutions, sparking worst political crisis in 20 years and raising prospect of secession.** In moves threatening collapse of 1995 Dayton Peace Accords, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik 8 Oct said Bosnian Serb-run entity Republika Srpska would pull out of Bosnian armed forces, top judiciary body and tax administration; 12 Oct announced Bosnian judiciary, security and intelligence agencies would be banned from operating in Republika Srpska and “Serb only” institutions would replace them by end of Nov, announcing he was “openly working on the project of an independent Republika Srpska” but stopping short of calling for secession. Republika Srpska President Zeljka Cvijanovic signed law which came into force 13 Oct to reverse ban on genocide denial introduced by previous High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina Valentin Inzko in July. Dodik 14 Oct announced intention to unravel further Bosnian state institutions, including state court, prosecution, and constitutional court. Prosecutors subsequently launched investigation of Dodik for “undermining the constitutional order”. National Assembly of Republika Srpska 20 Oct adopted law creating independent medicine procurement agency, undermining federal Agency for Medical Equipment and Drugs; EU and U.S. same day expressed concerns over “divisive rhetoric” and called for respect of institutions. Bosnia’s Serb police 22 Oct held “anti-terrorist” drill in Mount Jahorina, outside capital Sarajevo and in Mrkonjic Grad in move seen by Bosnian Croat and Bosniak leadership as “a clear provocation”. EU and U.S. 29 Oct reaffirmed support for unified Bosnia and said they were working with Bosnian officials to solve political crisis.

➔ **Kosovo EU brokered temporary agreement to resolve tense standoff with Serbia triggered by licence plate dispute, while police and Kosovo Serb protesters clashed.** Following govt’s implementation of regulations affecting Serbian licence plates that triggered unrest in north and dispute with Belgrade, NATO mission 2 Oct deployed to border crossing points with Serbia in northern Kosovo in support of EU-brokered temporary agreement. EU deal 4 Oct came into force, requiring covering up national symbols on licence plates and establishing Working Group to find permanent solution to dispute. Working Group 21 Oct met for first time in Belgian capital Brussels, due to report back on their findings at High-Level Dialogue in six months. Meanwhile, authorities in Mitrovica city in northern Kosovo 1 Oct charged ten ethnic Albanians with involvement in Sept ethnically motivated attack against Serbs. In worrying incident, police 13 Oct clashed with Kosovo Serb protesters who reportedly threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at police during anti-smuggling operation in Mitrovica; incident left six officers and one protester injured. Serbian President Vučić same day met Kosovo Serb representatives, who asked for weapons and Serbian troops in or out of uniform, and stated: “If they [Kosovo authorities] start violence, you protect your people and we will be with you”. Meanwhile, U.S. 13 Oct urged for calm and EU 14 Oct warned against “unilateral actions”. In first round of municipal elections held 17 Oct, ruling

Vetevendosje party failed to secure victory in any of 17 constituencies that produced clear winner; 21 remaining constituencies due to be decided in run-off votes.

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## **Caucasus**

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➔ **Armenia Diplomatic engagement with Baku increased despite hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh and proceedings at International Court of Justice.** Despite rise in hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone (see Nagorno-Karabakh), Armenian FM Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani FM Jeyhun Bayramov 14 Oct met in presence of Russian FM Sergei Lavrov to discuss issues related to NK conflict, including implementation of Nov 2020 trilateral statement. After govt and Baku in Sept initiated cases against each other at International Court of Justice on grounds of violating International Convention on Racial Discrimination, court 14 Oct hosted hearings on Armenian case against Azerbaijan, which focused on Azerbaijan's Military Trophies Park and Armenian prisoners of war, and 18 Oct hosted hearing on Azerbaijan's separate case against Armenia, which largely focused on landmines. Following Azerbaijan's Aug closure of transit road from Iran to Armenia, Iranian delegation 4 Oct visited country to discuss Iran's possible contribution to construction of alternative transit road in Armenia; Russia's Deputy Minister of Economic Development Dmitry Volvach 19 Oct announced plans to invest in "concrete programs worth one billion dollars". Meanwhile, PM Pashinyan 12 Oct travelled to Russian capital Moscow to meet Russian President Putin, reportedly discussing bilateral agenda and post-war situation.

➔ **Azerbaijan Diplomatic engagement with Yerevan increased despite hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh and proceedings at International Court of Justice; tensions with Iran continued.** Despite rise in hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone (see Nagorno-Karabakh), Armenian FM Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani FM Jeyhun Bayramov 14 Oct met in presence of Russian FM Sergei Lavrov to discuss issues related to NK conflict, including implementation of Nov 2020 trilateral statement. After govt and Yerevan in Sept initiated cases against each other at International Court of Justice on grounds of violating International Convention on Racial Discrimination, court 14 Oct hosted hearings on Armenian case against Azerbaijan, which focused on Azerbaijan's Military Trophies Park and Armenian prisoners of war, and 18 Oct hosted hearing on Azerbaijan's separate case against Armenia, which largely focused on landmines. Meanwhile, tensions continued with Iran after police installed checkpoint in Sept on main border zone highway connecting Iran to South Caucasus, and Armenia with its southern regions. Iranian armed forces 1 Oct held military drills, prompting President Aliyev to question "why now, and why on our border?". Interior ministry 5 Oct suspended prayer hall and Representative's Office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran early Oct held large-scale military drills at borders with Azerbaijan's enclave Nakhchivan and Turkey; Azerbaijan and Turkey 5-8 Oct launched joint military exercises. Iran 5 Oct closed airspace to Azerbaijani military. FMs of Iran and Azerbaijan next day discussed bilateral tensions. Azerbaijan 19 Oct detained five Azerbaijani Shia Muslim clerics with alleged links to Iran. After Iranian authorities 20 Oct banned Iranian load drivers from entering NK via Armenia, Baku next day released two detained Iranian truck drivers. Iranian FM Hossein Amir-Abdollahian

27 Oct said tension between countries were thing of past and nations were “on the right path of cooperation”.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh** **Despite heightened tensions inside Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders continued to voice readiness to resume meetings in OSCE Minsk Group format.** In Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, hostilities increased during month. Azerbaijani sniper reportedly 9 Oct killed ethnic Armenian farmer next to military positions; Azerbaijan’s defence ministry same day denied responsibility. Azerbaijani trucks 13 Oct came under fire, with no injuries reported, prompting Baku to pause movement of trucks in area; de facto NK defence ministry 13 Oct denied incident. Clashes along one of front-line sections in Agdam district 14 Oct wounded six NK soldiers; sniper in nearby area same day reportedly killed one Azerbaijani soldier. Similar sniper shots same day reported near Azerbaijan’s exclave in south of Armenia, with no deaths or injuries confirmed. Earlier, Azerbaijani President Aliyev 4 Oct visited NK conflict zone, showcasing Israeli-produced drone and announcing construction of “smart settlement” in southern part of NK conflict zone. Despite hostilities, diplomatic contact increased. Aliyev 2 Oct signalled readiness to meet Armenian PM Pashinyan with Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group mediation; Pashinyan 15 Oct confirmed willingness to meet. Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs 14 Oct met in presence of Russian FM Sergei Lavrov to discuss issues related to NK conflict, including implementation of Nov 2020 trilateral statement calling for resolution of “remaining issues”; meeting follows late Sept meeting convened by OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). In positive development, Azerbaijan 6 Oct released one Armenian soldier detained in July at disputed border areas, and 19 Oct freed five Armenian soldiers detained during or shortly after 2020 war, who were previously sentenced to prison terms. Armenian-populated areas of NK 10 Oct held elections in Askeran, Martakert and Martuni regions.

➔ **Georgia** **Ruling Georgian Dream party won local elections as arrest of former President Mikheil Saakashvili fuelled tensions between opposition and govt.** In local elections held 2 Oct, Georgian Dream won 46.7% of votes, surpassing 43% threshold for snap parliamentary elections set by EU-brokered April deal from which party withdrew in July; largest opposition party United National Movement (UNM) came in second with 30.7% of vote. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observation mission same day concluded elections were “well-administered”, despite “allegations of intimidation, vote-buying, pressure on candidates and voters, and an unlevel playing field”; UNM 3 Oct alleged “election results were falsified”. Run-off round took place 30 Oct to decide winner in number of key towns as well as capital Tbilisi; Central Election Commission 31 Oct announced Georgian Dream won 19 of 20 mayoral polls, including all major cities, prompting head of UNM Nika Melia to reject “rigged results” and call for street rallies in protest. After founder of UNM and former President Mikheil Saakashvili 1 Oct returned to Georgia from Ukraine, authorities same day arrested him on corruption charges which he rejected; Saakashvili immediately announced hunger strike. In its largest street protest ever, UNM 14 Oct gathered 50,000 supporters in capital Tbilisi to demand Saakashvili’s release; dozens of former and current European foreign officials 18 Oct called for Saakashvili’s release. Prosecutor’s Office 21 Oct charged Saakashvili with crossing

border illegally. Meanwhile, in breakaway entity Abkhazia, violent altercation ensued after de facto Interior Minister Dmitry Dbar accompanied by police reportedly sought to disarm de facto MP Garri Kokaia who had fired shots in air at late Sept celebrations of 28th anniversary of territory's declaration of independence. Demonstrators 1 Oct rallied against Dbar outside de facto parliament building while de facto President Aslan Bzhania same day convened emergency parliamentary session. Bzhania 3 Oct suspended Dbar pending investigation into the incident; motion in de facto parliament to dismiss Dbar from his post however failed by one vote. Bzhania visited Russian capital Moscow twice during month for high-level meetings with senior Russian officials, including with Deputy PM Marat Khusnullin.

➔ **Russia (internal) Authorities detained dozens of suspected Islamist militants across country, and harassment of opposition leader Sergei Navalny's associates continued.** Law enforcement agencies 4 Oct detained two leaders and six supporters of international jihadist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir in capital Moscow and wider capital region for allegedly disseminating terrorist ideology. Agencies 14 Oct detained four Central Asian nationals in Vladimir region suspected of affiliation with extremist group Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Authorities 14 Oct detained 14 individuals suspected of engaging in financing activities for Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Moscow, North Caucasus and other regions. In North Caucasus republic Karachay-Cherkessia, law enforcement 19 Oct detained five individuals associated with banned At-Takfir wal-Hijra organisation. Authorities 29 Oct reported detention of members of extremist right-wing radical community in Buryatia region who were planning actions against authorities and migrants. Meanwhile, Moscow court 14 Oct sentenced head of Alliance of Doctors trade union Dr Anastasia Vasilyeva, who treated Navalny, to one-year restriction of freedom for allegedly calling for demonstrations in support of opposition leader. Forty-five countries 5 Oct also questioned Russia via Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) regarding Aug 2020 poisoning of now-imprisoned Navalny; govt 7 Oct provided response, which UK Delegation to OPCW 20 Oct argued "makes no attempt to answer the questions". Eighteen govts, including U.S., UK, France and Germany, 28 Oct issued joint statement condemning "the Russian government's targeting and harassment of independent journalists and media outlets".

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➔ **Belarus Authorities continued crackdown on dissent and restricted space for civil society groups, while ties with Western countries deteriorated further.** Following late Sept house raid by security forces that resulted in shootout, which left one civilian and one security officer dead, authorities 6 Oct announced detention of 136 individuals over social media comments criticising intelligence agency for incident. Authorities next day launched criminal probe against news outlet *Tut.by* for allegedly inciting social hatred and discord. Supreme Court 1 Oct ordered closure of Belarusian Helsinki Committee, one of country's remaining two human rights groups. Court 5 Oct sentenced former Colonel Alyaksey Syankou to two years in prison over participation in Aug 2020 mass protests. Ministry of interior 15 Oct classified Telegram channel of exiled opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya as "extremist", threatening subscribers with fines or jail

time. Authorities 25 Oct removed licence of opposition lawyer Natallya Matskevich; 28 Oct cut access to several news networks, including *Deutsche Welle*, alleging media outlets spreading “extremist” content. Amid migration dispute between EU states and Belarus, Polish Border Guards 8 Oct accused Belarusian forces of firing “probably blank ammunition” across border; Belarus’ Border Guard Committee rejected alleged use of weapons. Polish interior minister 12 Oct announced plan to construct “solid, high barrier” on Polish-Belarusian border, while Poland 19 Oct doubled border contingent to 6,000 soldiers. German Federal Police 13 Oct claimed 4,300 migrants entered Germany through “Belarus Route”. After govt mid-Aug demanded U.S. to reduce embassy staff in Belarus, Belarusian New York City consulate 21 Oct closed at request of U.S.; France’s ambassador 17 Oct left Belarus following govt’s request. Govt 20 Oct notified U.S. of forced closure of its embassy’s Public Diplomacy and Agency for International Development offices.

➔ **Ukraine Hostilities continued in Donbas conflict zone, while momentum gathered for possible Normandy Four meeting.** Russian-backed armed groups suffered 12 combat fatalities during month according to Ukrainian researchers. Ukrainian govt forces recorded two combat deaths 26, 27 Oct. In notable development, Kyiv 26 Oct used for first time Turkish Bayraktar drone, which reportedly destroyed howitzer. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors corroborated two civilian casualties following heavy weapons use 21 Oct, and one from small arms use 9 Oct, all near separatist-held Donetsk. De facto authorities of so-called Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR) 13 Oct announced that Stanytsya Luhanska, sole checkpoint through which civilian residents can enter govt-held territory, would be closed 15 Oct-1 Nov to control COVID-19 spread. Ukrainian authorities same day detained LPR member allegedly conducting reconnaissance, prompting Moscow to call for consular access given detainee’s Russian citizenship; incident led separatist armed group 17 Oct to temporarily block OSCE Special Monitoring Mission from accessing patrol base, demanding arrestee’s release. Following online meeting between German Chancellor Merkel, French President Macron and President Zelenskyy 11 Oct, Paris next day announced that FMs of Normandy Four (Ukraine, France, Germany, Russia) would meet in coming weeks; Moscow 13 Oct confirmed that plans were under way, although Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 14 Oct reiterated meetings not desirable until sides had fulfilled Dec 2019 pledges. EU and U.S. 9 Oct jointly criticised “unexplained and unjustifiable delays” in selecting head of Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office after selection committee failed to achieve quorum at planned proceedings. Annual Ukraine-EU summit on 12 Oct yielded declaration of willingness to “explore possibilities” to further support country including through military education. U.S. military aid package worth \$250 mn arrived in three instalments, on 10, 18 and 23 Oct; U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin 19 Oct visited capital Kyiv, discussed implementation of U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Defence Framework. Investigative project “Pandora papers” published 3 Oct revealed Zelenskyy and partners had set up network of offshore companies in 2012. Authorities 8 Oct announced new possible treason charges against opposition deputy Viktor Medvedchuk.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus UN Sec-Gen proposed new special envoy, while maritime tensions persisted.** UN Sec-Gen Antonio Guterres 3 Oct proposed appointment of Canadian Colin Stewart as new special envoy to Cyprus; Republic of Cyprus next day consented while “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) did not immediately respond in likely sign of disagreement over scope of envoy’s mandate. Meanwhile, tensions persisted in maritime domain. Greek Cypriot govt 3 Oct rejected Ankara’s calls to stop energy exploration by research vessels in waters south of island. In troubling incident that could become more common in months ahead, Turkish defence ministry 4 Oct announced Turkish navy had pushed back Greek Cypriot research vessel; Republic of Cyprus’s research vessel carried out survey operations in claimed Exclusive Economic Zone 21-23 Oct. Turkish navy 8 Oct issued advisory announcing that Turkish research vessel Oruç Reis, accompanied by Turkish warships, would carry out seismic surveys north of Cyprus 8 Oct-16 Dec; in response, Republic of Cyprus claimed such activity violated its sovereign rights. Turkish Cypriot authorities 13 Oct began new phase in opening of fenced-off town of Varosha, clearing roads and streets in one part of area Turkey had demilitarised for resettlement of Greek Cypriots who wish to reclaim their properties. Incumbent “TRNC” PM Ersan Saner 13 Oct resigned, saying acting govt was no longer sustainable given that it had lost majority support in parliament; parliamentary elections in “TRNC” planned for early 2022.

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean Maritime tensions persisted between Greece and Turkey while sides held new round of exploratory talks.** After France and Greece last Sept announced defence and security deal that includes Greece’s purchase of three French frigates and mutual assistance clause, Turkish defence ministry 1 Oct said deal threatened NATO alliance and would fuel regional arms race. Turkish defence ministry 3 Oct accused Greece of “unlawful, provocative and aggressive” actions in Aegean Sea, citing Greek military drills in Sept 16km from Turkish coast and scientific research vessel in contested waters. Ankara also conducted numerous naval drills in Aegean Sea during month, including in contested maritime zones. In tentatively positive sign, Ankara and Athens 6 Oct held 63rd round of exploratory talks in Turkish capital Ankara; content of discussion not publicly disclosed and next round of talks expected to be held in Greek capital Athens in six months. Greece, Cyprus and Egypt 19 Oct jointly condemned Turkey’s activities in Eastern Mediterranean, following their 9th Trilateral Summit held in Athens; in response, Turkish foreign ministry said joint declaration is “nothing but a reflection of hostile attitude displayed by the Greek Cypriot side and Greece against Turkey and the TRNC [“Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”]”. Turkish President Erdoğan and U.S. President Biden 31 Oct met on sidelines of G20 summit, focusing on bilateral relations as well as regional issues, including Eastern Mediterranean.

➔ **Turkey Military operations continued against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in south east and northern Iraq, and authorities arrested scores of alleged Islamic State supporters.** Military continued operations against PKK in south east and northern Iraq. In south east, operations concentrated in rural areas of Bingöl and Şırnak provinces; interior ministry 5 Oct claimed number of PKK members operating inside country dropped to 189. In northern Iraq, military

conducted air operations targeting higher-ranking members of PKK. Attack in northern Syria 10 Oct killed two Turkish policemen, for which Ankara blamed People's Protection Units (YPG) – Syrian armed group with links to PKK (see Syria). Parliament 27 Oct extended military's mandate to launch cross-border military operations in Iraq and Syria for two years. Security units continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) cells/operatives across country. Police detained more than 130 individuals with alleged ISIS links during month. Notably, security units 5 Oct carried out simultaneous raids in 18 locations in Istanbul, detaining 16 individuals, and police 12 Oct detained 11 ISIS-linked suspects in simultaneous raids in nine provinces, including Ankara and Adana. In sign of deteriorating relations with West, President Erdoğan 23 Oct said he had ordered foreign ministry to declare persona non grata ten Western ambassadors, including U.S., Canada, France and Germany, after they issued joint statement calling for release of businessman and human rights activist Osman Kavala who has been jailed since Oct 2017; crisis was defused after embassies reaffirmed commitment to Article 41 of Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which stipulates that diplomatic missions shall not interfere in domestic affairs of their host country. In response, Erdoğan 27 Oct stepped back from his decision to expel the ambassadors. Erdoğan and U.S. President Biden 31 Oct met on sidelines of G20 summit, focusing on bilateral relations as well as regional issues, including Eastern Mediterranean.

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kyrgyzstan President Japarov signalled willingness to resolve disputed border issue with Tajikistan.** President Japarov 12 Oct named Akyzbek Japarov as chairman of cabinet; move follows constitutional reforms which created new post and which president adopted previous day. Japarov 23 Oct said border crossings with Tajikistan were still closed to Tajik citizens following violent escalation in April and indicated officials “will be heading to Tajikistan soon” to proceed with border demarcation and delimitation.

➔ **Tajikistan Concerns persisted over tensions between govt and Taliban in Afghanistan.** Russian foreign ministry 1 Oct voiced concern about “growing tension in Tajik-Afghan relations against the background of the mutually acrimonious statements by the leaders of both countries”, indicating build-up of Taliban fighters and Tajikistan's armed forces on respective sides of border. Reports 28 Oct surfaced that China will finance construction of law enforcement outpost in eastern Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province in eastern Tajikistan, at border with Afghanistan. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 29 Oct held telephone conversation with FM Sirojiddin Muhriddin during which pair “confirmed the decision to coordinate efforts on issues related to the situation in Afghanistan”. Muhriddin 30 Oct hosted chairperson of Parliamentary Assembly of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Margaret Sederfelt, and reportedly raised “alarming situation on the border” with Afghanistan.

➔ **Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev won second presidential term, while senior Uzbek officials engaged with Taliban govt in Afghanistan.** Central Election Commission chairman 25 Oct declared Mirziyoyev winner of election with 80.1% of vote; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

(OSCE)-led monitoring mission same day said election was “not truly competitive”. Ahead of election on 24 Oct, NGO Human Rights Watch 13 Oct cited restrictions on media freedom and opposition candidates that “compromise the fairness and integrity of the first presidential elections since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016”. Earlier, U.S. Deputy Sec State Wendy Sherman 4 Oct met with Mirziyoyev in capital Tashkent to discuss bilateral relations; Sherman “underscored the importance of the United States’ strategic partnership with Uzbekistan”. Turkmenistan President Berdymukhammedov 5 Oct met Mirziyoyev in Tashkent where pair “stressed during the talks that peace and stability in Afghanistan are the key to sustainable development in the entire Central Asian region”. FM Abdulaziz Kamilov 7 Oct visited Afghan capital Kabul to meet acting Deputy Head of Taliban govt Mulla Abdul Kabir and acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi; Kamilov said he “received from our Afghan brothers strong and clear assurances that Afghanistan will never impose any threat or danger on Uzbekistan”.