

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ Bosnia Tensions flared in Republika Srpska amid alleged vote-rigging in presidential election, prompting street protests and ballot recount.

Bosnians 2 Oct headed to polls to vote in general elections, including presidential vote in Republika Srpska (RS), for which main contenders were Serb leader Milorad Dodik and Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) VP Jelena Trivic. Tensions began rising in RS after preliminary results 3 Oct showed Dodik on verge of electoral victory despite Trivic claiming victory night before, reportedly based on preliminary ballot count from number of polling stations. Amid reports of “irregularities”, Trivic alongside opposition parties Serbian Democratic Party and List for Justice and Order 5 Oct formally called for ballot recount. Meanwhile, opposition supporters 6, 9 Oct held protests in Banja Luka city, denouncing vote-rigging. Central Electoral Commission 10 Oct ordered recount in all polling stations in Serb entity; move escalated tensions further, with thousands of Dodik supporters 25 Oct taking to streets and demanding end to recount, during which Dodik reiterated his “belief in the idea of an independent Republika Srpska”. Electoral Commission 27 Oct declared Dodik winner.

➔ Kosovo Authorities delayed license plate rule in bid to ease tensions, as discussions on Kosovo-Serbia normalisation continued.

Kosovo govt announced new license plate rules. As tensions simmered over govt’s 31 Oct deadline for switch of all Serbia-registered vehicles to temporary Republic of Kosovo plates, U.S. Special Envoy Gabriel Escobar 19 Oct said that “Quint” countries (France, Germany, Italy, UK and U.S.) asked PM Kurti to extend deadline for implementation of license plate rule by ten months; EU 21 Oct joined call for postponement. Serb party in Kosovo 28 Oct warned that Serb minority would once again block roads if govt did not delay implementation of rule. Kurti same day announced phased deadlines: until 21 Nov, users of Serbia-registered cars will be given warning, after which they will receive fine; full implementation will be established 21 April 2023. EU 29 Oct said decision was “step in the right direction” but called for longer transition period to “maintain calm”.

Franco-German proposal for normalisation with Serbia sparked debates. Following Sept rumours of Franco-German draft proposal on normalising Serbia-Kosovo relations, Serb President Vučić 8 Oct confirmed its existence, claiming it proposed UN membership for Kosovo in exchange for Serbia receiving financial aid and fast-track to EU membership; FM Donika Gervalla 9 Oct also confirmed document’s existence, said it was “basis for discussion” rather than final proposal.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** **Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders engaged in flurry of diplomatic activity amid ongoing tensions; PM Pashinyan met with Turkish President Erdoğan to discuss normalisation process.**

Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders met in Prague for EU/French-mediated talks. Following border violence in Sept that killed almost 300 people, PM Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 6 Oct met in Czech Republic's capital Prague for meeting mediated by French President Macron and EU Council President Michel. Both leaders committed to respecting each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, agreed to two-month EU civilian mission to observe situation on Armenian side of border with Azerbaijan; first monitors 20 Oct deployed. Aliyev 6 Oct said sides were gradually moving toward peace, reiterated that Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) was Azerbaijan's internal affair (see Nagorno-Karabakh).

Moscow held separate summit in Russia. Russian foreign ministry 6 Oct criticised West's "not quite balanced" approach to reaching peace agreement; Russian President Putin 27 Oct said "so-called Washington option envisages recognition of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over Karabakh" but emphasised that "if the Armenian people and leadership believe that Karabakh has its own specificities and these specificities must be taken into account, mentioned in a future peace agreement, this is also possible". Putin 31 Oct hosted Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders at summit in Sochi city; sides, echoing part of outcomes from Prague, committed to respecting each other's territorial integrity and emphasised "crucial contribution" of Russian peacekeepers.

Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan persisted. Aliyev 14 Oct said Armenia had failed to provide access from mainland Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan or to pull troops out of NK, as agreed in Moscow-brokered deal to end 2020 war; Pashinyan same day rejected accusations and warned of "high risk" of new "military aggression" by Azerbaijan. Pashinyan 17 Oct accused Azerbaijan of violating Sept ceasefire and blaming Armenia as "pretext for new military aggression", which Azerbaijan denied. Meanwhile, at Armenia's invitation, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe sent mission 21-27 Oct to assess situation in certain border areas; Azerbaijan 20 Oct rejected "unilateral" mission.

In other important developments. Pashinyan 6 Oct met with Turkish President Erdoğan in Prague in highest-level meeting in over a decade to discuss normalisation process.

➔ **Azerbaijan** **Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders engaged in flurry of diplomatic activity amid ongoing tensions.**

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➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh De facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) declared willingness for direct negotiations with Baku, while talks between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders drew mixed reactions.**

Stepanakert declared readiness for direct talks with Baku. Armenia 5 Oct confirmed negotiations to establish "international discussion mechanism" between Baku and Stepanakert were under way. De facto NK FM Davit Babayan same day confirmed readiness for direct talks with Baku, adding that Baku should recognise NK as "full-fledged party to the conflict" so that all sides could negotiate as "equals"; Babayan also said talks should include Armenia and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group in order "to achieve a comprehensive settlement".

Talks in Prague between Armenia and Azerbaijan prompted mixed reactions in NK. Following deadly violence along Armenia-Azerbaijan border in Sept, Armenian PM Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 6 Oct met in Czech Republic's capital Prague for EU and French-mediated meeting (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Aliyev same day said sides were gradually moving toward peace, but reiterated that NK was Azerbaijan's internal affair; added that Azerbaijani govt would continue to develop informal relations with NK Armenians. Prague meeting prompted mixed reactions in NK. Notably, protesters 8-9 Oct held sporadic rallies against being placed under Baku's rule, while de facto authorities same day complained that Prague statement made no reference to NK. NK residents 30 Oct once more gathered in huge numbers for rally while de facto parliament, who organised rally, issued statement rejecting any peace deal envisaging Azerbaijani control over NK and urging authorities in Yerevan to "approach recognizing Azerbaijan's territorial integrity with reservations, taking into account the fact that the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict is not settled."

In other important developments. Ahead of 31 Oct summit in Russia's Sochi city, in which Russian President Putin brought together Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders to discuss peace process, de facto NK leader Arayik Harutyunyan 29 Oct expressed

hope that meeting would “extend the term of the Russian peacekeeping force deployed in NK indefinitely, since the Russian peacekeepers have undertaken a significant share of the effort to ensure the security of Artsakh and its population”.

➔ **Georgia** After months-long pause, international forum to discuss consequences of 2008 Russo-Georgian war held.

New round of Geneva International Discussions held in Switzerland. After pause of nearly one year due to international tensions over Russian invasion of Ukraine (see Ukraine), 56th round of Geneva International Discussions – multilateral forum to address security and humanitarian consequences of 2008 Russo-Georgian War – held 5 Oct in Switzerland’s Palais des Nations. Deputy FM Lasha Darsalia 5 Oct described negotiation process as “particularly difficult” given “rather complicated security environment around us”. EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar same day commended “very useful” exchange of views, noting everyone was “committed” to continuing work in Geneva format.

In other important developments. EU Council 12 Oct announced plan on non-acceptance of Russian travel documents issued in breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine; said decision was in “response to Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine and Russia’s practice of issuing Russian international passports to residents of the occupied regions”.

➔ **Russia (internal)** President Putin introduced new threat-level system across country, crackdown on opposition continued, and Moscow deepened military cooperation with Iran.

Govt introduced new security regime. In signs Russia is preparing for protracted conflict with Ukraine, Putin 19 Oct declared martial law in four annexed Ukrainian regions (see Ukraine) and introduced various “response levels” across Russia. System differentiates depending on threat level in particular regions. Notably, Putin introduced “medium response level” in annexed Crimea and regions bordering Ukraine such as Belgorod, which has seen continued shelling from Ukraine and which 16 Oct encountered “terrorist attack” at military site that killed 11 soldiers. “Medium level” decree gives local authorities right to organise economic mobilisation, ban movement for residents and support military services. Putin also announced new “Coordination Council” to increase supply of weapons and equipment, as well as medicines, food and salaries, to military.

Partial military mobilisation completed. Following Sept “partial military mobilisation” announcement, which prompted rallies across country and mass exile, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu 28 Oct announced 300,000 people had been mobilised, of whom 41,000 have been deployed to military units in Ukraine. Authorities reported around 11 cases of arson during month at military enlistment offices, but overall protest activity decreased.

Crackdown on opposition persisted. Court in Moscow 18 Oct sentenced local resident Pavel Pischulin to two months of pre-trial arrest for “cooperating with foreign state”, first known criminal case handed down for working with foreign govt. Imprisoned opposition leader Alexey Navalny 20 Oct said authorities had opened another criminal case against him for “promoting terrorism”. Former presidential candidate and journalist Ksenia Sobchak 26 Oct became suspect in extortion case

against Rostec State Corporation; Sobchak same day left country. News 27 Oct emerged that authorities opened first criminal case against individual for failing to obey wartime order.

In other important developments. EU 6 Oct adopted eighth sanctions package, aimed at “depriving the Kremlin’s military and industrial complex of key components and technologies and Russia’s economy of European services and expertise”. U.S. newspaper *The Washington Post* 16 Oct reported that Iran agreed to secretly transfer short-range ballistic missiles to Russia.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus Authorities deployed joint regional force with Moscow after Minsk accused Ukraine of planning attack, while authorities continued crackdown on dissent.**

Govt ramped up military cooperation with Russia amid war in Ukraine. President Lukashenko 10 Oct alleged Ukraine was planning strikes on Belarus and announced joint deployment of forces with Russia. G7 (Canada, France, Italy, Japan, UK, Germany and U.S.) 11 Oct called joint force proof of “regime’s complicity with Russia”. Russia 15 Oct began sending equipment and troops, while defence ministry 16 Oct said they expected to host just under 9,000 Russian troops. Authorities 17 Oct announced live-fire exercises and missile launches as part of “training activities” in east and centre of country. Meanwhile, FM Vladimir Makei 14 Oct told Russian *Izvestia* newspaper that gov’t was introducing “counterterrorist regime” in response to expected provocations from Ukraine, giving security forces broad powers to detain people or restrict free movement.

Crackdown on dissent continued apace. Following sentencing of four independent media representatives in Minsk District Court, EU 7 Oct criticised gov’t’s “brutal crackdown”, “long prison sentences” and “appalling conditions” in detention. Meanwhile, in trial dubbed “Autukhovich case”, court 17 Oct sentenced main defendant Mikalay Autukhovich to 25 years in prison for allegedly plotting terrorist attack and conspiring to seize power; remaining eleven defendants received sentences of up to 20 years.

➔ **Moldova Amid ongoing opposition-led protests, U.S. imposed sanctions targeting Russian “influence operations”; tensions ran high with Russia amid airspace violation and gas supply worries.**

Opposition-led protests prompted U.S. sanctions targeting Kremlin. Protests that began in Sept denouncing high inflation and fuel prices and demanding resignation of President Maia Sandu and pro-EU gov’t continued throughout month in capital Chisinau. Notably, estimated 7,000 protesters 23 Oct marched through capital and created new tent camp, removed 10 Oct by police. Members of opposition Shor Party, who maintain links to Russia, have been main organisers behind demonstrations, hinting at Kremlin’s role in protests to destabilise country. Amid growing concerns, U.S. 26 Oct imposed sanctions on over 20 individuals and entities to counter Russia’s “persistent malign influence campaigns and systemic corruption in Moldova”.

Authorities accused Moscow of violating country’s airspace. Deputy PM Nicu Popescu 10 Oct announced that three missiles launched on Ukraine from Russian

ships in Black Sea crossed Moldova's airspace; Russia offered no official explanation for incident. Meanwhile, govt 7 Oct extended state of emergency imposed in Feb following Russia's invasion of Ukraine by 60 days.

Concerns grew over Russian gas supplies. Amid soaring gas prices in wake of Ukraine war, Russian gas supplier Gazprom – which Moldova relies almost entirely on for gas – 4 Oct threatened to cut gas supplies if country failed to comply with its payment obligations by 20 Oct; one lawmaker said move was “another element of soft blackmailing Moldova for its European course”. Govt 20 Oct said Gazprom refused to tell Chisinau how much gas it would provide in Nov, citing supply issues due to Ukraine, further straining relations.

↓ **Ukraine Russia stepped up offensive by launching series of strikes on cities, including capital Kyiv, and civilian infrastructure, likely aimed at worsening living conditions as winter approaches.**

Wave of Russian strikes targeted cities and civilian infrastructure. Russia throughout Oct launched strikes on Kyiv and other cities, often using Shahed-136 drones supplied by Iran, in move likely aimed at worsening living conditions across country as winter nears. Most notably, Russian forces 10 Oct launched around 80 missiles across country, about half of which were intercepted, killing 23 civilians and targeting power stations, electricity grid and symbolic targets in Kyiv such as pedestrian bridge. Meanwhile, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Mariano Grossi 12 Oct said shelling at Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia power plant in Enerhodar city had caused plant to lose connection to grid several times and called for security protection zone. Both sides have traded blame for shelling.

Ukrainian counteroffensives in north east and south continued. In north east, Ukraine's forces 1 Oct entered strategically important Lyman city in Donetsk region day after Moscow proclaimed annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. In south, as Ukrainian forces advanced along Dnipro river toward Kherson city in bid to close in on occupied city, Russian-installed head of Kherson region 19 Oct said Russian military would evacuate up to 60,000 civilians; forcibly deporting civilians from occupied territories into occupiers' territory can constitute war crime under Geneva Convention. Meanwhile, Russia reportedly began sending reinforcements to defend Kherson city, 24 Oct accused Ukraine of plans to use “dirty bomb”. In Russian-annexed Crimea, explosion 8 Oct at symbolical Kerch Bridge connecting Russia to Crimea destroyed parts of road and railway tracks; Russia 8 Oct blamed Kyiv who neither confirmed nor denied involvement. Russia 29 Oct accused Ukraine of “massive” drone attack on port city of Sevastopol, same day announced exit from UN-brokered Black Sea Grain Deal.

In other important developments. At UN General Assembly, 143 countries 12 Oct voted to condemn Russia's proclaimed annexation of four Ukrainian regions, five members voted against and 35 abstained. FM Dmytro Kuleba 3 Oct embarked on tour of Africa to advocate for Ukrainian perspective in conflict but returned to Ukraine after missile strikes 10 Oct.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus Tensions persisted after U.S. lifted arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus last month, while Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots issued ultimatum to UN peacekeeping mission.**

Türkiye vowed new weapons for Turkish Cypriots. After U.S. 16 Sept lifted its decades-old arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus and Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu late Sept vowed to send more weapons to “protect Turkish Cypriots”, Turkish President Erdoğan 7 Oct said Turkish UAVs and combat drones may be sent to region “because we need to secure Northern Cyprus from all sides”; statement came amid reports of potential plan for Türkiye to establish military base in Karpaz peninsula located on northern tip of “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”).

Turkish Cypriot leadership made demands to UN peacekeeping force. Turkish Cypriot leadership demanded end to UN’s peacekeeping force deployment in northern Cyprus unless UN signs agreement specifically with “TRNC”; Turkish Cypriot FM Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu 5 Oct said: “We decided to give them another month. It is not the Greek Cypriot government that will approve your mission in the north. It is us”; UN military presence in north is enabled by agreement between UN and Greek Cypriot govt.

➔ **Türkiye Military targeted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and affiliates in Iraq, Syria and south east Türkiye, while tensions remained high with Greece amid new energy exploration agreement with Libya.**

Military continued operations against PKK and its affiliates. Operations within Türkiye were concentrated in rural areas of Elazığ, Şırnak and Hakkari provinces. In northern Iraq, operations were concentrated particularly in Duhok region; notably, PKK attack 1 Oct killed Turkish soldier (see Iraq). In northern Syria, Turkish drone strike 6 Oct killed People’s Defence Units (YPG) commander in Aleppo provinces (see Syria); Ankara appeared to remain intent on conducting new military operation against YPG/Syrian Democratic Forces but is yet to secure approval of U.S. or Russia.

Ankara struck deal with Libya, prompting Greece’s condemnation. FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 3 Oct announced govt and Libya had signed memorandum of understanding on joint energy explorations in their agreed Exclusive Economic Zone that was bilaterally declared in late 2019, which is disputed by Egypt and Greece. Greece protested deal, saying implementation “will be de facto illegal and, depending on its gravity, there will be a reaction both at a bilateral level and at the level of the EU and NATO”; Turkish foreign ministry 4 Oct accused Greece of “trying to usurp the legitimate rights of Turkey and Libya with its maximalist maritime jurisdiction demands”. Tensions between Athens and Ankara also remained high over irregular flow of migrants across land and sea borders, with Ankara accusing Greece of illegal pushbacks and Greece accusing Türkiye of deliberately pushing migrants westward toward Greece.

In other important developments. Security units’ operations against Islamic State continued, with nearly 90 individuals detained during month; notably, police 17 Oct detained six suspects in southern Adana province. President Erdoğan 6 Oct met

Armenian PM Pashinyan for first face-to-face meeting since countries began new process to normalise ties this year.

Central Asia

➔ Kyrgyzstan Authorities repressed dissenting views over border delimitation agreement with Uzbekistan; tensions persisted along Tajik-Kyrgyz border as both sides traded accusations of military build-up.

Local tensions flared over final border delimitation agreement with Uzbekistan. Following govt's breakthrough deal in March 2021 with Uzbekistan to resolve longstanding border disputes, sides drew closer during month toward agreement on definitive delimitation of shared border. However, frustration mounted among border communities over govt's decision to hand ownership of Kempir-Abad reservoir, vital water source that lies between Osh region and Uzbekistan's Andijan region, in return for land. Notably, opposition forces 15 Oct organised rally in Uzgen district's Kyzyl-Oktyabr village near reservoir, where they criticised govt's handling of border negotiations and demanded reservoir remain in Kyrgyz hands. In response, authorities 23 Oct repressed dissent, notably detaining at least 20 activists and politicians opposed to deal, accusing them of "organising and preparing mass riots"; court in Bishkek 25 Oct sent all detainees to pre-trial detention until at least Dec.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan accused each other of mustering forces along border. Following deadly violence in Sept along disputed segment of border with Kyrgyzstan, President Sadyr Japarov and Tajik counterpart Rahmon 13 Oct met in Kazakh capital Astana along with Russian President Putin, who offered to help resolve border dispute. Yet tensions persisted, with Tajikistan's border guard service 19 Oct accusing Kyrgyzstan of "deliberate actions aimed at escalating the situation in the border areas", including "preparing firing positions, creating trenches, continuing to pull in additional military equipment and regularly violating [its] airspace". Security services same day rejected "absolutely untrue" accusations, blaming Tajik armed forces for "preparing firing positions, digging trenches and making incursions with unmanned aerial vehicles".

Authorities called on regional security organisation to station troops along border. Authorities 19 Oct asked Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), of which Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are members, to deploy peacekeeping troops at disputed parts of Kyrgyz-Tajik border to uphold fragile ceasefire, saying "until an arbitrator comes between us, say a small contingent from the CSTO, peace will not be achieved".

➔ Tajikistan Tensions persisted along Tajik-Kyrgyz border as both sides traded accusations of military build-up.

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➡ **Uzbekistan Authorities neared deal with Kyrgyzstan on definitive border delimitation.**

Following breakthrough deal in March 2021 with Kyrgyzstan to resolve longstanding border disputes, both sides drew closer to agreement on definitive delimitation of shared border. However, frustration mounted in Kyrgyzstan among border communities over govt’s decision to hand ownership of Kempir-Abad reservoir, vital water source that lies between Andijan region and Kyrgyzstan’s Osh region, to Uzbekistan in return for land (see Kyrgyzstan).