

# Europe and Central Asia

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## Balkans

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➔ **Kosovo** **U.S.-led Kosovo-Serbia talks resumed and produced first agreement on normalisation of economic ties ahead of restart of EU-led dialogue.** Kosovo PM Hoti and Serbian President Vucic 2 Sept met in Washington DC for U.S.-brokered dialogue and 4 Sept signed agreements on normalisation of economic ties; deal excluded contentious issue of mutual recognition. Agreement included provision for Serbia to move its Israel embassy to Jerusalem, while Kosovo would also open embassy in city; Israeli PM Netanyahu same day welcomed news and said his country would establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo; EU 7 Sept raised “serious concern and regret” over embassy plans. President Trump called agreement “major breakthrough” in which both parties “committed to economic normalisation”; Vucic said that agreement was with U.S. and not Kosovo; Hoti also expressed hope deal would lead to mutual recognition. Hoti and Vucic 7 Sept met in Brussels with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell for EU-led talks; at meeting, Hoti and Vucic agreed to practical cooperation on issues of missing and internally displaced persons; subsequent round of EU-led talks scheduled for 28 Sept postponed due to COVID-19. The Hague Special Chamber tasked with investigating alleged crimes during 1998-1999 war 24 Sept announced its first arrest, detaining former Kosovo Liberation Army commander Salih Mustafa based on “warrant, transfer order and confirmed indictment issued by a pre-trial judge”; Mustafa faces charges of torture, false imprisonment and murder.

➔ **Montenegro** **Post-election protest and attacks on ethnic minorities erupted following defeat of incumbent President Đukanović.** Đukanović, who had ruled country for three decades, 1 Sept conceded defeat following 30 Aug election, accusing Serbia of stoking ethno-nationalist tensions; Belgrade same day denied meddling in election; election dominated by controversial Freedom of Confession Act that critics argue facilitates govt register of all religious sites in attempt to reduce role of Serbian Orthodox Church. Three opposition coalitions – For the Future of Montenegro, Peace is Our Nation and Black in White – 9 Sept signed coalition agreement promising to uphold country’s commitment to joining EU bloc. Meanwhile, post-electoral attacks broke out against ethnic minorities as supporters of pro-Serb parties reportedly attacked Bosniaks and Albanians in northern towns, and caused material damage to an Islamic community centre in the northern town of Plvelja 2 Sept. Religious leaders and opposition parties called for calm; top Orthodox Bishop Metropolitan Amfilohije 2 Sept called attacks an affront to “every citizen of Montenegro”. Thousands of protesters 6 Sept gathered in capital Podgorica to contest Serb nationalist imagery featuring prominently in opposition celebrations. New parliament 23 Sept convened, approved new govt composed of three electoral coalitions with slim majority of 41 seats; leader of pro-Serbian opposition party Zdravko Krivokapić appointed new PM.

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## Caucasus

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📌🇦🇲 **Armenia** **Authorities called on public to prepare for war after major deadly clashes with Azerbaijan along front line of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, raising risk of escalation in Oct.** Largest-scale fighting since 1994 ceasefire erupted 27 Sept as Azerbaijani army attacked Armenian troops located along key sections of 200km-long front line in NK conflict zone: fighting reportedly killed dozens and wounded hundreds of military personnel on both sides (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijan 27 Sept reported taking control of several Armenian positions in southern part of NK conflict zone; de facto leader Arayik Harutyunyan next day said Armenian troops regained control of initially lost positions. Govt 27 Sept declared martial law and started to mobilise reserve troops. Previously, deadly clashes 16-21 Sept broke out along state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Armenia 16 Sept reported one soldier killed and Azerbaijan 14-21 Sept reported one killed and two wounded; both countries called on public to prepare for imminent war or to be ready for adversary attack. Meanwhile, Russian protesters stuck in Armenia due to closure of state borders amid COVID-19 3 Sept gathered in front of govt buildings in Yerevan demanding resumption of air travel to Russia.

📌🇦🇷 **Azerbaijan** **Authorities called on public to prepare for war after major deadly clashes with Armenia along front line of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, raising risk of escalation in Oct.** Largest-scale fighting since 1994 ceasefire 27 Sept erupted as Azerbaijani army attacked Armenian troops located along key sections of 200km-long front line in NK conflict zone: fighting reportedly killed dozens and wounded hundreds of military personnel on both sides (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijan 27 Sept reported taking control of several Armenian positions in southern part of NK conflict zone; de facto leader Arayik Harutyunyan next day said Armenian troops regained control of initially lost positions. Govt 27 Sept declared martial law and started to mobilise reserve troops. Previously, deadly clashes 16-21 Sept broke out along state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Armenia 16 Sept reported one soldier killed and Azerbaijan 14-21 Sept reported one killed and two wounded; both countries called on public to prepare for imminent war or to be ready for adversary attack. Following police 22 March arrest of member of opposition alliance National Council of Democratic Forces and member of Musavat Party, Tofuq Yagublu, authorities 3 Sept sentenced Yagublu to four years and three months in jail on hooliganism charges; Yagublu went on hunger strike in protest, and on 11th day of strike was transferred to private clinic. More than 30 protesters 9-11 Sept gathered in capital Baku as well as Berlin, Toronto and other cities demanding Yagublu's release; court 18 Sept revised Yagublu's sentencing to prison term with bail, allowing him to return home. Govt 28 Sept extended COVID-19 lockdown to 2 Nov, while allowing some internal travel as of 8 Sept.

📌🇦🇲 **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict** **Severest escalation since 1994 ceasefire erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan along front line in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, raising risk of worsening fighting in Oct.** Large-scale fighting 27 Sept erupted as Azerbaijani army attacked Armenian troops located along key sections of 200km-long front line in NK conflict zone: most intense fighting involving tanks, artillery, helicopters, drones and infantry took place south, north and north east of frontline. Fighting reportedly killed dozens and wounded hundreds of military personnel on both sides. Azerbaijan 27 Sept reported taking control of several Armenian positions in southern part of NK conflict zone; de

facto leader Arayik Harutyunyan next day said Armenian troops regained control of initially lost positions. Armenia, Azerbaijan and de facto NK entity 27 Sept declared martial law and started to mobilise reserve troops; on both sides, groups of volunteer fighters, mainly veterans of 1992-1994 war in NK, arrived in conflict zone to support fighting. Civilian areas on both sides located close to front line suffered regular attacks, leading to at least 14 civilians killed and dozens wounded, including children. Towns situated far from front line faced artillery, rocket and drone attacks, including Armenian-controlled Stepanakert city 27 and 29 Sept, and Azerbaijani city Naftalan 28 Sept; Armenia 29 Sept reported attack on its town of Vardenis located close to NK conflict zone. Russia, France, Germany, EU, U.S., Iran, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairs and UN Security Council 27-29 Sept called for immediate ceasefire and return to talks. Turkey's President Erdogan 27 Sept said Ankara would support Azerbaijan "with all means"; Armenia 29 Sept accused Turkey of downing its military jet, but Ankara same day denied its involvement. Reuters 28 Sept reported that Turkey deployed up to 1,000 Turkish-backed Syrian National Army fighters from Syria to Azerbaijan days before outbreak of fighting; Ankara and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 29 Sept separately denied report. Previously, deadly clashes 16-21 Sept broke out along state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Armenia 16 Sept reported one soldier killed and Azerbaijan 14-21 Sept reported one killed and two wounded; both countries called on public to prepare for imminent war or to be ready for adversary attack.

➔ **Georgia Political tensions ran high in de facto South Ossetia as anti-govt protests continued over death in custody.** After numerous senior officials, including interior minister, PM and parliamentary speaker, announced their resignation in response to popular outcry against local authorities prompted by late-Aug death in custody of local 28-year-old man, opposition MPs 2 Sept boycotted parliamentary sessions, preventing quorum, and demanded general prosecutor to leave his position. De facto President Anatoly Bibilov meanwhile refused to resign, a key demand of protesters, and offered instead a parliamentary investigation. Supporters of de facto president 4 Sept held rally, while a few days later opposition 11 Sept organised demonstration. De facto leader 4 Sept spoke with members of Russian presidential administration in Russia's capital Moscow, reportedly requesting opening of border crossing with Russia that was closed since March due to COVID-19; Russia 15 Sept opened border and sent officials to investigate local needs to respond to pandemic and economic consequences.

➔ **Russia/North Caucasus**      **In Far East, weekly mass protests continued while international community called for investigation into alleged poisoning of opposition leader.** In Far East, thousands of people continued to protest each Saturday in Khabarovsk city against July arrest of former local governor and member of nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Sergei Furga, accused of involvement in murders of businessmen in 2005-2006; Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu 17 Sept announced increase of military presence in region. Moscow City Court 18 Sept upheld extension until 9 Dec of Furgal's pre-trial detention; Furgal called charges against him "a persecution" via video link during hearing and demanded all hearings in his case be public. After French and Swedish laboratories 14 Sept independently confirmed that Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny was poisoned in Aug with lethal nerve agent Novichok, Germany and France same day called on Russia to conduct credible and transparent investigation; UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 8 Sept also asked Russia for "thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation into this assassination attempt."

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➔ **Belarus**      **Mass demonstrations continued following disputed Aug presidential elections, leading to clashes with police and numerous arrests.** Tens of thousands continued to gather throughout month in capital Minsk to demand President Lukashenka step down after disputed Aug vote; police clashed violently with demonstrators, detaining hundreds. In response to call from opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, thousands of students 1 Sept boycotted start of school year and staged marches collecting signatures calling on Lukashenka to resign; security forces detained seven journalists covering protests and 4 Sept arrested five university students protesting in capital Minsk. After govt late Aug detained third member of opposition Coordination Council, other council member Pavel Latushka 2 Sept fled to Poland. Masked men 7 Sept reportedly detained protest leader Maria Kolesnikava in Minsk and 8 Sept attempted to forcibly expel her from country across border with Ukraine; masked men 9 Sept also detained opposition leader Maxim Znak. Lukashenka 8 Sept said he would not step down but remained open to early presidential elections. UN Human Rights Council 14 Sept confirmed it would hold urgent debate on human rights situation in Belarus. U.S. 4 Sept deployed 500 troops and 40 tanks to Lithuania near border with Belarus for pre-agreed two-month deployment; Russia and Belarus throughout month held joint military drills in Brest region near border with Poland. Head of Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Sergei Naryshkin 16 Sept accused U.S. of "poorly disguised attempt" to organise coup in Belarus. Russian President Putin 14 Sept confirmed after talks with Lukashenka that Russia would lend \$1.5bn to Minsk. Lukashenka 23 Sept sworn in for new term, prompting thousands to take to streets; police fired water cannon to disperse crowds and arrested hundreds; Pavel Latushka same day called on protesters "to immediately start a civil disobedience campaign"; U.S., UK, Germany, European Parliament and Canada were among actors that refused to recognise Lukashenka. UK and Canada 29 Sept imposed sanctions on Lukashenka, his son and eight senior officials. French President Macron 29 Sept said he hoped mediation will begin soon.

➔ **Ukraine** **Discord among Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) parties resurfaced over local election in Donbas, while July ceasefire held in Donbas conflict zone.** Ahead of nationwide elections scheduled for 25 Oct, disagreement persisted between Ukraine, Russia and Russian-backed proxies in Donbas over Ukrainian parliament's July decree that conditioned local elections in Donbas on region's "deoccupation, demilitarisation and reintegration"; disagreement blocked discussions at 16 Sept TCG meeting on prisoner swap and disengagement along contact line; Russian TCG representative Boris Gryzlov 16 Sept said decree contradicts Minsk agreements, while Donbas proxies urged Kyiv to amend the decree. Reintegration minister 18 Sept called for parliament to amend decree, citing its impact on Minsk negotiations. President Zelenskyy 30 Sept dismissed first deputy head of Ukrainian delegation to TCG and former PM Vitold Fokin after Fokin 29 Sept stated that he "can see no evidence of war between Ukraine and Russia in Donbas". In Donbas, 27 July ceasefire held but fighting 6 Sept killed one govt serviceman at checkpoint in Luhansk region, and both sides continued to sustain non-combat casualties mainly from explosives, including three Ukrainian soldiers and two Russian-backed fighters killed 1-23 Sept, according to pro-Ukrainian non-govt source. Advisers of Normandy Four (France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia) leaders 11 Sept met in Berlin, reached agreement to allow Red Cross to visit prisoners in custody of Russian proxies. NATO and govt 20 Sept began four-day joint command and staff military exercises, coinciding with Russian "Caucasus 2020" military drills. Ukraine 30 Sept reported record daily number of 4,027 new COVID-19 cases, prompting Kyiv to restrict entry to all foreigners until 28 Sept; de facto republics reported modest rise in cases. G7 member states 16 Sept urged Ukrainian authorities to support anti-corruption agencies, including National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, after Constitutional Court 16 Sept ruled that bureau was unlawfully established by presidential decree; vice chair of delegation to EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee 17 Sept stated govt "is jeopardizing visa-free with EU and further tranche of €1.5bn assistance".

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## Western Europe/Mediterranean

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➔ **Cyprus** **UN announced intention to reignite stalled reunification talks, while Turkey and Greece expressed willingness to defuse persistent tensions in Eastern Mediterranean.** UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 16 Sept announced intention to restart reunification talks in Cyprus and convene meeting of relevant parties following 11 Oct presidential election in "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus" (TRNC); Republic of Cyprus officials welcomed proposal but stated Turkey must first cease exploration activities in its exclusive economic zone, while "TRNC" "PM" Ersin Tarar welcomed move and called for solutions other than federation; Turkish FM 15 Sept expressed opposition to federative solution and said options such as a "loose federation" or "confederation" should be discussed. U.S. 1 Sept lifted for one year 33-year-old arms embargo to allow sale of "non-lethal military goods" to Republic of Cyprus; Turkish MFA same day condemned move as having "negative effects on the efforts to reach a settlement on the Cyprus issue". U.S. Sec State Pompeo 12 Sept visited Republic of Cyprus, expressed "deep concerns" over Turkish actions in region while reaffirming U.S. support for "bi-zonal, bi-communal federation". Previously, Russian FM Lavrov 7-8 Sept visited Republic of

Cyprus, expressed willingness to “assist with establishing a pragmatic dialogue” between Republic of Cyprus and Turkey; Turkish FM 14 Sept responded that if Russia wished to mediate, counterpart would be “TRNC”, not Turkey. Amid ongoing tensions between Turkey and Greece in eastern Mediterranean, Ankara 12 Sept withdrew its drillship *Oruç Reis* from contested waters and returned it to Turkish port Antalya; Greek PM Mitsotakis 13 Sept welcomed “positive first step” toward de-escalation. Turkish President Erdoğan 18 Sept said he was eager to give “a chance to diplomacy and display a positive approach”. Both sides continued to carry out military exercises in contested waters throughout month. Meanwhile, efforts to defuse tensions continued apace: as of 20 Sept, NATO had convened four rounds of military-to-military technical de-confliction talks, while Germany continued to facilitate preparations for bilateral “exploratory talks” between sides; Athens and Ankara mid-Sept both confirmed readiness to begin exploratory dialogue soon.

➔ **Turkey Security operations continued against Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in south-eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, while Ankara sought regional support against group.** In Turkey’s south east, Turkish military continued operations against PKK in rural areas of Mardin, Muş, Bingöl, Hakkari and Van provinces. In northern Iraq, after Turkish military 31 Aug seized control of two strategic locations in the Haftanin region, military conducted 14 reported air raids on PKK positions throughout month. PKK continued to wage attacks against Turkish military: PKK militants 4 Sept assaulted Turkish excavator south of Hantur mountain range and 11 Sept attempted to infiltrate two Turkish military outposts in Haftanin. President Erdoğan and FM Çavuşoğlu 4 Sept received Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Nechirvan Barzani in Ankara to discuss “joint fight against PKK” among other issues. Erdoğan and Iranian President Rouhani 8 Sept vowed cooperation against PKK and its Iranian affiliate the Kurdistan Free Life Party. In northern Syria, low-intensity clashes continued between Turkish forces and People’s Protection Units (YPG); YPG-attributed car bomb attack in Syria’s Ras al-Ayn 24 Sept injured 12 civilians. Russian-Turkish ceasefire held in Idlib despite strains (see Syria). Govt continued moves toward criminalising members of pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP); police detained more than 130 HDP members or sympathisers throughout month; detention of 82 individuals and activists, including HDP co-mayor, over their alleged role in the Oct 2014 Kobani protests drew international criticism. Govt continued with operations against Islamic State (ISIS) in Turkey: security personnel reportedly detained over 150 individuals with suspected ISIS links throughout month. Defence ministry 28 Sept announced capture of alleged al-Qaeda affiliate Islom Saydalimov in the southern Hatay province. Amid ongoing tensions between Turkey and Greece over drilling activities in eastern Mediterranean, both sides expressed willingness to defuse tensions through talks (see Cyprus).

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kazakhstan Stifling of opposition continued amid calls for creation of new opposition party and adoption of limited reforms.**

Around 200 people 13 Sept gathered in authorised rally in Almaty to call for release of political prisoners and authorisation to form new opposition Democratic Party, which govt has repeatedly barred from official registration; demonstrators also called for expulsion of Chinese ambassador to Kazakhstan, citing fear of Chinese economic “expansion” in country. After prominent civil rights activist Erbol Eskhozhin publicly called police officers “Nazarbayev’s puppies” during protest earlier this year, in reference to former President Nazarbayev, Almaty city court 14 Sept fined Eskhozhin \$530 for insulting police. Almaty city court next day upheld April sentence of activist Alnur Ilyashev, convicted for criticising govt response to COVID-19 outbreak, to parole-like limited freedom. Authorities 25 Sept disrupted protests across country organised by exiled leader of opposition Mukhtar Ablyazov by reportedly surrounding public squares and preventing demonstrators from gathering; police reportedly detained protesters in capital Nur-Sultan, Aktobe and eastern Semey. President Tokayev 1 Sept called for “reset” of state structures, including implementation of direct elections for local governors from next year; move follows persistent calls from opposition groups for democracy reform in recent years. Tokayev same day announced creation of two new state agencies and more independence for Agency for Emergency Situations to tackle COVID-19 pandemic.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan Political parties launched electoral campaigns ahead of Oct parliamentary poll amid reports of alleged vote buying and clashes between parties’ supporters.**

In run-up to parliamentary elections scheduled for 4 Oct, 15 political parties 4 Sept kickstarted electoral campaigns in contest for 120 seats in Supreme Council; Central Elections Commission (CEC) chairwoman Nurjan Shaildabekova same day called for all parties to ensure “clean and open elections”. After CEC 3 Sept rejected applications by Aktiv and United Kyrgyzstan parties for failure to meet registration requirements, administrative court of capital Bishkek 9 Sept announced reversal of decision for United Kyrgyzstan, allowing party to officially join parliamentary race. Reports of alleged voter buying surfaced mid-month. Parliament speaker and Kyrgyzstan Party parliamentary candidate Dastan Djumabekov 14 Sept accused of giving new mother \$600 during pre-election tour in Talas region, reportedly using funds from his speaker’s official activities; move which CEC official next day called possible vote-buying attempt. Local news emerged that head of education dept in Kara-Suu district, Osh region, and Mekenim Kyrgyzstan party parliamentary candidate Gulaym Mashrapova featured in WhatsApp message circulated week 14 Sept where she reportedly threatened to withhold teachers’ salaries if they did not mobilise ten voters for her party; Mashrapova denied allegations while police reportedly launched investigation. Unity party supporters 20 Sept disrupted My Homeland Kyrgyzstan party rally in southern Aravan district, Osh province, reportedly beating participants and leaving 12 injured; police briefly detained ten suspected attackers; Mekenim Kyrgyzstan party members 21 Sept reportedly attacked and injured Republika party campaigners in Alysh village, Naryn province.

➔ **Tajikistan Incumbent President Rahmon announced bid for fifth presidential term ahead of Oct poll.** Ruling People's Democratic Party 3 Sept nominated Rahmon, in power since 1992, to run for fifth term in presidential elections scheduled for 11 Oct, ending speculation he would step down to make way for his son, Rustam Emomali. Lawyer and Gorno-Badakhshan provincial council member, Faromuz Irgashev, same day announced intention to run in elections to fight "injustice being meted out by law enforcement officers against ordinary people"; State Committee for National Security officers next day visited and questioned Irgashev at his home. After 11 Sept candidate registration deadline, Central Election Commission 14 Sept announced total of five presidential candidates, excluding Irgashev who reportedly failed to collect enough voter signatures; candidates next day launched electoral campaigns. Nationwide internet outage 16 Sept coincided with online address by exiled Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan opposition leader Muhiddin Kabiri, speaking from Washington DC, U.S.; Kabiri accused govt of preventing opposition from participating in elections. State Communications Service representative next day said 30-minute internet shutdown occurred for "unknown reasons". Group 24 opposition movement, which govt proscribed as extremist group in 2014, 2 Sept said Russian authorities detained activist and member Shobuddin Badalov in Nizhny Novgorod city in Russia; Group 24 alleged involvement of Tajik officials. Meanwhile, U.S. defence dept 1 Sept said China may be planning to set up new military bases in Tajikistan "to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure". Afghan FM Mohammad Haneef Atmar and Tajik counterpart Sirojiddin Muhriddin 17 Sept met in capital Dushanbe, reportedly to discuss range of issues including resumption of electric supply from Tajikistan to Afghanistan; Afghan MFA same day announced plans for strategic partnership agreement with Tajikistan.

➔ **Turkmenistan Govt continued to deny any COVID-19 cases amid reports of outbreak, while tensions rose in Balkanabat city over cash shortage.** Amid govt's continued denial of COVID-19 outbreak inside country, independent media Radio Free Europe 3 Sept reported hospitals in capital Ashgabat were increasingly overwhelmed by rise of COVID-19 cases. In Balkanabat city (west), public anger rose over authorities' failure to provide money for cash withdrawal machines and growing queues in front of banks; at least 200 Balkanabat residents 7 Sept reportedly marched to prosecutor's office and Central Bank in city centre to demand solution to cash shortage; authorities next day introduced cash withdrawal coupons. NGO Human Rights Watch 23 Sept said govt inaction toward economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic has worsened pre-existing food crisis in country, urged govt to "take immediate measures to make sure that people can get adequate food". Dozens of Turkmen citizens 1 Sept held rally in front of Turkmenistan embassy in Washington DC, U.S., demanding govt cancel plan to amend constitution initiated by President Berdymukhammedov last year. Berdymukhammedov 25 Sept signed constitutional amendment to merge parliament with People's Council to create two-chamber institution. Human rights groups Turkmen Helsinki Foundation and Russian Memorial 7 Sept said in joint statement that police 5 Sept detained lawyer Pigambergeldy Allaberdiyev near Balkanabat for suspected links with protests abroad; national security ministry first described Allaberdiyev's arrest as "terrorism case", but officially arrested him on assault and hooliganism charges.



➔ **Uzbekistan Deputy PM died from COVID-19 complications.** U.S. state dept 5 Sept expressed concern over fate of Uzbek journalist Bobomurod Abdullaev, extradited to capital Tashkent from Kyrgyzstan in Aug, calling on govt to “clarify the allegations against him as well as the next steps”. Swiss govt 11 Sept announced agreement with Uzbek authorities over return of \$130m confiscated in 2012 from daughter of late Uzbek President Karimov, Gulnara Karimova, in connection with international corruption case; non-binding agreement states returned assets should be “used for the benefit of the people of Uzbekistan”; 13 Uzbek rights activists 16 Sept released joint letter urging Swiss, U.S. and Uzbek govts to ensure confiscated assets will not be misused. Lawmakers 15 Sept approved draft legislation to improve religious freedom, including provision to allow wearing of religious clothing in govt offices and education institutions. Deputy PM Uktam Barnoev 20 Sept died from COVID-19 complications in hospital in Germany, two months after testing positive for virus.