

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Kosovo** **New govt regulations on licence plates triggered protests at Serbian border and escalated tensions with Belgrade.** Govt implemented regulation beginning 20 Sept requiring replacement of Serbian licence plates with temporary Kosovo ones when entering Kosovo; govt said move imposes “reciprocity” with measure similar to long-time Serbian practice with Kosovo-registered cars. Rejecting decision, hundreds of Kosovo Serbs 20-21 Sept blocked roads leading to Jarinje and Brnjak border crossings, prompting armed police 20 Sept to deploy to border, where they fired tear gas at blockades. European Commission immediately called on both parties to exercise restraint “without any delay”. Serbian President Vučić 21 Sept held National Security Council meeting to discuss possible economic and political sanctions “if Kosovo does not change its decisions”. Serbian defence ministry 24 Sept said President Vučić gave order to heighten alert for army and police units; Serbian fighter jets 26 Sept flew close to Jarinje border crossing. Police 25 Sept said Serbs set fire to car registration office in Zubin Potok town and threw two hand grenades (which did not explode) at civil registration office in Zvečan town near border crossings in Mitrovica district, northern Kosovo; PM Kurti same day accused Serbia of attempting to “provoke a serious international conflict”. EU and NATO next day called on Kosovo and Serbia to de-escalate situation in northern Kosovo. Meanwhile, Kosovo Specialist Chambers in The Hague, Netherlands, 15 Sept began first case against former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) commander Salih Mustafa for atrocities committed during Kosovo War.

➔ **Montenegro** **Inauguration of new head of Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro sparked protests and inflamed political tensions.** Hundreds 4 Sept blocked roads in Cetinje city in protest at inauguration of new leader of Montenegrin branch of Serbian Orthodox Church. During day of ceremony, demonstrators 5 Sept clashed with police who fired tear gas, leaving at least 20 officers and 30 protesters wounded and at least 15 arrested. Deputy PM Dritan Abazović same day accused members of opposition Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) of using event to “attempt to introduce Montenegro into permanent destabilization with elements of dissolution”. PM Krivokapić 6 Sept launched investigation into police management of protest attacks. After President Milo Đukanović and DPS members of parliament attended Cetinje allegedly to show support to protesters and urge cancellation of ceremony, ruling coalition members of parliament 22 Sept passed resolution demanding Constitutional Court rule whether Đukanović violated constitutional responsibility by promoting protests.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** **Armenia and Azerbaijan commenced legal proceedings against each other at International Court of Justice (ICJ), while tensions surfaced with Baku over control of regional highway.** Armenia 16 Sept instituted proceedings at ICJ, accusing Azerbaijan of violating International Convention on Racial Discrimination through decades of state-sponsored discrimination; Azerbaijani foreign ministry 23 Sept filed case against Armenia on same grounds. Tensions surfaced with Azerbaijan over control of highway. Azerbaijani police 13 Sept installed checkpoint on main border zone highway connecting Iran to South Caucasus and Armenia with its southern regions in violation of agreements on restrictions of movement following Autumn 2020 war; in response, Armenia next day closed highway for Iranian trucks (see Azerbaijan). After Turkish President Erdoğan late Aug declared readiness for gradual normalisation of ties with Yerevan, PM Pashinyan 8 Sept affirmed Armenian willingness to begin discussions. Erdoğan 19 Sept, however, refused to meet Pashinyan at UN General Assembly, insisting Yerevan must first open corridor between Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan exclave; Yerevan 20 Sept reiterated willingness to start meetings, while stating that corridor was not part of Nov 2020 ceasefire statements. Authorities 29 Sept briefly detained former Defence Minister Davit Tonoyan on charges related to investigation into supply of low-quality weapons and ammunition in 2011, which may have been used in 2020 war with Azerbaijan, and court 30 Sept sentenced him to two months' pre-trial detention; Tonoyan is first senior official in power late last year to face trial in relation to problems that occurred during 2020 fighting.

➔ **Azerbaijan** **Tensions with Armenia continued as both sides initiated legal proceedings at International Court of Justice (ICJ) and disputed control of regional highway.** Armenia 16 Sept instituted proceedings at ICJ, accusing Azerbaijan of violating International Convention on Racial Discrimination through decades of state-sponsored discrimination; Azerbaijani foreign ministry 23 Sept filed case against Armenia on same grounds. Tensions surfaced with Armenia over control of highway. After Azerbaijani defence ministry 13 Sept lodged protest with Russian defence ministry and peacekeepers about Iranian trucks entering Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan insists requires Azerbaijani authorisation, Azerbaijani police 13 Sept installed checkpoint on main border zone highway connecting Iran to South Caucasus and Armenia with its southern regions in violation of agreements signed with Russia on restrictions of movement following Autumn 2020 war; Iranian media reports 15 Sept claimed Azerbaijani police detained two Iranian truck drivers after they allegedly travelled to Nagorno-Karabakh. In response, Armenia next day closed highway for Iranian trucks. Russian foreign ministry same day discussed border issue with Baku, whose officials also met Iranian ambassador to Baku.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh** **Low-level clashes continued in conflict zone, while Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs met for first time since Nov 2020.** Low-level hostilities reported during month, with occasional shootings along front lines. Notably, Russian peacekeepers 17 Sept released report that two Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) soldiers were wounded in shootings; Deputy Chief of Press Service of Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry Anar Eyvazov 19 Sept denied information and

called report “surprising and regrettable”. Further incidents were reported on social media without official confirmation from either side. Azerbaijani and Turkish special forces 6-11 Sept organised first ever training drills in Lachin district located between NK and Armenia. Following Russian mediation, Armenia and Azerbaijan 7 Sept exchanged one Azerbaijani soldier with two Armenian soldiers, all of whom were detained in NK in July-Aug. In first diplomatic contact since Autumn 2020 war, co-chairs of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group 24 Sept facilitated joint meeting between Azerbaijani FM Jeyhun Bayramov and Armenian FM Ararat Mirzoyan on sidelines of UN General Assembly session; meeting focused on “wide range of outstanding unresolved issues”, while co-chairs proposed “specific focused measures to deescalate situation”, according to OSCE. Incoming head of Russian peacekeeping mission in NK Lieutenant General Gennady Anashkin 25 Sept met Armenian defence minister and 28 Sept met Azerbaijani defence minister; previous head of mission faced criticism from Baku. Tensions surfaced between Armenia and Azerbaijan over regional highway. Azerbaijani police 13 Sept installed checkpoint on main highway connecting Iran to South Caucasus and Armenia with its southern regions, violating agreements following Autumn 2020 war (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Armenian and Azerbaijani leadership marked one-year anniversary of start of Autumn 2020 war on 27 Sept amid series of commemorative events held across countries and in NK. Kamo Vardanyan 11 Sept replaced Mikael Arzumanyan as de facto NK defence minister.

➡ **Georgia Acrimony between opposition and ruling Georgian Dream party surfaced ahead of Oct local elections, raising prospect of disputed results.** Country prepared for local elections scheduled for 2 Oct, with opposition members throughout month characterising poll as “referendum” to end nine-year-long rule of Georgian Dream party and voicing concerns over possible voting irregularities. Under EU-U.S. brokered agreement signed in April between opposition and govt, local elections should lead to snap parliamentary elections if Georgian Dream fails to obtain 43% of vote share; ruling party withdrew from deal in July. Meanwhile, opposition media 13 Sept leaked thousands of reports and transcripts of conversations allegedly recorded by Georgian security services containing details of personal and professional lives of dozens of Georgian clerics, prompting launch of investigation by Georgian Prosecutor’s Office; Georgian Church claimed leaks are attempt to discredit clerics. Former senior official Megis Kardava, facing charges of torture, rape and murder, 17 Sept arrived for trial in Georgia after his extradition from Ukraine; Kardava is expected to testify against former Georgian leaders, who are now key opposition figures. De facto authorities of breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia facilitated participation of Russian passport holders in Russian parliamentary elections 17-19 Sept by opening polling stations and encouraging voting; Georgia 20 Sept condemned holding of elections in two breakaway regions.

➡ **Russia (internal) Ruling United Russia party maintained constitutional majority in parliamentary elections.** Ruling United Russia party won 324 of 450 seats in parliamentary elections held 17-19 Sept, slightly fewer seats than 2016 elections; Communist Party of Russian Federation secured second place by boosting seats from 42 to 57. Controversy surfaced after authorities 20 Sept announced results from electronic voters in capital Moscow, whose votes appeared to swing support from opposition candidates to United Russian candidates,

prompting Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov same day to refuse to recognise “unacceptable” final results. Hundreds of Communist supporters 25 Sept rallied in protest of election results in central Moscow, resulting in police detaining 60 activists; smaller rallies were held in other cities. Election also prompted international criticism. EU 20 Sept claimed poll took place “in an atmosphere of intimidation of independent critics”, while EU, U.S., Turkey, UK and Georgia rejected recognition of parliamentary elections held in Crimea territory. Meanwhile, Russian Investigative Committee 28 Sept announced third criminal case against imprisoned opposition figure Alexei Navalny since Jan 2021; Navalny could face new sentence of up to ten years in prison for founding “extremist community”. Chair of Duma Commission for Investigating Foreign Interference Vasily Piskarev 19 Sept proposed to prosecutor general to label over 20 unknown foreign NGOs as undesirable on Russian territory for allegedly attempting “to influence the will of the Russian people”. Russia’s Federal Security Service 17 Sept reported detention in Moscow of two leaders and three members of terrorist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir, including Russian, Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens. Authorities 22 Sept detained one Russian and four Tajik citizens allegedly preparing terrorist attacks in Yekaterinburg city, and 25 Sept detained five suspected neo-Nazis in Ufa city who were reportedly preparing attack on law enforcement officers.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus Authorities continued sentencing of opposition figures, while Russia boosted its support for govt.** Authorities 6 Sept sentenced leading opposition figures Maryya Kalesnikava and Maksim Znak to 11 and ten years’ imprisonment, respectively; rulings prompted strong condemnation from EU, UK, Germany and U.S.. UN Special Rapporteur 7 Sept described “terrible repression” inside country and crackdown on human rights groups had hindered human rights monitoring. 23 international and Belarusian human rights organisations 17 Sept demanded release of members of Viasna human rights centre. President Lukashenka 1 Sept said country would soon receive large quantity of military hardware from Russia. In fifth face-to-face meeting this year, Lukashenka 9 Sept met Russian President Putin in Russian capital Moscow where pair agreed additional loans for Minsk and announced unified gas market. Russian and Belarus military forces 9-16 Sept held large-scale Zapad 2021 military exercises in multiple locations across country. Polish President Duda 2 Sept announced state of emergency in areas close to Belarussian border amid surge in recent months of migrants and asylum seekers; Poland 20 Sept deployed 500 additional troops to border, citing “well-organised action directed from Minsk and Moscow”. Latvian border authorities 8 Sept said over 1,000 people had illegally entered country in past month. During visit to France, opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya 15 Sept urged President Macron to take “decisive action in solving the Belarus crisis”.

➔ **Ukraine Low-level violence continued in Donbas conflict zone, while parliament passed controversial “anti-oligarch” legislation.** In Donbas conflict zone, combat killed five Ukrainian govt troops, per military figures, while Ukrainian researchers reported at least five combat deaths among Russian-backed forces during month; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe corroborated four civilian injuries, all from shelling and all in separatist-held areas;

town head in govt-controlled Shchastya reportedly injured in aftermath of 16 Sept mortar attack. Meanwhile, unknown assailant 22 Sept attacked car carrying Serhiy Shefir, aide and long-time business associate of President Zelenskyy, in capital Kyiv, leaving driver injured; Zelenskyy blamed attack on administration's efforts to reduce public influence of oligarchs. Parliament next day passed Zelenskyy's law aimed at preventing designated oligarchs from sponsoring political parties or buying privatised assets; some opposition members claimed move aimed at hobbling political rivals such as ex-President Poroshenko. Approximately 150,000 Russian passport holders 17-19 Sept voted in Russian parliamentary elections held in Donbas for first time; Ukraine's Security and Defence Council 17 Sep vowed sanctions against "all involved". EU 10 Sept prolonged for six months sanctions against 177 individuals and 48 entities "responsible for undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence of Ukraine". Ambassadors to Ukraine from G7 states 23 Sept issued joint statement noting "concern" and "disappointment" at delays in judicial reform and inadequate efforts to ensure transparent selection of new Constitutional Court judges. At address to UN General Assembly, Zelenskyy 23 Sept criticised UN for failure to appear at Aug 2021 Crimea Platform meeting and urged UN revival through stronger action against countries violating international law.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ Cyprus Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders discussed reigniting talks, while tensions persisted over hydrocarbon exploration.

UN Sec-Gen Guterres 27 Sept held meeting with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders during which sides discussed how to overcome stalemate in efforts to relaunch formal settlement talks; Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades subsequently announced that Guterres was considering appointment of special envoy who would search for common ground and work on confidence-building measures within pre-existing UN parameters. After Exxon Mobil/Qatar Petroleum consortium late Aug announced plans to begin work late Nov-early Dec in Republic of Cyprus' offshore block 10, Turkish VP Fuat Oktay 4 Oct said Turkey would also commence hydrocarbon activities if Greek Cypriots commence drilling in eastern Mediterranean. In letter to Cypriot MEP Niyazi Kızılyürek, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen 7 Sept called on Turkey "to reverse the actions undertaken in Varosha since October 2020", called 20 July statement from Turkish President Erdoğan and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar to reopen section of Varosha/Maraş, area under Turkish military control since 1974, "an unacceptable unilateral decision" to change status of fenced-off area, also reiterated EU's commitment to solution based on a bi-zonal bi-communal federation with two sides having political equality. Tatar 10 Sept said he continues to work for recognition of "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") and reiterated on several occasions during month that only viable solution to overcome deadlock on island is two-state formula based on sovereign equality of two political entities on island. In contrast, Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 14 Sept said that he would brief UN Sec-Gen Guterres on his proposal on return to 1960 constitution; proposal envisions "Turkish Cypriots returning to the executive, legislative, judicial authority and the other services of the Republic".

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean Diplomatic and maritime tensions continued between Greece and Turkey.** Turkey's Defence Minister Hulusi Akar 9 Sept reiterated that Ankara will never accept any Greek move to extend its territorial waters in Aegean Sea, dismissing any possible effort in this direction by Athens as "empty dreams"; Akar also said Ankara was determined to press ahead with efforts to search for energy in eastern Mediterranean, in areas where it believes Ankara and Turkish Cypriots have rights. Turkish President Erdoğan same day complained of Greece's "maximalist policies" and intentionally raising tensions in Aegean, which Greek officials same day dismissed by retorting that rhetoric was aimed at exerting pressure on Greece for demilitarisation of eastern Aegean islands. Maritime tensions 15-20 Sept rose amid series of Greek announcements of maritime activity and counter-advisories by Turkey. Tensions likely contributed to cancellation of high-level meetings between Greek and Turkish officials at UN General Assembly in New York, U.S., late Sept.

➔ **Turkey Authorities reported dwindling number of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants across country, and continued operations against alleged Islamic State supporters.** Interior minister 8 Sept claimed number of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants in country had dropped below 200 for first time since conflict began, claiming "Turkey has been cleared of terror"; Defence Minister Hulusi Akar same day vowed to continue fight against group with determination "until the last terrorist is neutralised". Turkey continued operations against PKK in northern Iraq as airstrikes targeted suspected PKK targets throughout month; defence minister 12, 17 and 24 Sept announced death of Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq (see Iraq). Govt continued efforts to delegitimise pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP); police 1 Sept detained more than 50 individuals protesting on World Peace Day in economic capital Istanbul, including HDP members and party officials. Security units continued to carry out operations against Islamic State (ISIS) cells/operatives across country. Notably, police during month detained more than 80 individuals for their alleged links to ISIS, majority of them foreigners (mostly Syrian and Iraqi nationals).

Central Asia

➔ **Kyrgyzstan Senior officials met Taliban leadership following group's takeover of Afghanistan.** Deputy chairman of Kyrgyzstan's Security Council, Taalatbek Masadykov, and head of Foreign Policy Department of Kyrgyz presidential administration, Jeenbek Kulubaev, 23 Sept met acting FM of new Taliban govt, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Afghan capital Kabul; meeting focused on "bilateral relations and continued cooperation", according to Taliban.

➔ **Tajikistan Authorities continued to express concern about threat to regional security arising from Afghanistan.** Dozens of Afghan women 14 Sept rallied outside Afghanistan's embassy in capital Dushanbe to protest Taliban govt. Border official 22 Sept reportedly confirmed: "We see certain security threats from the other side of the border" in Afghanistan, amid reports that Tajik militants associated with Taliban plan to return to country. In pre-recorded speech at UN General Assembly, President Rahmon 23 Sept warned of "serious threat to regional security and stability" emanating from Afghanistan. Lower chamber of parliament 9

Sept approved bill proposing amnesty for some 16,000 people, including prisoners and those suspected or accused of crimes. Foreign ministry 14 Sept issued verbal protest to U.S. ambassador after U.S. President Biden, who was commenting on U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, said: “If we were in Tajikistan and pulled up a C-130 and said we’re going to let ... anybody who was involved with being sympathetic to us to get on the plane, you’d have people hanging in the wheel as well”, potentially implying that many people currently based in Tajikistan would also be desperate to leave country on U.S. airplane; foreign ministry said president’s remarks “do not correspond to the spirit of friendship and partnership”.

➔ **Uzbekistan President Mirzyoyev confirmed candidacy for Oct presidential election.** Ahead of election on 24 Oct, Mirzyoyev 9 Sept accepted nomination by ruling Liberal Democratic Party to seek second five-year term in office. Govt mid-month reportedly began implementing deal reached with U.S. to transfer Afghan pilots and their families, who had fled Afghanistan in Aug, to U.S. military bases in Middle East; foreign ministry 13 Sept confirmed deportation of all Afghan nationals who had flown to Uzbekistan last month.