

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Kosovo** **French and German leaders urged compromise over normalisation with Serbia, tensions over license plate dispute persisted.**

Diplomatic efforts to sustain Belgrade-Pristina dialogue continued. After govt reached agreement with Serbia late Aug allowing border crossings with existing ID cards, French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz 4 Sept asked PM Albin Kurti and Serbian President Vučić to prepare for compromise in Serb-Kosovar normalisation. In positive development, Kosovar deputy PM and education minister 5 Sept visited southern Serbia, while Serbian PM Ana Brnabic 6 Sept visited northern Kosovo with message of “peace, stability and tolerance”.

Tensions over license plate dispute persisted. Amid govt’s 31 Oct deadline for switch of all Serbia-registered vehicles to temporary Republic of Kosovo plates, assailants 20 Sept set fire to Kosovo Serb police officer’s car for displaying Kosovo-issued license plates. Interior Minister Xhelal Sveçla same day blamed “illegal structures”, allegedly supported by Vučić, for attacks and accused Vučić of trying “to intimidate Serb citizens living in Kosovo”. NATO Mission in Kosovo 22 Sept announced arrival of reserve troops “as part of normal contingency planning” amid heightened concerns as deadline nears, added that “other reserves” could arrive if required.

Caucasus

↓ 🇦🇲* **Armenia** **Clashes erupted along border with Azerbaijan, marking deadliest escalation since 2020 war as fighting spilled deeper into Armenian territory; fighting could escalate once more as negotiating positions harden.**

Renewed hostilities with Azerbaijan killed hundreds. Clashes 13 Sept erupted along border with Azerbaijan, marking deadliest violence between two countries since six-week war in 2020. Sides blamed each other for renewed fighting; defence ministry 13 Sept said Azerbaijani forces shelled 200km stretch of southern border in Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces, attacking civilian and military infrastructure in “unprovoked aggression” and moving deep inside Armenian territory; Baku same day rejected characterisation, saying its forces took action to prevent Armenian “saboteurs” from mining supply roads on border near Azerbaijani army positions. PM Pashinyan 14 Sept said Azerbaijani army had taken control of at least 10 sq km of Armenian territory. Yerevan and Baku 14 Sept issued statements committing to ceasefire, although both countries 14, 21, 23, 24, 28 Sept accused each other of violating it. Fighting in two days killed at least 207 Armenian and 80 Azerbaijani soldiers; Yerevan 19 Sept said four Armenian civilians were killed and that authorities had been forced to evacuate over 2,700 civilians from Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces. Addressing UN General Assembly (UNGA), PM Pashinyan 22 Sept said threat of new offensive remained “very high” and “Azerbaijan intends to occupy more territories of Armenia”.

Clashes prompted flurry of diplomatic activity. Before fragile ceasefire was announced, Russia, U.S., EU and France 13 Sept called for peace and restraint, with Moscow announcing it had brokered ceasefire, though fighting persisted into following day. In rare show of unity, UN Security Council members 15 Sept condemned violence and urged talks. On sidelines of UNGA, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 19 Sept brought together both Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs, urging “strong, sustainable diplomatic engagement” to reinforce fragile ceasefire. In less measured response, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi blamed Azerbaijani forces for “illegal and deadly attacks on Armenian territory” during visit to Yerevan day before; Baku 18 Sept said Pelosi’s “groundless” accusations dealt blow to peace efforts.

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➡ Nagorno-Karabakh Fragile calm prevailed in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) as deadly clashes erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan along state border.

Disputed NK territory saw relative calm as deadly clashes flared in other areas. Amid high tensions following Baku’s military operation in NK early Aug, clashes 13 Sept erupted along Armenia-Azerbaijan state border, marking deadliest violence between two countries since six-week war in 2020. Fighting killed at least 207

Armenian and 80 Azerbaijani soldiers and forced 2,700 Armenian civilians from their homes (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Addressing UN General Assembly, PM Pashinyan said threat of new offensive remained “very high” and that “Azerbaijan intends to occupy more territories of Armenia”.

International actors urged sides to continue normalisation process. Russia, U.S., EU and France 13 Sept called for peace and restraint. Russia 15 Sept called on Baku and Yerevan to “refrain from steps that could lead to increased tensions” and to fulfil “the ceasefire agreements mediated by Russia” that ended 2020 war; U.S. same day called for “comprehensive settlement of all remaining issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan”.

➔ **Georgia Debate over potential military operation in breakaway territories prompted pushback, Belarusian president travelled to Abkhazia to strengthen cooperation, and authorities curtailed political freedoms.**

Opposition raised idea of “military operation” in breakaway territories, ruling party rejected it. Russian losses in Ukraine during Sept (see Ukraine) raised tensions between ruling Georgian Dream party and several opposition leaders after latter mid Sept said country should capitalise on Russia’s weakened position and launch military operation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia breakaway territories. Ruling party Chairman Irakli Kobakhidze 7 Sept had rejected idea of opening “second front” against Russia (Russia recognises breakaways as independent states and is responsible for providing military support and security to both entities) but floated idea of referendum on issue. In response, Abkhazia’s de facto FM Inal Ardzinba 15 Sept organised public discussion with local representatives to voice concerns about “forces aimed at diverting Russia’s military and economic resources away from Donbas”; also drew attention to Georgia’s military exercises with NATO, saying likelihood of Georgia initiating military operation in Abkhazia was “quite high”, pointing to Kobakhidze’s referendum suggestion; Kobakhidze same day denied plans for war were being considered.

Belarusian President Lukashenko visited Abkhazia for first time since taking office. In first visit to breakaway territory as president, Lukashenko 28 Sept met with Abkhazia’s de facto leader Aslan Bzhania and other senior officials in Bichvinta town to discuss bilateral cooperation and international security. Lukashenko said “we must strengthen relations with friends” otherwise “we will not be allowed to live in peace”, but stopped short of explicitly promising recognition.

Authorities passed laws restricting freedoms, compromising prospects for EU candidacy status. Amendments to first law, adopted 6 Sept, strengthen security service’s ability to use covert surveillance measures on civilians; President Salome Zourabichvili had vetoed bill in June and 1 Sept reiterated that it was “not in line with securing human rights”. Amendments to second law, adopted 9 Sept, modified selection rules for public defender, reducing opposition’s influence over candidate’s selection. Amendments, which followed EU’s June decision to condition candidate status on fulfilling “outstanding priorities” regarding political polarisation, judicial system, human rights and anti-corruption, appeared to challenge prospects for candidacy status.

↓ 🇷🇺* **Russia/North Caucasus President Putin announced partial mobilisation, prompting hundreds of thousands to flee, and pledged to**

annex parts of Ukrainian territory; political volatility and border insecurity could increase in coming weeks.

Putin announced partial military mobilisation, fuelling protests and mass exile. Following Ukraine's successful counteroffensive in which it recaptured swathes of territory from Russian forces (see Ukraine), Putin 21 Sept announced partial mobilisation and threatened nuclear escalation. Anti-mobilisation rallies same day erupted across country, including in Russian national republics such as Dagestan and Chechnya. According to OVD-Info, around 2,414 people were detained 21-26 Sept. Over 20 military enlistment offices were torched and over 260,000 Russians had fled country by late Sept. Meanwhile, Putin 30 Sept annexed four only partly occupied regions in Ukraine – biggest annexation in Europe since World War Two – saying “we will defend our land with all our strength and all our means” (see Ukraine). U.S. same day sanctioned hundreds of individuals.

Municipal deputies demanded Putin's resignation, opposition crackdown continued. Ten deputies from Smolninskoye municipal council in Saint Petersburg 7 Sept appealed to State Duma to remove Putin from office and charge him with treason. Deputies from Moscow's Lomonosovsky municipal council next day urged Putin to resign. Municipal deputy from Saint Petersburg 12 Sept started petition demanding Putin's resignation; as of 28 Sept, 75 municipal councillors had signed petition. District court in Saint Petersburg 13 Sept approved dissolution of Smolninskoye municipal council. Meanwhile, court in Moscow 14 Sept sentenced opposition politician Leonid Gozman to 15-day jail term for 2013 publication “equating” Soviet-era Russia with Nazi Germany. Ministry of justice 16 Sept labelled comedian Maxim Galkin “foreign agent” for protesting Ukraine war.

Russian energy company said major gas pipeline to Europe closed indefinitely. G7 finance ministers 2 Sept agreed to price cap on Russian oil exports. Announcement followed Deputy PM Alexander Novak's threat 1 Sept that Russia would cease oil and gas supplies to countries that impose such caps. Gazprom 2 Sept announced Nord Stream 1 pipeline supplying gas to Europe would remain closed indefinitely. Four gas leaks were detected 26-29 Sept in Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines; NATO 29 Sept said leaks were “result of deliberate, reckless and irresponsible acts of sabotage”.

Eastern Europe

➔ Belarus President Lukashenko denied rumours of mobilisation to support Russia's war efforts, crackdown on opposition continued.

Army conducted military exercises, Lukashenko dismissed mobilisation rumours. Defence ministry 8 Sept announced military drills near border with Poland, which lasted until 14 Sept. Following Russia's partial military mobilisation over war in Ukraine (see Russia) and subsequent rumours of similar measures in Belarus, Lukashenko 23 Sept clarified that “there will be no mobilisation”.

Crackdown on opposition continued. Court in Minsk 5 Sept sentenced five people – including U.S. citizen Yuras Zyankovich – to between 2.5 and 11 years in prison for attempting to seize power through assassination of Lukashenko; Zyankovich was also found guilty of creating extremist group. Court 16 Sept sentenced Syarhey

Kanavalau to 15 years in prison for damaging railways that supply weapons and troops for Russia's war in Ukraine.

➔ **Moldova As thousands of protesters called for president's resignation, speculation mounted over possible Russian involvement.**

Opposition-led protests against escalatory prices amid Ukraine war spread. Thousands of protesters 9, 18 and 25 Sept took to streets denouncing high inflation and soaring fuel prices in wake of Ukraine war; also demanded resignation of President Maia Sandu and her govt, which has promised to secure EU membership and crackdown on corruption since 2020 electoral victory, and early parliamentary elections. Populist opposition party Sor organised demonstrations; party is led by MP, businessman and fugitive Ilan Shor, sentenced in 2017 for money laundering and large-scale banking fraud. MPs from Sor Party 9 Sept met Chairman of Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky in Moscow. Slutsky 24 Sept called Ilan Shor and Sor Party Russia's "reliable partners", prompting many to speculate about Kremlin's possible role in protests to help destabilise country.

↓ 🇸🇰* **Ukraine Russian President Putin pledged to annex four partly occupied territories and ordered partial military mobilisation after successful Ukrainian counteroffensive; fighting likely to intensify in coming weeks.**

Ukrainian forces made significant battlefield gains in south and north east. Ukrainian forces conducted two parallel counteroffensives against Russian forces. First counteroffensive, announced late Aug, moved slowly through Kherson region (south); second counteroffensive, aided by increased intelligence-sharing with U.S., began 6 Sept and moved quickly through Kharkiv region (north east), taking Russian forces by surprise. Kherson offensive reportedly aimed to divert Russian forces south, weakening defensive lines in north east and enabling Ukrainian army to strike forcefully. Ukrainian forces 6-14 Sept regained 8,500 sq km of Kharkiv, including strategically important Kupiansk and Iziurm cities. Elsewhere in east, Russian-backed authorities 30 Sept said Ukrainian forces had "partially surrounded" Russian troops in Lyman city, Donetsk region. Kherson offensive in south stalled, although Ukrainian forces 16 Sept partly destroyed administrative building in Kherson city with western-delivered HIMARS rocket.

Moscow launched retaliatory strikes, announced partial mobilisation and proclaimed annexation of new territory. Responding to Ukraine's counteroffensive, Russian missiles 11 Sept struck Kharkiv city, interrupting electricity and water supply; 14 Sept struck hydroelectric dam in Dnipropetrovsk region's Kriviy Rih city; 30 Sept struck humanitarian convoy in Zaporizhzhia city (south east), killing at least 30. In further escalation, Putin 21 Sept announced partial military mobilisation and brandished nuclear threats (see Russia), while de facto proxy officials in four partly occupied territories – Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson – 20 Sept announced referenda to join Russia would be held 23-27 Sept; authorities 27 Sept declared victories in polls. In ceremony held at Kremlin, Putin 30 Sept proclaimed annexation of all four territories, biggest annexation in Europe since World War II, saying "we will defend our land with all our strength and all our means". President Zelenskyy same day said Ukraine had formally requested "accelerated accession" to join NATO.

In other important developments. Following discovery of mass grave near recently liberated Iziyum, authorities 23 Sept said that of 436 bodies discovered, 30 bore traces of torture. U.S. 8, 15 Sept announced military aid packages worth \$675mn and \$600mn respectively.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ Cyprus U.S. lifted decades-old armed embargo on Republic of Cyprus, prompting Turkish condemnation and vow to bolster Turkish military presence on island.

Washington announced lifting of long-held arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus. U.S. 16 Sept announced it would fully lift – initially for one year – arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus in place since 1987, saying “Republic of Cyprus has met the necessary conditions under relevant legislation”. In line with U.S. requirements, Republic of Cyprus had put in place in recent years several financial regulatory oversight mechanisms and denied Russian military vessels access to ports, among other conditions.

Ankara strongly criticised U.S. and pledged greater military support for Turkish Cypriots. Turkish foreign ministry 16 Sept harshly reacted to U.S. move, saying it would “further strengthen the Greek Cypriot side’s intransigence and negatively affect efforts to resettle the Cyprus issue” as well as “lead to an arms race on the island”. Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 29 Sept said: “We will send more forces there to protect the Turkish Cypriots and we will meet whatever they need in terms of weapons”, while Turkish President Erdoğan same day said Türkiye would reinforce its 40,000 troops on island with additional weapons, ammunition and vehicles. Meanwhile, unconfirmed news reports 20 Sept surfaced that Russia was intending to start direct flights to Ercan airport located in Turkish Cypriot north of island.

➡ Türkiye Tensions with Greece continued to mount amid maritime incident, while military targeted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and affiliates in Iraq, Syria and south east Türkiye.

Tensions persisted with Greece amid maritime incident and escalating rhetoric. President Erdoğan 3 Sept warned Greece would pay “heavy” price if it went “too far” and warned: “We may come suddenly one night”. Greek PM Mitsotakis 13 Sept responded: “We wait in the daylight for those who claim that they may come suddenly one night”. Ankara 10 Sept claimed two Greek Coast Guard boats opened harassment fire on Turkish ship in international waters, immediately protested; Greek Coast Guard next day said it opened fire when captain did not comply with orders. Turkish media outlets 25 Sept reported that Greece had deployed tactical armoured vehicles to some eastern Aegean islands, which Ankara asserts ought to be demilitarised under international treaties; Ankara next day summoned Greek ambassador and protested to U.S. over reported deployment of U.S.-supplied vehicles. Greece 29 Sept said Türkiye has no right “to flagrantly violate international law and threaten Greece with war” and Athens “is in favour of dialogue”. Tensions also rose after U.S. late Sept lifted decades-old arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus, prompting stern Turkish response (see Cyprus).

Military continued operations against PKK and its affiliates. Operations during month held primarily in northern Iraq's Duhok region, where clashes with PKK 11 Sept killed four Turkish soldiers and wounded two (see Iraq). In northern Syria, military 7 and 11 Sept struck villages near Tal Tamer; suspected Syrian Democratic Forces cross-border attack 18 Sept on Turkish border post in Suruç district of Şanlıurfa province killed Turkish soldier. In south east Türkiye, defence ministry 18 Sept announced it "neutralised" two "PKK/YPG members" in Hakkari province. In southern Mersin province, two PKK militants 26 Sept opened fire on police residence and later killed themselves by detonating suicide bombs.

In other important developments. Security forces 2 Sept arrested Semra Güzel, pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) MP, on PKK membership charges. Police during month detained at least 90 individuals with alleged Islamic State (ISIS) links across country, majority of them foreigners.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan President announced snap presidential elections and changes to term limits for future incumbents; country welcomed almost 100,000 Russians fleeing President Putin's mobilisation order.**

President declared early presidential elections and changes to presidential term. President Tokayev 1 Sept called for snap elections in coming months, when he will seek second term, and parliamentary elections early 2023, arguing that such measures would enable "fundamental and comprehensive reforms". Tokayev also proposed changing presidential term from five to seven years, preventing future incumbents from seeking second term, in order to "reduce the risks of monopolisation of power". Following approval from lower chamber of parliament on 16 Sept, Tokayev 17 Sept signed legislation enshrining one seven-year presidential term. He also approved change of capital name from Nur-Sultan back to Astana, in move likely aimed at further distancing himself from his predecessor, Nursultan Nazarbaev.

Almost 100,000 Russians fleeing Putin's mobilisation order crossed into Kazakhstan. Following Putin's partial mobilisation order for war in Ukraine (see Russia and Ukraine) on 21 Sept, officials 27 Sept said around 98,000 Russians had arrived in Kazakhstan. Tokayev same day urged tolerance, saying "we must take care of them and ensure their safety. It is a political and a humanitarian issue".

↓ **Kyrgyzstan Violence erupted along disputed border with Tajikistan, killing almost 100 people and displacing thousands.**

Fierce fighting flared along disputed part of Kyrgyz-Tajik border. Clashes 14 Sept erupted between Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards, killing at least two. Sides exchanged blame for flare-up; Kyrgyz guards accused Tajikistan of assuming military positions on part of border not yet demarcated, while Tajikistan said Kyrgyz guards had opened fire without provocation. President Japarov and Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon 16 Sept announced ceasefire agreement on sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, said they had ordered troop withdrawal. However, violence same day erupted again, marking deadliest escalation since

conflict in April 2021 claimed 55 lives. Sides accused each other of breaching ceasefire and of using heavy weaponry including tanks, rocket artillery and assault drones to attack outposts and nearby settlements. Notably, Tajikistan accused Kyrgyzstan of firing toward Ovchi-Kalacha and Bobojon settlements in Gafurov district, and Vorukh and Chorkuh settlements near Isfara city. Kyrgyz border services, meanwhile, said Tajik forces “renewed gunfire at Kyrgyz border guards’ positions” in Kulundu and Jany-Jer settlements in Leilek district and attacked positions in Batken district, which lies 10km from border, signalling spread of hostilities deeper into Kyrgyzstan. Countries 16 Sept signed second ceasefire, after which sides 16-17 Sept reported sporadic shelling but no major incidents. Hostilities killed around 100 people, including at least 37 civilians. Authorities 18 Sept said they had evacuated 137,000 people from conflict area, 19 Sept said homes in Ak-Sai village (Leilek district) were deliberately burned and pillaged. Tajik authorities same day said civilian homes in Tajikistan were also burned, although there were no reported evacuation efforts.

Moscow urged “peaceful” resolution and offered to help stabilise border. According to Kyrgyz authorities, situation on border 18 Sept remained “tense” but “appeared to be stabilising”. Russian President Putin same day spoke with Tajik and Kyrgyz leaders, urging sides to “prevent further escalation and to take measures to resolve the situation exclusively by peaceful, political and diplomatic means”, highlighting “Russia’s readiness to provide the necessary assistance to ensure stability in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border region”. Both countries 25 Sept reached agreement to demilitarise conflict-affected section of border.

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➔ **Uzbekistan Amid Russia’s annexation of occupied territories in Ukraine, govt released statement on respecting “sovereignty” and “territorial integrity; Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit held.**

Authorities pledged respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity amid Russia’s annexation plans. In response to developments in Ukraine, notably Russia’s annexation of four occupied territories (see Ukraine), foreign ministry 30 Sept reiterated position that “Uzbekistan is invariably committed in the implementation of its foreign policy to national interests, fundamental principles, including openness, equality, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states” and called for “resolving the current situation through political and diplomatic means in accordance with the norms of international law”.

Govt hosted Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit. Uzbekistan 15-16 Sept hosted leaders from 13 countries for SCO summit in Samarkand city with “agenda to strengthen security, trade and innovative cooperation”. Attendees included SCO members China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia and Tajikistan; presidents of Belarus, Iran and Mongolia attended as observers, while those from Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Türkiye attended as invited partners. Türkiye’s participation in summit as only NATO member, along with President Erdoğan’s expressed interest 15 Sept in joining SCO, further strained ties between Ankara and western partners.