

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Bosnia** Republika Srpska (RS) parliament 14 Aug voted to annul 2004 report produced by special govt commission on 1995 Srebrenica massacre, which acknowledged that Bosnian Serb forces killed thousands of Bosniaks in serious violation of international law; RS President Dodik said document contained “false data” and was produced under international pressure; parliament also ordered RS govt to form new commission and report, to include suffering of Serbs. U.S., UN and Bosniak politicians decried move. Journalist returning from reporting on anti-govt protest in RS capital Banja Luka was beaten by two unknown assailants 26 Aug; Bosnian journalists’ association said Dodik’s campaign against independent media had made journalists “open targets”, while Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe called for end to negative rhetoric against media.

➔ **Kosovo** Ahead of 7 Sept resumption of EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia on normalising relations, signals from Kosovo and Serbian leaderships that they may consider territorial swap as part of deal prompted strong reactions in Kosovo, Serbia and internationally. President Thaci 30 Aug said he would table proposal for border correction to allow for predominantly ethnic Albanian communities in southern Serbia to become part of Kosovo as part of deal, while also rejecting idea of partition of Kosovo; earlier in month, told press conference 6 Aug that deal with Serbia could include a “correction” of border. Serbian President Vučić 9 Aug referred to policy for delimitation with Albanians, and need for clarity on who administers territories. Participating in international forum in Austria 26 Aug, Thaci and Vučić both expressed commitment to reach a deal, and called for EU to support agreement that they reach. U.S. national security adviser John Bolton 24 Aug said U.S. would not oppose a territorial exchange if both sides agreed, while several European FMs voiced concerns about land swap, also expressed by local and international NGOs, and by three former high representatives for Bosnia, warning of potentially destabilising impact on Kosovo and region. Opposition in Kosovo called for resolution in parliament ahead of 7 Sept dialogue to prevent negotiations on Kosovo territory. Vučić mid-Aug announced he will visit Kosovo 9 Sept to present “guidelines and directions of state policy towards Kosovo”; also called for Serbs to show “much more tolerance” to potential deal with Kosovo. Tensions rose early Aug over allegations that Kosovo authorities were planning to seize control of Gazivode hydropower plant in Serb-run part of northern Kosovo; Vučić in open letter to Kosovo Serbs said Serbia would protect them and called on them to remain peaceful, also said Pristina would “not lift a finger” to fulfil its commitment to establish Association of Serb municipalities.

➔ 🇲🇰 **Macedonia** Govt 22 Aug launched public campaign ahead of 30 Sept referendum on implementing 17 June name deal with Greece, which unblocks Greek veto on Macedonia starting accession process to join NATO and EU in return for country changing name to Republic of North Macedonia. Polls published late Aug, carried out by International Republican Institute, showed 57% of respondents favour entering EU and NATO under new name, and general increase in support for EU and

NATO membership since Aug 2017. Albanian President Meta called on Macedonian Albanians to vote for the agreement in the referendum.

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## **Caucasus**

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➡ **Armenia** Robert Kocharyan, country's second president who in July became first former leader in post-Soviet space to be imprisoned when he was detained for two month's pre-trial detention on charges of "overturning the constitutional order" during final weeks of his rule in 2008, was released 13 Aug following successful appeal, but still faces criminal charges. Several former and current officials and their relatives were charged and their property searched in relation to Kocharyan's case. 46 parliamentarians from Armenia's National Assembly and fifteen from de facto Nagorno-Karabakh called on appeal court to release Kocharyan, fuelling speculation he could consolidate opposition to PM Pashinyan.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Country's most prominent political prisoner Ilgar Mammadov, leader of ReAl (Republican Alternative) party who was jailed for seven years in 2013 on charges of organising riots, was released 13 Aug, and his jail time commuted to two-year probationary period during which he cannot run for election (possibly including in 2020 parliamentary elections). European parliament had made his release and that of other political prisoners a condition of signing of EU-Azerbaijan agreement. Ahead of anticipated visit by President Aliyev to Russia early Sept, govt analysts and pro-govt MPs called for Azerbaijan to consider joining Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO, the Moscow-led military bloc) as means to secure Russian support in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution and take advantage of deterioration in Armenian-Russian relations. Azerbaijan signed convention on Caspian Sea at Summit of Caspian States in Kazakhstan 12 Aug (see Kazakhstan); implications for Azerbaijan include limits for its cooperation with Turkey and other NATO member states in connection with joint military exercises in Caspian Sea.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Political leadership in Armenia and Azerbaijan made some positive public statements about peaceful resolution of conflict and continued building contacts, including launch by Armenian PM Pashinyan's wife of new campaign "Women for Peace", which was well received in Baku; Armenian PM's office said her speech was not a policy statement, but reflected general mood in new administration. Azerbaijani leadership also toned down its rhetoric, and took down website of major local news-agency APA after it reportedly misquoted words of President Aliyev by attributing to him statement "we will bring Armenia to its knees". However military leaderships on both sides continued to make inflammatory public statements, amid continued instability and uncertainty at Nakhchivan section of state border. FMs widely expected to meet in coming weeks, but many in both capitals believe that genuine dialogue can take place only after anticipated snap elections in Armenia.

➡ **Georgia** Tenth anniversary of August War with Russia provoked emotional public campaign against Russia, coinciding with launch of campaigning for Oct presidential election. Day before anniversary, PM Mamuka Bakhtadze called for peaceful resolution and reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, underlining

that Tbilisi's response to the continued conflicts would be a "bold peace initiative". FMs of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland and Ukraine's vice premier visited Georgia 7 Aug to support its call for withdrawal of Russian army from breakaway republics, backed by similar calls in statements by EU, U.S., and other allies. No major events or commemorations of war in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; events took place late month to celebrate tenth anniversary of Russia's recognition. During 22-23 Aug visit to Georgia, German Chancellor Merkel travelled to conflict zone near South Ossetia; meeting with students, spoke about "injustice" in relation to continued Russian military presence in Georgia's breakaway regions, which she called occupation; also downplayed prospects for Georgia's membership of NATO and EU any time soon.

↓ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Several police injured in three attacks allegedly carried out by minors in Chechnya 20 Aug; knife attack on district police station in Shali town injuring two officers, carried out by two alleged perpetrators who were shot dead; alleged perpetrator blowing himself up at police post in Merker-Yurt village without injuring others; and vehicle used to hit police officers in capital Grozny, driver shot dead. At least five alleged attackers died during incidents; Chechen information minister told media that attackers' ages ranged from eleven to seventeen years old, authorities said driver in latter incident was younger brother of convicted terrorist Khizir Akhmatkhanov. Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov denied ISIS claim, saying group has no support in Chechnya. Police reportedly detained up to 200 teenagers in Shali for interrogation 23-25 Aug; Kadyrov pledged to collectively punish alleged attackers' relatives. Thousands gathered in Geldagen village to attend burial of Yusup Temerkhanov, convicted of 2011 murder of Russian colonel who was convicted of murdering Chechen teenager in 2000; Temerkhanov died in prison in Siberia 3 Aug. Kadyrov 23 Aug said he would ban from region human rights activists, who have been travelling to Chechnya to attend trial of Oyub Titiyev, director of Chechnya office of Memorial human rights organisation, once trial is over, saying they were provocateurs like terrorists and extremists; international rights groups called on Kremlin to safeguard rights defenders' access to Chechnya and ensure Titiyev's release.

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## Eastern Europe

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➔ **Moldova** Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) 15 Aug expressed concern over river-crossing exercise conducted by Russian military in Transnistria Security Zone mid-month, as the OSCE was obstructed from fully monitoring the exercises and they were not authorised by Joint Control Commission, in violation of 1992 agreement on principles of a peaceful settlement. Thousands joined anti-govt protests in capital 26 Aug; hundreds protested next day.

➔ **Ukraine** At 21-22 Aug Trilateral Contact Group meeting, parties agreed "back-to-school ceasefire", but immediately accused each other of violating ceasefire after it came into effect 29 Aug. Adherence to 1 July "harvest ceasefire" waned during Aug, with increased use of large-calibre weapons (though still well below June levels) and casualties again rising among civilians and combatants. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors reported six civilian fatalities and at least six injured. At least nineteen Armed Forces of Ukraine (UAF) servicemen were

killed and 72 injured, and at least seven dead and two injured among Russian-backed forces 22 Jul-28 Aug; conflict hotspots remained Krymske and Novotoshkiivske villages in Luhansk, Svitlodarsk bulge, areas surrounding Horlivka, Avdiivka, Donetsk (Marinka), Dokuchaevsk and Mariupol (Lebedynske). OSCE mission reported two convoys of cargo trucks entering and exiting Ukraine at night through Russian-controlled section of eastern border with Russia in Donetsk region 7 Aug; also observed for first time 7 Aug suspected military camp near unguarded road crossing Russian border; published drone footage of previously observed convoys crossing border 10 Aug; 11 Aug reported July sighting of “four distinct electronic warfare systems” near Chornukhyne village, previously unseen by monitors. Lawmakers in Kyiv debated whether to extend validity of Sept 2014 law, due to expire in Oct, guaranteeing temporary “special status” to areas controlled by Moscow-backed separatists upon return to Kyiv’s control; OSCE envoy reportedly wrote letter to parliament arguing that extension of law would give Ukraine leverage to press Russia to agree to peacekeeping mission; while some in Kyiv argue law strengthens Kyiv’s position toward West and Russia, others contend it lost relevance following Jan 2018 “reintegration law”. U.S. President Trump 13 Aug signed act authorising \$250mn in security assistance to Ukraine, including \$50mn for lethal weapons. Aleksandr Zakharchenko, local head of Russian-backed separatist group, died following Donetsk city bombing 31 Aug; Russian FM Sergei Lavrov called bombing “Ukrainian provocation aimed at ruining the Minsk agreements”; ruled out Normandy Format meetings in near future.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➡ **Cyprus** Tensions over hydrocarbon explorations continued; Turkish President Erdoğan 3 Aug revealed plan to buy Turkey’s second drillship for east Mediterranean exploration. UN efforts to explore options for restarting reunification talks continued; Greek Cypriot President Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci expected to meet with UN Secretary General in Sept.

➡ **Turkey** Month saw continued clashes between military and Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), pressure on pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and operations against PKK targets in northern Iraq, as well as concern over risks stemming from an all-out regime offensive against Idlib in northwest Syria, and tensions with the U.S.. Military operations against PKK in south east continued, with almost 40 casualties reported during month, mostly PKK militants. Crackdown on pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and sister Democratic Regions’ Party (DBP) continued. Two former HDP MPs were arrested 13 Aug on charges of “terrorism propaganda” over content of recent speeches; DBP co-mayor and HDP local official were among twelve arrested for suspected involvement in alleged PKK bomb attack 16 Aug. Ground operation in northern Iraq continued along with major air operations against PKK targets; President Erdoğan and Iraqi PM Abadi 14 Aug agreed on full cooperation against PKK. Amid spectre of all-out Russian-backed assault by Syrian regime on Syrian opposition stronghold Idlib, north-west Syria (see Syria) and fears of accompanying influx of refugees into Turkey, Ankara 15 Aug called on Syrian regime to terminate its military operation in Idlib and made diplomatic efforts with Russia to broker deal. Despite ongoing cooperation in Syria’s Manbij, U.S.-Turkey frictions increased: U.S. 1 Aug imposed sanctions on Turkish

justice and interior ministers over Turkey's refusal to free jailed U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson, subject of 3 Aug discussion between FMs, while diplomatic delegations met in Washington 7 Aug in attempt to resolve crisis. U.S. 10 Aug doubled tariffs on Turkish aluminium and steel products, contributing to sharp devaluation of Turkish Lira during first half of Aug; Trump 13 Aug signed bill blocking Turkey's access to F-35 fighter jets; Erdoğan 14 Aug called for boycott of U.S. electronic products and 15 Aug hiked tariffs on U.S. products. Ankara 22 Aug accused U.S. of waging "economic war", 27 Aug said U.S. sanctions could destabilise region, and exacerbate terrorism and refugee crisis. Lira slightly recovered toward end of month after Central Bank measures and Qatari Emir's 15 Aug pledge for \$15bn in direct investment. Turkish court 14 Aug ordered release of two Greek soldiers held since March for illegal border crossing and military espionage.

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## Central Asia

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➡ **Kazakhstan** Leaders of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia and Turkmenistan met in Kazakh city Aktau 12 Aug to sign new convention on legal status of Caspian Sea (in dispute for two decades) and outlining rights of littoral states; new agreement not disclosed, reportedly allows for construction of underwater pipelines and fishing quotas; follow-up talks expected. Nazarbayev 24 Aug attended meeting of Central Asian leaders in Turkmenistan to discuss environmental degradation of Aral Sea (see Turkmenistan).

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Kyrgyz-Uzbek intergovernmental committee mid-month reportedly reached agreement to swap Kyrgyzstan's Barak exclave (inside Uzbekistan) for land around village of Birlashken in Uzbekistan's Andijon region, contiguous with border. President Jeenbekov 24 Aug attended meeting of Central Asian leaders in Turkmenistan to discuss environmental degradation of Aral Sea (see Turkmenistan).

➡ **Tajikistan** Police 3 Aug reported detention of suspected ringleader of group behind 29 July attack which killed four foreign cyclists, and killing of four other suspects, during police operation night following attack; claimed all five suspects were members of banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, despite release by Islamic State (ISIS) of video showing the five swearing allegiance to ISIS. Two Tajik foresters reported killed in shooting along border with Afghanistan 26 Aug; Afghan authorities next day reported eight suspected Taliban killed in airstrike along border in Darqad district. Journalist Hairullo Mirsaidov, jailed for twelve years in July for charges he said were baseless, was freed 22 Aug. President Rahmon 17 Aug travelled to Uzbekistan, first such visit in seventeen years; signed strategic partnership agreement among others. Rahmon 24 Aug attended meeting of Central Asian leaders in Turkmenistan to discuss environmental degradation of Aral Sea (see Turkmenistan).

➡ **Turkmenistan** President Berdymukhamedov 12 Aug signed new convention on legal status of Caspian Sea with heads of all Caspian littoral states (see Kazakhstan), offered to host follow-up talks. Berdymukhamedov 15 Aug travelled to Sochi, Russia to discuss bilateral relations with President Putin. Berdymukhamedov 24 Aug hosted counterparts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and

Uzbekistan in western city Turkmenbashi for meeting of International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea; Turkmenistan reportedly to draft joint action plan on basis of agreements.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Taliban political chief 6 Aug travelled to Uzbekistan for talks with senior Uzbek foreign ministry officials on Afghan peace process, withdrawal of international forces and Uzbek development projects in Afghanistan; followed President Mirziyoyev's March offer to broker Afghan peace talks. Kyrgyz-Uzbek intergovernmental committee mid-month reportedly made agreement to swap Kyrgyz Barak exclave (inside Uzbekistan) for land around village of Birleshken in Uzbekistan's Andijon region, contiguous with border. Mirziyoyev 17 Aug hosted Tajik counterpart in first such visit in seventeen years; signed strategic partnership agreement among others. Mirziyoyev 24 Aug attended meeting of Central Asian leaders in Turkmenistan to discuss environmental degradation of Aral Sea (see Turkmenistan). Justice ministry 30 Aug registered local branch of first foreign NGO (American Councils for International Education) in more than ten years.