

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Kosovo** Amid war in Ukraine, regional tensions ran high as authorities warned of Russian and Serbian threats in Western Balkans, and blamed series of small-scale attacks on Belgrade. President Osmani 5 April accused Russia of having interest “in attacking Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina”, while stating Serbia may feel “emboldened by what is happening in the continent of Europe right now”; Osmani also stated that NATO membership is “becoming indispensable, especially in light of events in Ukraine” and EU’s “active appeasement policy” toward Serbian President Vučić is “big mistake”. Following Serbian elections, PM Kurti 12 April claimed that removal of Albanian voters in Serbia’s south from election lists equated to “silent ethnic cleansing” and called polls “neither free nor democratic”. Interior minister 15 April announced four attacks, including one with use of rifles and grenades, on police officers in previous three days in Zubin Potok, Serb-majority municipality in north; PM Kurti same day alleged attacks were “coming from Serbia”, prompting EU and U.S. same day to caution against “speculation”. Temporary agreement with Serbia forged in Sept 2021 that resolved license plate dispute expired 21 April as EU-facilitated talks failed to produce new permanent deal, while reports indicated temporary measures would remain in place; EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák same day warned against actions that “jeopardise the security on the ground”. Meanwhile, at UN Security Council briefing on UN Mission in Kosovo, govt and Serbia exchanged barbs: FM Gervalla-Schwarz 22 April accused Serbian FM Selaković of trying to “manipulate facts” and said Vučić “propagated genocide as something heroic”; Serbian counterpart claimed Gervalla-Schwarz ignored past “crimes committed by the Kosovo Albanians”.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan gained momentum, triggering political backlash at home as opposition announced street protests to oust govt. After major flare-up in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) in March that resulted in Azerbaijani forces taking control of strategic mountains inside Armenian-populated areas, EU 6 April facilitated third meeting between Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev; pair agreed to instruct respective FMs to work on peace treaty and convene joint border commission by late April (see Nagorno-Karabakh). In address to parliament, PM Pashinyan 13 April said Yerevan was facing international pressure to scale down demands on status of breakaway NK, that there was no alternative to peace with Azerbaijan, and expressed commitment to signing peace deal “as soon as possible”; Pashinyan also stressed that Karabakh issue was about rights, not territories, and peace negotiations should ensure security guarantees, rights and freedoms for Karabakh Armenians, as well as clarify territory’s final status. Momentum toward peace talks raised fears among political opposition that govt is preparing to cede NK’s

control to Azerbaijan. Notably, opposition parties 5 April held large-scale rally in capital Yerevan against signing peace deal with Baku that would compromise Armenian-populated NK's claim for independence from Azerbaijan. Opposition MPs 12 April brought breakaway NK flags to parliament before walking out of session and travelling to various villages in Armenia and NK; Russian peacekeepers in NK same day denied opposition MPs entry, prompting Armenian foreign ministry 12 April to claim lack of access contradicted Nov 2020 ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, opposition MP and Deputy Parliament Speaker Ishkhan Saghatelian 22 April announced start of "non-stop street struggle" to oust govt; leading opposition alliances, Armenia and I Have the Honour, 25 April began small-scale demonstrations ahead of mass protests aimed at toppling Pashinyan, accused PM of planning concessions to Azerbaijan over NK; rallies late April were held over multiple days in Yerevan, as Office of Human Rights Defender 27 April cited evidence of police using disproportionate force to detain some protesters.

➡ **Azerbaijan Peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan gained momentum.** After major flare-up in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) in March that resulted in Azerbaijani forces taking control of strategic mountains inside Armenian-populated areas, EU 6 April facilitated third meeting between Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev; pair agreed to instruct respective FMs to work on peace treaty and convene joint border commission by late April (see Nagorno-Karabakh). President Aliyev 23 April said in phone conversation with European Council President Charles Michel that Baku had set up commission for delimitation and demarcation of state border and delegation to draft peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Aliyev 12 April said that Armenia during 6 April meeting accepted five principles of settlement proposed by Baku, which included mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and mutual affirmation of absence of territorial claims. Aliyev 22 April said that EU "is very actively involved in the normalisation process between Azerbaijan and Armenia" and added that Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group was no longer involved in process; Armenia's Security Council secretary previous day had said peace process with Baku was proceeding with assistance from Russia, U.S. and EU. State Border Service 23 April said it detained member of Armenian "subversive group" who attempted to cross border in Zangilan district; Armenian defence ministry same day said soldier had crossed border under unknown circumstances.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan gained momentum, triggering concern among de facto NK authorities and Armenia's political opposition.** After major flare-up in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) in March that resulted in Azerbaijani forces taking control of strategic mountains inside Armenian-populated areas, EU 6 April facilitated third meeting between Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev; pair agreed to instruct respective FMs to work on peace treaty and convene joint border commission by late April. President Aliyev 12 April said that Armenia during 6 April meeting accepted five principles of settlement proposed by Baku, which included mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and mutual affirmation of absence of territorial claims (see Azerbaijan). Armenian PM Pashinyan 13 April reiterated that Yerevan had accepted Azerbaijan's proposals regarding peace agreement, including mutual recognition of each other's territorial

integrity (see Armenia). Momentum toward peace talks raised fears in NK and Armenia that Yerevan is preparing to cede NK's control to Azerbaijan. Notably, Armenian opposition MPs 12 April travelled various villages in Armenia and NK; Russian peacekeepers in NK same day denied them entry, prompting Armenian foreign ministry to claim lack of access contradicted Nov 2020 ceasefire agreement. De facto NK leader Arayik Harutyunyan 13 April rejected "impossible" Azerbaijani rule over region, while de facto NK parliament 14 April demanded end to "disastrous" Armenian position. Harutyunyan 25 April said Pashinyan had previous day assured him that Armenia would not back any agreements on region's status unacceptable to Karabakh Armenians. Meanwhile, war in Ukraine strained cooperation between West and Russia and raised doubt over Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 8 April accused U.S. and France of refusing to work with Russia in OSCE format following Russian invasion of Ukraine. French Co-chair 14 April and U.S. Co-chair 18 April visited Armenia to reiterate importance of Minsk Group in finding comprehensive settlement. Pashinyan and Russian President Putin 19 April met and reaffirmed Minsk Group as valid and important format.

➡ **Georgia Breakaway South Ossetia's de facto leader, who has called for accession to Russia, competed in first round of presidential elections.**

Following late March announcement by de facto leader of breakaway South Ossetia Anatoly Bibilov of intention to join Russia after April de facto presidential elections, Georgian leaders raised concern over possible Russian annexation of breakaway South Ossetia. At first round of de facto presidential election in breakaway territory, opposition leader Alan Gagloyev 10 April came in first with 38%; Bibilov came in second with 34.95%. Run-off vote was supposed to be held on 28 April but de facto central electoral commission rescheduled it for 8 May. Gagloyev 18 April met Kremlin official in Russia's capital Moscow ahead of run-off election. Meanwhile, Abkhaz authorities and leaders maintained insistence on independence of de facto state in contrast to South Ossetia's de facto leadership; however, Abkhaz de facto opposition Patriotic Movement and some Russian politicians during month maintained that Abkhaz accession to Russian Federation remained possible. After de facto parliamentary elections in breakaway Abkhazia in March, de facto parliament 11 April elected Lasha Ashuba as speaker. State Security Service 18 April declared release of Georgian citizen Vladimer Kaniashvili, formerly detained in breakaway South Ossetia in Dec 2021. Meanwhile, family of imprisoned former President Mikheil Saakashvili late month demanded authorities permit Saakashvili to obtain urgent medical treatment in foreign country; family warned of protests if request not met by 2 May. Over dozen NGOs 28 April called for govt to ensure Saakashvili receives adequate medical treatment.

➡ **Russia (internal) Amid ongoing heavy crackdown on dissent, authorities accused Ukraine of cross-border attacks, which injured dozens and reportedly killed one soldier.** As Russia continued to attempt to control narrative over war in Ukraine (see Ukraine), authorities targeted scores of activists; NGO OVD-Info 14 April reported at least 993 administrative cases and 84 criminal cases across country on account of discrediting Russian armed forces. Notably, authorities 15 April charged head of Yabloko party's north-western Pskov branch in Pskov city; 17 April detained Yabloko deputy in Pskov city; 22 April arrested politician Vladimir Kara-Murza, one of founders of Russian Anti-War

Committee in capital Moscow; 27 April arrested journalist Maria Ponomarenko in St Petersburg city. Ministry of Justice 8 April also revoked registration of 15 international organisations, including Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Amnesty International, forcing them to close offices in Russia. Meanwhile, authorities during month reported shelling of border regions with Ukraine, which injured at least 25 people according to state media; notably, two Ukrainian helicopters 14 April allegedly conducted airstrikes on village in Bryansk region, injuring seven people. Authorities 23 April reported checkpoint in Kursk Oblast came under fire from Ukraine. Explosions 25 April broke out at oil storage facility and ostensible military facility in Bryansk region. Fires 27 April broke out at ammunition depot in Kursk region and were reported in Belgorod and Voronezh regions. Local media 28 April reported first soldier killed inside Russia in Belgorod region, reportedly due to Ukrainian shelling on 19 April. Defence ministry 20 April successfully tested Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile; President Putin said nuclear-capable projectile will make Moscow's enemies "think twice". Internationally, Western states and their allies imposed new sanctions. U.S. 6 April extended sanctions against banking sector and President Putin's daughters; next day suspended normal trade relations and prohibited energy imports with Russia and Belarus. EU 8 April imposed fifth package of sanctions; notably, EU expanded embargo on all Russian coal imports, starting 10 Aug, affecting 25% of all Russian coal exports. UK, Switzerland, Montenegro, Canada, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, New Zealand also imposed sanctions during month.

Eastern Europe

► **Belarus** Authorities continued crackdown on dissent, while U.S. and EU imposed further sanctions to condemn govt's role in Ukraine war. Authorities stifled dissent during April. Notably, Supreme Court 8 April declared Nexta news outlet and corresponding Telegram channels as "extremist organization". Authorities 20 April arrested journalist Aksana Kolb without presenting charges; NGO Committee to Protect Journalists same day claimed "Kolb's detention shows that the situation for journalists in Belarus remains extremely worrying". Meanwhile, lower house of parliament 27 April approved bill to make attempted acts of terrorism punishable with death penalty; bills follows numerous media reports about activists allegedly sabotaging rail links to disrupt Russia's war effort in Ukraine. Internationally, U.S. 8 April expanded sanctions on Belarus and Russia over Ukraine war, including removal from most-favoured-nation trade status; 14 April imposed restrictions on seven Belarussian owned or operated aircrafts, effectively grounding them; 20 April imposed visa restrictions on 17 individuals, including Belarus nationals, "responsible for undermining democracy" through "intimidation, harassment and repression". EU 8 April adopted fifth sanctions package due to Ukraine war, expelling non-essential Russian and Belarussian road transport and banning sale of banknotes and transferable securities to Russia and Belarus. Polish authorities 6 April announced arrest of two Belarussians on "charges of espionage"; suspects face up to ten years of prison.

↓ **Moldova Unknown assailants launched armed attack on de facto ministry in breakaway Transnistria, as concerns rose incident could signal spillover from Ukraine war.**

De facto interior ministry of breakaway territory Transnistria – located along Ukrainian border and controlled by Russian-speaking separatists since 1992 – 25 April reported attack on de facto security ministry allegedly involving grenade-launchers; no casualties reported. Moldova's foreign ministry same day said aim of incident “is to create pretexts for straining the security situation in the Transnistrian region”. Ukrainian intelligence directorate 26 April said incident “is one of a number of acts of provocation organised by [Russian intelligence services] to incite panic and anti-Ukrainian sentiment” and “justify the war on the territory of Ukraine in order to involve the [Transnistrian] region in combat”. De facto head of region Vadim Krasnoselsky 26 April said “traces of these attacks lead to Ukraine”. Russian major general 22 April reportedly said Russian control of southern Ukraine could provide access to Transnistria, where estimated 1,500 Russian troops are stationed.

➔ 🌐* **Ukraine Month saw relative calm in Kyiv region as Russian forces withdrew to launch new offensive in east, where fighting could worsen as it edges closer to urban areas.**

Russian troops by 2 April had vacated stretch of land between Kyiv's north-western suburbs and Belarusian border, as well as Chernihiv and Sumy regions, north east of Kyiv. Following Russian troops' departure, authorities said they had recovered over 1,000 bodies of murdered civilians, most notably in Bucha, and alleged war crimes. Russian forces continued attacks in east. Notably, Russia 1 April captured Iziurm city south east of Kharkiv city; Russian missile 8 April struck train station in Donetsk city of Kramatorsk, killing at least 50. Marking new phase of war, Kremlin 10 April appointed General Alexander Dvornikov to oversee invasion. Russia late-April launched new offensive in Donbas. Notably, Russia 20 April seized eastern town of Kreminna in Luhansk. Ukrainian forces 29 April claimed they regained Ruska Lozova north of Kharkiv; fighting could worsen in east, as it comes closer to urban areas in Severodonetsk and Sloviansk/Kramatorsk area. In south, besieged Donbas port city of Mariupol remained worst affected hotspot with 100,000 people encircled. President Putin 21 April claimed Russian forces took city, although Ukrainian forces remained holed up in Azovstal steel plant; after talks between UN Sec Gen Antonio Guterres and Putin in Moscow on 26 April, UN 30 April reportedly began limited evacuations of civilians from steel plant. Governor of Odessa 13 April announced Ukrainian forces attacked flagship Russian missile cruiser Moskva, which caught fire and sank; large number of 500-member crew remained unaccounted for. On humanitarian front, UN 17 April estimated 7.7mn people internally displaced, 5.3 mn refugees, although exodus reportedly slower than March due to greater security in Kyiv region. On diplomatic front, UN Human Rights Council 7 April suspended Russia. Zelenskyy hosted EU, UK, U.S. officials in capital Kyiv, who promised more sanctions and weapons. Talks between Kyiv and Moscow were limited to humanitarian corridors and exchanges of prisoners, as sides focus on battlefield outcomes in Donbas. Guterres 28 April visited Kyiv and sites of suspected war crimes; Russian airstrikes hit city during visit.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** **Greek Cypriot negotiator resigned over lack of progress in diplomatic process, while Republic of Cyprus boosted ties with Israel.**

Greek Cypriot chief negotiator Andreas Mavroyiannis 17 April resigned, citing lack of progress on negotiations for resolution to Cyprus question; govt intends to appoint Menelaos Menelaou, foreign ministry official with long experience regarding Cyprus negotiations, after new president elected in Feb 2023. Israeli, Greek and Greek Cypriot FMs 5 April met in Greek capital Athens and vowed to boost energy ties and cooperation in other areas; specifically, they agreed to make progress on Euro-Asia interconnector project – world’s longest and deepest underwater power cable through Mediterranean (due to be completed in 2024). International news outlets 11 April reported that Republic of Cyprus, Israel and Greece were exploring option of building liquefied natural gas terminal in Republic of Cyprus.

➔ **Turkey** **Military operations against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) intensified in northern Iraq, human rights advocates received heavy sentences, and President Erdoğan visited Saudi Arabia.**

Military 18 April launched new operation against PKK in northern Iraq dubbed “Claw-Lock”; fighter jets targeted infrastructure and bases used by PKK militants in Metina, Zap and Avashin-Basyan regions (see Iraq). In Turkey, roadside bomb attack 20 April hit bus carrying prison guards in western Bursa province, killing one and injuring thirteen; Peoples’ United Revolutionary Movement, umbrella group spearheaded by PKK, 24 April claimed attack. Police crackdown against pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party continued during month, including 12 April detention of 91 individuals on charges of offering financial support to PKK. Security operations against Islamic State (ISIS) cells/operatives continued; police detained more than 120 individuals with alleged ISIS links across country. In contravention of legally-binding judgment of European Court of Human Rights from Dec 2019, penal court in Istanbul city 25 April sentenced businessman and human rights advocate Osman Kavala to life in prison without parole on charges of “attempting to overthrow the government” over his involvement in 2013 Gezi park protests; seven other well-known human rights activists also sentenced to 18 years in prison in same case. Ankara and Athens continued diplomatic engagement, notwithstanding tensions. FM Çavuşoğlu 4 April said dialogue channels between sides were more open today than ever before. Govts 19 April confirmed they will hold fourth round of talks on military confidence building measures (date yet to be announced). Greece 27 April protested “unacceptable provocation” following flights by Turkish fighter jets in Aegean Sea, claiming it violated Greek airspace; Turkey rejected claims and accused Athens of violating its airspace. Govt 22 April pulled out of NATO air force exercises due to be held in Greece in May. In move intended to pave way toward normalisation of ties with Saudi Arabia, Turkish court 7 April suspended case in absentia of Jamal Khashoggi’s murder suspects, deciding to transfer it to Saudi Arabia; human rights groups heavily criticised move. President Erdoğan 28 April visited Saudi Arabia to meet Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (see Saudi Arabia).

Central Asia

➔ **Kyrgyzstan Clashes on border with Tajikistan killed one border guard.** Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards 12 April exchanged gunfire close to Maksat village in Leilek district, Batken region, in south-western Kyrgyzstan, reportedly wounding one border guard on each side; Tajik border guard next day succumbed to wounds. Head of respective border guard services 12 April reportedly held talks to de-escalate situation. Batken region governor 13 April said Kyrgyz-Tajik talks on border situation ended with agreement to withdraw additional armed forces from both sides and “two sides’ police will take joint control over the border segment crossing the Konibodom-Khujand highway”. Kyrgyz FM Ruslan Kazakbaev and Tajik FM Sirojiddin Muhridin 14 April held call to discuss border situation; pair “agreed to continue discussions on further steps to resolve border issues”. Mayor of capital Bishkek 14 April announced that Pervomay district court had banned rallies and protests in city centre (allocating three designated areas elsewhere) until 1 Sept 2022, reportedly aimed at preventing “possible mass disorders”.

➔ **Tajikistan Clashes on border with Kyrgyzstan killed one border guard.** Tajik and Kyrgyz border guards 12 April exchanged gunfire close to Maksat village in Leilek district, Batken region, in south-western Kyrgyzstan, reportedly wounding one border guard on each side; Tajik border guard next day succumbed to wounds. Head of respective border guard services same day reportedly held talks to de-escalate situation. Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region governor 13 April said Kyrgyz-Tajik talks on border situation ended with agreement to withdraw additional armed forces from both sides and “two sides’ police will take joint control over the border segment crossing the Konibodom-Khujand highway”. Tajik FM Sirojiddin Muhridin and Kyrgyz FM Ruslan Kazakbaev 14 April held call to discuss border situation; pair “agreed to continue discussions on further steps to resolve border issues”.

➔ **Uzbekistan Islamic State (ISIS) claimed first cross-border attack from Afghanistan, clashes at Kyrgyz border left two dead, and wheat shortages raised concerns over food security in coming months.** Amid uptick in activity in Afghanistan since Taliban takeover last year (see Afghanistan), Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) 18 April said it fired ten rockets from Afghan town of Hairatan at military base located in Uzbek border town of Termez in first such assault of its kind; president’s spokesperson next day denied claims, claiming “situation is stable” and calling on citizens to disregard “provocations”. Kyrgyz Border Guard Service 5 April reported incident between Uzbek border guards and Kyrgyz nationals allegedly attempting to smuggle goods into Uzbek territory on horseback, which resulted in Uzbek guards fatally shooting two individuals. Kazakhstan, major global wheat supplier, 1 April imposed quotas on wheat exports from 15 April to 1 June due to supply disruptions following Russian invasion of Ukraine (see Ukraine); while quotas allow limited exports and Kazakhstan made public assurances it plans to continue regional supply, concerns mounted about potential impact on food security in coming months; Tashkent late March had announced plans to buy 100,000 tonnes of wheat from Kazakhstan between April and July to ensure domestic food security, with imports mainly from Kazakhstan making up about 35% of domestic wheat consumption. Meanwhile, govt 8 April

delivered over 34 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Ukraine in further signal of support for country's territorial integrity.