



## Europe and Central Asia

---

### Balkans

---

➔ **Kosovo** Belgrade and Pristina established Monitoring Committee as normalisation efforts proceeded, local elections in north saw meagre turnout, and trial against former president kicked off in The Hague.

*EU-mediated dialogue on normalising relations with Serbia advanced.* Kosovo and Serbia 18 April created Joint Monitoring Committee to oversee “implementation” of March agreement on normalising relations and its Implementation Annex. Meanwhile, Council of Europe Ministers’ Committee 24 April forwarded Kosovo’s application for Council membership to Parliamentary Assembly, which Kosovo leaders hailed as “historic step”.

*Kosovo Serbs boycotted municipal elections.* Largest Kosovo Serb party Serbian List 21 April urged Serb community to boycott “undemocratic” elections, held 23 April in four Serb-dominated northern municipalities. Under 4% of eligible citizens voted, leading to victories for ruling Vetëvendosje party and opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo. VP of Serbian List, Milan Radoičić, same day warned that Serbs “would never allow” officials elected with such low turnout to govern in northern municipalities. EU 24 April said low turnout “shows that this process is not and cannot be considered business as usual”.

*Trial against former President Hashim Thaçi and three others began.* Kosovo Specialist Court in The Hague, which has jurisdiction over crimes committed in Kosovo 1998-2000, 3 April commenced trial of Thaçi and three other former Kosovo Liberation Army leaders for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes; all have pleaded “not guilty”. Thousands 2 April protested in capital Pristina in support of Thaçi.

---

### Caucasus

---

➔ **Armenia** Tensions with Azerbaijan continued to escalate as fresh fighting along border left seven dead; international efforts to restart stalled peace talks persisted.

*Border skirmish killed seven, Azerbaijani soldiers detained after entering Armenia.* Baku and Yerevan 11 April reported that renewed fighting on Armenian side of border close to Lachin road killed four Armenian and three Azerbaijani soldiers, with sides exchanging blame for incident; EU 12 April deplored “armed clashes”. Azerbaijani foreign ministry 13 April said Armenia had captured two Azerbaijani

soldiers who entered Armenian territory and claimed video circulating on social media showed one soldier (who allegedly praised Azerbaijani troops for beheading Armenians and was later charged with killing Armenian citizen) was subjected to “torture and inhumane treatment” by civilians. EU 13 April, U.S. and UK embassies 14 April criticised “unacceptable” treatment; ombudsman 17 April denied mistreatment. Prosecutor’s office 11, 14 April charged soldiers with border trespassing and weapons smuggling, 17 April charged one with killing Armenian citizen. Meanwhile, tensions spiked over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) after Azerbaijan installed checkpoint along Lachin Corridor (see Nagorno-Karabakh).

*Foreign actors, notably U.S., worked hard to restart direct peace talks.* U.S. officials 17 April travelled to Azerbaijani capital Baku, 18 April met Armenian officials in capital Yerevan as U.S. ramped up efforts to prompt resumption of negotiations; FMs late April arrived in U.S. for talks beginning 1 May. Meanwhile, PM Pashinyan 18 April restated Yerevan’s recognition of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and readiness to sign peace treaty, while emphasizing that both sides need to recognise other’s territorial integrity “without ambiguities” for durable peace; Azerbaijani President Aliyev same day reiterated demand that Armenia recognises that “Karabakh is Azerbaijan”, and said Armenians in NK should accept “Azerbaijani citizenship or find another place to live”.

➔ **Azerbaijan Tensions with Armenia continued to escalate as fresh fighting along border left seven dead, international efforts to restart stalled peace talks persisted, and relations with Iran remained strained.**

*Border skirmish killed seven, Azerbaijani soldiers detained after entering Armenia.* Baku and Yerevan 11 April reported that renewed fighting on Armenian side of border close to Lachin road killed four Armenian and three Azerbaijani soldiers, with sides exchanging blame for incident; EU 12 April deplored “armed clashes”. Foreign ministry 13 April said Armenia had captured two Azerbaijani soldiers who entered Armenian territory and claimed video circulating on social media showed one soldier (who allegedly praised Azerbaijani troops for beheading Armenians and was later charged with killing Armenian citizen) was subjected to “torture and inhumane treatment” by Armenian civilians. EU 13 April, U.S. and UK embassies 14 April criticised “unacceptable” treatment; Armenian ombudsman 17 April denied mistreatment. Armenian prosecutor’s office 11, 14 April charged soldiers with border trespassing and weapons smuggling, 17 April charged one with killing Armenian citizen. Meanwhile, tensions spiked over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) after Azerbaijan installed checkpoint along Lachin Corridor (see Nagorno-Karabakh).

*Foreign actors, notably U.S., worked hard to restart direct peace talks.* U.S. officials 17 April travelled to capital Baku, 18 April met Armenian officials in their capital Yerevan as U.S. ramped up efforts to prompt resumption of negotiations; FMs late April arrived in U.S. for talks beginning 1 May. Meanwhile, Armenian PM Pashinyan 18 April restated Yerevan’s recognition of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and readiness to sign peace treaty, while emphasizing that both sides need to recognise other’s territorial integrity “without ambiguities” for durable peace; President Aliyev same day reiterated demand that Armenia recognises that “Karabakh is Azerbaijan”, and said Armenians in NK should accept “Azerbaijani citizenship or find another place to live”.

*Tensions with Iran ran high.* After Baku late March opened embassy in Israel's capital Tel Aviv, Iranian Parliament 5 April issued statement criticising move. Authorities 6 April arrested six individuals suspected of working for "Iran's secret service" to "overthrow" state, same day expelled four Iranian diplomats. Azerbaijani and Iranian FMs 7-8 April discussed disagreements and need to resolve them through dialogue, though situation remained tense.

↓ 🇦🇷 **Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijan installed checkpoint along Lachin corridor, prompting condemnation from Yerevan Moscow and others for breaching 2020 ceasefire deal; tensions could escalate further over uncertainty wrought by checkpoint despite talks in U.S.**

*Azerbaijan set up checkpoint on Lachin corridor, violating 2020 ceasefire deal.* In move fuelling already heightened tensions, Azerbaijan 23 April announced it had installed "border checkpoint" along Lachin corridor connecting Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) with Armenia. Reiterating past allegations (to which Armenian and de facto authorities have proposed independent monitoring), Baku said checkpoint aims to stop "rotation of personnel of Armenian armed forces that continue to be illegally stationed in the territory of Azerbaijan, the transfer of weapons and ammunition, entrance of terrorists, as well as illicit trafficking of natural resources". Checkpoint violates 2020 ceasefire agreement, which delegated responsibility for Lachin road to Russian peacekeepers. Azerbaijani-backed protesters, who had blocked road since Dec 2022, 28 April ended rally and Azerbaijani forces reportedly began asserting control over that section of road while allegedly continuing to hamper humanitarian deliveries into NK.

*Ceasefire deal signatories and international actors condemned Baku's actions.* Armenia 23 April condemned move and urged Russia – third signatory to 2020 ceasefire deal alongside Armenia and Azerbaijan – to ensure "withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces" from corridor's "entire security zone"; Azerbaijan same day rejected demand as interference in its "internal affairs". Russia 24 April condemned move and expressed "extreme concern" about increase in ceasefire violations. Other international actors, including U.S., France and EU, also condemned Baku, saying move could undermine peace efforts.

*Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs arrived in U.S. for talks.* Armenian and Azerbaijani FM's late April arrived in U.S. capital Washington for talks beginning 1 May; tensions could escalate should dialogue fail to yield tangible results. Meanwhile, amid disagreement over place and format of direct negotiations between Stepanakert and Baku, de facto authorities 11 April proposed Russian-mediated talks take place at headquarters of Russian peacekeepers in NK; Azerbaijan had not responded by end of April.

➡ **Georgia Geneva International Discussions (GID) took place after months-long pause with no sign of diplomatic breakthrough; U.S. sanctioned judges for corruption.**

*"Tough" conversations occurred during 57th round of Geneva Discussions.* After several postponements, Geneva 4-5 April hosted 57th round of GIDs – multilateral forum to address security and humanitarian consequences of 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Co-chairs 5 April reported that participants were unable to reach "common understanding" during talks and that Russian, de facto Abkhaz and de facto South

Ossetian participants walked out when Tbilisi raised issue of return of internally displaced people and refugees; Tbilisi refused to compromise on proposals from Moscow and breakaways regarding agreement on non-use of force. EU Special Representative for South Caucasus Toivo Klaar 5 April and Georgia's deputy foreign minister 6 April admitted dialogue was "tough". Still, participants reiterated commitment to process; next round planned for "mid-July". Despite troubled Geneva talks, meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (structure aimed at defusing tensions in South Ossetian conflict zone) 27 April took place; participants notably praised de facto authorities for opening two crossing points along South Ossetian administrative boundary line for Orthodox Easter festivities.

*Govt condemned U.S. for sanctioning judges.* U.S. 5 April sanctioned four Georgian judges for "significant corruption" that undermined "faith" in judicial system. Chairman of ruling party Georgian Dream Irakli Kobakhidze same day criticised move and accused U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken of seeking to "stigmatise" judiciary; PM Gharibashvili 10 April expressed his "full support" for judiciary. Opposition 6 April called for investigation into "clan rule" within judiciary, ruling coalition 19 April prevented initiative.

➡ **Russia (Internal) Govt sought to clamp down on draft-dodgers with new conscription law, repression of dissent continued, and Ukraine launched more drone strikes in Russian borderlands.**

*Govt tightened conscription legislation.* President Putin 14 April signed new legislation providing for digital register of all Russian citizens eligible for military service, which could help authorities expedite mobilisation activities and prevent conscripts from fleeing abroad. Specifically, law allows authorities, previously required to deliver in-person notices to those eligible for military service, to issue electronic draft orders; it also bans citizens from leaving country when they receive such order. Those who fail to appear at registration office within 20 days without valid reason could face new restrictions related to banking, selling property, driving and registering vehicles. Meanwhile, defence ministry 1 April launched regular spring conscription; 30 April announced it had replaced deputy defence minister Mikhail Mizintsev with Alexei Kuzmenkov.

*Crackdown on opposition continued.* In harshest judgement for opposition activist since Putin came to power, Moscow court 17 April handed politician Vladimir Kara-Murza 25-year prison sentence for spreading disinformation about army and treason; State Duma next day approved amendments allowing life sentences for treason. Imprisoned opposition leader Alexey Navalny 26 April said military tribunal opened "terrorism" case against him, which could see him imprisoned for up to 30 years. Authorities throughout month declared several foreign NGOs "undesirable organisations" and "foreign agents".

*Pro-war blogger assassinated, Ukraine launched more attacks into Russia.* In Saint Petersburg city, explosion in cafe owned by paramilitary Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin 2 April killed war correspondent known as Vladlen Tatarsky; authorities next day arrested Russian citizen and accused Ukrainian special services of planning "terrorist attack". Meanwhile, Ukrainian drones 4, 18 April hit military offices in Bryansk region; 17 April struck two power stations in Belgorod region. In Moscow region, authorities 24 April found drone containing explosives.

*Defence minister announced plans to boost combat readiness of Central Asian bases.* Speaking at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu 28 April announced plans to increase combat readiness of its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, saying U.S. efforts to strengthen its presence there triggered move.

---

## **Eastern Europe**

---

### **➡ Belarus Crackdown on opposition continued, and army conducted military exercises.**

*Exiled opposition leader called for access to political prisoners amid crackdown.* Court in capital Minsk 7 April sentenced opposition politician and 2020 presidential candidate Valer Tsapkala to 17 years in prison in absentia. Another presidential candidate, Viktor Babaryka, sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in 2021, was reportedly hospitalised late April; EU 27 April expressed concern, pointing to "traces of beatings", while exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanousvkaya demanded diplomats be given access to political prisoners "to assess the conditions in which they are kept".

*Belarus held military exercises and asked Russia for security guarantees.* Defence ministry 5 April announced three-day "tactical exercise" at Polish and Ukrainian borders, 19-22 April conducted further exercises to strengthen air defence, 22 April announced forces had completed training on Russian tactical nuclear missile systems. President Lukashenko 10 April asked Russia for security guarantees amid heightened tensions with West. Meanwhile, Canada 11 April expanded sanctions to include National Bank and eight other banks in Belarus due to its support for "Russia's illegal invasion" of Ukraine.

### **➡ Moldova Authorities barred Russian delegation from entering Moldova, and EU launched civilian mission to help Chişinău counter foreign interference.**

Amid mounting concern about Russian destabilisation efforts in Moldova, Russian delegation led by Tatarstan region's governor Rustam Minnikhanov 17 April arrived in capital Chişinău to attend forum in autonomous Gagauzia region ahead of local polls on 30 April. Authorities, however, prevented him from disembarking aircraft, accusing delegation of seeking to bolster support for pro-Russian candidate. Minnikhanov same day claimed authorities had designated him persona non grata; border police rejected claim while urging Russian officials to "refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of our country". Russian foreign ministry that evening condemned move. Two days later, foreign ministry 19 April summoned Russian Ambassador Oleg Vasnetsov, informing him of decision to expel Russian Embassy employee for "inappropriate behaviour" at airport after authorities barred Minnikhanov's entry; Vasnetsov same day condemned "unfriendly moves against our country". PM Recean 27 April compiled "blacklist" of Russians banned from entering Moldova, including Russian President Putin. Meanwhile, EU 24 April approved launch of new civilian mission to help Moldova "protect its security, territorial integrity and sovereignty" amid "continued Russian attempts to destabilise" country.

➔ 🌐 **Ukraine As expectations for long-awaited Ukrainian counteroffensive grew, fresh Russian shelling killed and injured dozens; Moscow may deploy long-range weapons in the coming weeks, causing more civilian suffering.**

*Russia shelled Ukrainian cities, further high-casualty attacks possible.* Russian army and air force ramped up efforts to capture Bakhmut city alongside paramilitary Wagner Group fighters, gaining ground from Ukrainian forces. Wagner's head Yevgeny Prigozhin 29 April threatened to withdraw his troops from city unless Moscow sends more ammunition. Meanwhile, expectations for Ukrainian counteroffensive grew, though leaked classified U.S. documents revealed scepticism among U.S. officials about offensive's chances of success. Reports 22 April emerged that Ukraine was establishing forward positions on Russian-held left bank of Dnipro River near Kherson (south). Fresh Russian shelling across Ukrainian cities late April killed and injured dozens. Russia may use more long-range weapons in coming weeks to undermine Ukrainian morale.

*President Zelenskyy requested air defence assistance.* Ahead of 21 April Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting at Germany's Ramstein Air Base, President Zelenskyy called for air defence assistance amid fears depleted air defence munitions could facilitate Russian sorties into Ukrainian-held territory and intensified use of bombers over Ukrainian cities; meeting yielded no major announcements. Netherlands and Denmark 20 April announced they would send 14 Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine.

*More evidence of Wagner atrocities in Ukraine emerged.* Russian human rights group Gulagu 12 April interviewed escaped Wagner mercenary Andrei Medvedev, who attributed brutal video purportedly showing beheading of Ukrainian prisoner of war to Wagner. Two former Russian convicts who fought with Wagner 17 April admitted to killing civilians near Bakhmut; Wagner's head Evgeniy Prigozhin denied claims.

*In other important developments.* During China visit, Brazilian President Lula 14 April proposed peace model in which Russia returns all Ukrainian territory aside from Crimea, a non-starter for Kyiv; Lula criticised Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, though his remarks suggesting both countries bore responsibility for conflict drew criticism from West. Chinese President Xi 26 April spoke to Zelenskyy for first time since invasion. Meanwhile, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria 15-17 April introduced grain bans from Ukraine, saying cheaper Ukrainian agricultural imports had lowered prices for local farmers.

---

## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

---

➔ 🌐 **Cyprus Republic of Cyprus pursued initiative to expand EU involvement to reignite talks, while Turkish Cypriots expressed strong opposition; sides continued dialogue under UN auspices.**

*Republic of Cyprus President Christodoulides advanced proposal for active EU role.* After Christodoulides visited Belgian capital Brussels in March to propose greater EU involvement in Cyprus issue, Greek Cypriot FM Kombos 2 April

explained country is expecting Turkish Cypriots to make next move. Christodoulides 22 April said “everything depends on how Turkey will act” following elections in May (see Türkiye), adding that Ankara’s post-earthquake steps toward rapprochement with West and regional countries, if continued, would pave way for diplomacy over Cyprus. Meanwhile, Christodoulides 5 April visited Egypt to hold talks with President Sisi on Cyprus issue, bilateral ties and energy, signalling country’s desire to enhance regional engagement.

*Turkish Cypriots voiced opposition to Christodoulides’ initiative.* After foreign ministry of “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”) in March voiced opposition to EU involvement given bloc’s “partial attitude”, de facto FM Tahsin Ertuğruloğlu 5 April said “TRNC” would review diplomatic status of EU’s office in north as well as relations with bloc given EU has not recognised “TRNC”. After Republic of Cyprus and U.S. late March signed partnership deal for cooperation on maritime security and other issues, “TRNC” 1 April condemned deal, saying it served to strengthen armament of Republic of Cyprus. “TRNC” 8 April condemned U.S. for anchoring attack submarine in Republic of Cyprus; Türkiye next day reiterated calls for U.S. to reconsider policies that disrupt balance on island. “TRNC” 27 April condemned Greek Cypriot navigation advisory for drilling preparations in contested economic zone in eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, “TRNC” 1 April deepened cooperation with Türkiye by signing \$500mn Financial and Economic Protocol, which includes financial aid as well as funds for new schools, health facilities and national disaster centre.

*Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots continued UN-facilitated dialogue.* Under auspices of UN peacekeeping force, Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot negotiators 11 April met as part of regular dialogue related to bicomunal Technical Committees and issues of shared concern; negotiators 27 April discussed future settlement prospects and Technical Committees.

➡ **Türkiye Military targeted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and affiliates, country prepared for May elections, and positive atmosphere persisted with Greece amid Ankara’s regional normalisation drive.**

*Military continued operations against PKK and affiliates.* After PKK late March renewed commitment to unilateral ceasefire until 14 May elections, military conducted operations in Van, Iğdır, Şırnak and Diyarbakır provinces as well as northern Syria and Iraq. Notably, police 25 April detained 110 individuals in 21 provinces, including politicians, journalists and artists, allegedly affiliated with PKK. In northern Iraq, Suleimaniya officials 7 April claimed Türkiye carried out drone strike near airport, allegedly targeting Syrian Democratic Forces commander Mazloum Abdi’s convoy (see Iraq). In northern Syria, Turkish defence minister 17 April announced army killed ten People’s Defence Units (YPG)/PKK militants in Aleppo after alleged YPG/PKK attack previous day injured four Turkish soldiers (see Syria).

*Authorities prepared for May elections, continued crackdown on Islamic State (ISIS).* Amid heightened political tensions ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 14 May, unknown perpetrators 31 March and 6 April fired shots at opposition party offices in Istanbul and 21 April at ruling AKP office in

Adana city. Meanwhile, security forces detained at least 141 individuals with alleged ISIS links.

*Atmosphere of good-will persisted with Greece.* Greek and Turkish defence ministers 4 April met in Hatay province to discuss earthquake response, aid and future relations. Greece 8 April announced gradual closure of Camp Lavrion – refugee camp that Ankara had described as “PKK training camp”. Greek FM Nicos Dendias 17 April said sides should discuss “sharing potentially profitable energy projects instead of fighting over them.”

*Govt continued regional normalisation efforts.* Deputy FMs of Russia, Türkiye, Syria and Iran 3-4 April met in Russian capital Moscow to advance Turkish-Syrian rapprochement; defence ministers and intelligence chiefs of four countries 25 April resumed talks in Moscow on security in Syria, Ankara-Damascus normalisation and Syrian refugees in Türkiye. FM Çavuşoğlu 25 April said Turkish forces will not withdraw from Syria unless terrorist threats are eliminated. Egyptian and Turkish FMs 13 April agreed to reopen embassies and organise presidential summit.

---

## **Central Asia**

---

➡ **Kyrgyzstan Authorities brought more charges against activists detained over border deal opposition; Russia planned to increase combat readiness of military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.**

*Authorities charged imprisoned activists for attempting to seize power.* Court in Bishkek 12 April ruled that five activists, detained Oct 2022 for protesting border deal that hands ownership of Kempir-Abad reservoir to Uzbekistan, should be placed under house arrest. Lawyers of activists 26 April said activists faced new charges, namely attempts to seize power.

*Russia announced plans to boost combat readiness of military base in Kyrgyzstan.* Speaking at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in India, Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu 28 April announced plans to increase combat readiness of its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, saying U.S. efforts to strengthen its presence there triggered move.

➡ **Tajikistan Security forces killed two militants near Afghan border, govt deepened ties with Azerbaijan, and Russia planned to boost combat readiness of military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.**

*Militants killed near Afghan border.* State Committee for National Security 26 April reported that security forces had killed two suspected militants belonging to “international terrorist organisation” in Vanj district near border with Afghanistan.

*Azerbaijani and Tajik leaders sought closer ties.* Azerbaijani President Aliyev 5 April arrived in capital Dushanbe for two-day state visit, meeting with President Rahmon. Sides struck number of agreements aimed at strengthening bilateral relations through deeper economic cooperation.

*Russia announced plans to boost combat readiness of military base in Tajikistan.* Speaking at Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in India, Russian Defence



Minister Sergei Shoigu 28 April announced plans to increase combat readiness of its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, saying U.S. efforts to strengthen its presence there triggered move.

➡ **Uzbekistan**    **Uzbeks voted on proposed constitutional amendments.**

After lawmakers mid-March backed referendum on constitutional amendments proposed by President Mirziyoev, which among other things would allow him to seek third term in office and extend presidential term from five to seven years, Uzbeks 30 April began voting, amid expectations referendum will endorse proposals.