



Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia and Herzegovina U.S. sanctioned four Bosnian Serb officials for undermining Dayton Peace Agreement.**

U.S. 31 July sanctioned four Bosnian Serb officials for “encouraging” passage of law allowing self-governing entity Republika Srpska to ignore decisions made by country’s Constitutional Court. U.S. said in statement that “move threatens the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina”, “the hard-won peace underpinned by the Dayton Peace Agreement” and “the country’s future trajectory”.

➔ **Kosovo Pristina promised steps to reduce tensions in Serb-majority northern municipalities, and PM Kurti announced acquisition of Turkish combat drones.**

Govt agreed to reduce police presence at northern municipal buildings and hold elections. Amid stepped-up pressure from European Union (EU) on Pristina to de-escalate tensions in Serb-majority northern municipalities, which soared after govt late May installed newly-elected ethnic Albanian mayors, EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák 10 July met with Deputy PM Bislimi in Slovakian capital, Bratislava. Following meeting, Pristina 11 July announced reduction of police presence around municipal buildings in north by 25% and expressed support for “the holding of new elections”; EU High Representative Josep Borrell 12 July welcomed news but said EU expected further de-escalatory steps. In meeting with Serb President Aleksandar Vučić, NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 19 July urged Belgrade and Pristina to “prevent escalation and engage in the EU-facilitated dialogue”; Vučić same day requested “a more significant role for [NATO-led force] Kosovo Force (KFOR) in easing tensions”. Chief negotiators for Kosovo and Serbia 19 July met separately in Brussels with Lajčák, who reportedly saw “need for additional coordination” before trilateral meeting occurs.

Serbia condemned Kosovo’s acquisition of Turkish drones. PM Kurti 16 July confirmed purchase of Turkish-made Bayraktar drones, saying security spending is making Kosovo safer; KFOR next day reiterated its “primary authority over the airspace above Kosovo”. Serbian Defence Minister Milos Vucevic 21 July accused Kosovo of acquiring “offensive weapons”, including drones, and warned that Belgrade is “carefully watching what is happening”.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** **Yerevan and Baku continued to engage in high-level dialogue under U.S., EU and Russian auspices, as sides traded blame for border clashes.**

International efforts to advance talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan persisted. Following June meeting in Washington, Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders 15 July convened in Brussels for talks mediated by European Council President Charles Michel. Michel stated EU's readiness to help finance railroad construction in region; he also reiterated need to unblock Lachin road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia amid deteriorating humanitarian situation and noted possibility of sending aid from Azerbaijan-controlled Agdam region into enclave, saying "both options [are] important ... to ensure the needs of the population are met" (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 25 July held talks with Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs in Moscow, but meeting produced no tangible results.

Violent incidents occurred along border with Azerbaijan. Baku and Yerevan between 9 and 19 July reported multiple clashes along shared border, trading blame for incidents; clashes 11 July wounded one Azerbaijani soldier, 12 July injured two Armenian soldiers. Meanwhile, EU 18 July permitted third states to contribute to EU Civilian Mission along Armenian side of border with Azerbaijan; Canada 21 July announced plans to deploy two experts.

Border commissions reconvened after lengthy pause. Armenian and Azerbaijani border commissions 12 July convened at state border to resume delimitation and demarcation process following prolonged pause. Countries, however, continued to disagree on which maps to use for defining border and meeting concluded without breakthrough.

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Authorities arrested prominent opposition politician. Turkish media 23 July reported arrest of opposition politician Gubad Ibadoglu and his wife Irada Bayramova in Baku for alleged links to Turkish group that Ankara calls the “Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation”. Court in Baku next day placed Ibadoglu in pre-trial detention for three months on charges of involvement in “preparation, acquisition or sale of counterfeit money or securities by an organised group”, same day released Bayramova.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Lachin blockade continued to aggravate humanitarian suffering, tensions between Baku and de facto authorities ran high, and Armenia-Azerbaijan talks continued amid international pressure.**

Humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) deteriorated. NK residents continued to face severe shortages of food, electricity and medical supplies due to Azerbaijan’s blockade of Lachin corridor connecting NK with Armenia. Azerbaijan 11 July suspended International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) deliveries after contracted drivers attempted to smuggle cigarettes and mobile phones into enclave; ICRC same day acknowledged wrongdoing and humanitarian operations restarted 14 July. ICRC 25 July said it was again unable to deliver aid and warned of humanitarian consequences. Situation worsened after Azerbaijani forces 29 July arrested NK resident, Vagif Khachatryan, whom ICRC was evacuating for urgent medical treatment in Armenia; all medical evacuations were halted and had not resumed by end of month. Yerevan and Stepanakert 29 July said move violated international law but Baku justified arrest, accusing Khachatryan of genocide and ethnic cleansing during first NK war.

Baku and Stepanakert traded blame for multiple incidents throughout July. Baku and de facto authorities throughout month traded blame for clashes along line of contact, while Baku accused de facto forces of attempting to install fortifications. De facto authorities throughout month claimed Azerbaijani forces attacked farmers working near front. More clashes occurred between Armenia and Azerbaijan along border (see Armenia and Azerbaijan).

Armenia and Azerbaijan continued to engage in high-level dialogue. Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders 15 July convened in Brussels for talks mediated by European Council President Charles Michel (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Michel reiterated need to unblock Lachin road and noted possibility of sending aid to enclave from Azerbaijan-controlled Agdam region, saying “both options [are] important ... to ensure the needs of the population are met”; EU High Representative Joseph Borrell 26 July warned that Agdam route “should not be seen as an alternative to the reopening of Lachin” after Baku earlier that day began blocking humanitarian convoy from Yerevan on Lachin, arguing aid should be delivered via Agdam. Meanwhile, Russia 25 July held talks with Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs in Moscow; meeting produced no tangible results.

➡ **Georgia** Prospects for NATO and EU membership looked uncertain amid stagnant reforms, and 58th round of Geneva talks concluded without new agreements.

NATO summit yielded little for prospective Georgian membership. Leaders of NATO alliance 11-12 July met in Lithuanian capital Vilnius for second summit since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. NATO 11 July reaffirmed Bucharest Agreement promising Georgia membership. Unlike Ukraine, however, which was offered post-war fast track to membership, Tbilisi walked away empty-handed, triggering frustration among opposition. Ruling Georgian Dream party's pro-Russian rhetoric and failure to enact reforms may explain NATO's changing position.

Violent disruption at LGBTQ+ event further jeopardised Georgia's EU ambitions. Thousands of protesters, many with far-right ties, 8 July violently disrupted Tbilisi Pride festival. Organisers, who were forced to cancel event, accused govt of coordinating attack with far right. EU Delegation to Georgia same day expressed disappointment "that security and freedom of assembly could not be ensured" while Czech ambassador to Georgia said events indicated country was not doing enough to secure candidate status.

Protests broke out at Batumi port following arrival of Russian cruise ship. Cruise ship carrying some 800 mostly Russian tourists 27 July arrived in Black Sea port of Batumi from Russian port of Sochi. Protests same day erupted at port amid reports of passengers voicing support for 2008 Russo-Georgian War, forcing cruise to leave ahead of schedule; ship 31 July met fresh protests upon its return to Batumi.

Latest round of Geneva International Discussions took place. 58th round of Geneva International Discussions – multilateral forum to address security and humanitarian consequences of 2008 Russo-Georgian War – 11-12 July took place. Talks yielded no new announcements, though participants reaffirmed their commitment to process; next round scheduled for December.

➡ **Russia (Internal)** Kremlin clamped down on senior military officers following Wagner insurrection, parliament passed raft of measures to strengthen mobilisation efforts, and Moscow withdrew from Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Authorities detained high-ranking officers in wake of Wagner mutiny. News outlet *The Wall Street Journal* 13 July reported that at least 13 high-ranking officers were detained following paramilitary Wagner Group's short-lived mutiny in June, including Gen. Sergei Surovikin and Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev. Paper also said Kremlin suspended or dismissed about 15 other officers. In further sign of cracks in security establishment, Maj. Gen. Ivan Popov 12 July announced he had been fired after criticising high command's management of Ukraine war. Meanwhile, video published 19 July showed Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin addressing combatants in Belarus (see Belarus), saying mercenaries will remain in Belarus only temporarily before heading to Africa, though hinting they could eventually return to Ukraine.

Lawmakers extended eligibility for military service and approved creation of paramilitaries. State Duma 18 July approved bill raising age limit for reservists, 20 July increased fines for non-appearance at military enlistment office on demand and 25 July raised maximum age for military conscription from 27 to 30. Upper House

of Parliament 28 July approved law allowing governors to create regional paramilitary units to assist security forces during mobilisation, wartime or periods of martial law; president will decide when to form or disband such units.

Fresh drones struck capital. Kremlin 24 July accused Kyiv of fresh drone attack on Moscow and promised retaliatory measures; two drones 30 July attacked govt complex, also in capital.

Moscow scuttled Black Sea grain deal. Russia 17 July withdrew from Black Sea Grain Initiative, which allowed safe passage for Ukrainian grain exports (see Ukraine). President Putin 19 July said Moscow could return to deal if Western states fulfil their obligations, including by unblocking Russian assets related to agriculture and reopening Togliatti-Odessa ammonia pipeline. During Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg 27-28 July, representatives from five African countries publicly called for resumption of agreement; Putin 29 July pledged to ship 25-50,000 tonnes of grain free of charge to poorest countries in Africa within 3-4 months, but stopped short of promising return to initiative.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** **Wagner mercenaries travelled to Belarus following failed insurrection in Russia and conducted military exercises with army; crackdown on dissent continued.**

Minsk conducted military exercises with Wagner mercenaries. Following Russian paramilitary Wagner Group's short-lived mutiny in June and Russian President Vladimir Putin's subsequent announcement that mercenaries could move to Belarus, State Border Guard Service of Ukraine 22 July claimed approximately 5,000 Wagner fighters were now in Belarus. Video published 19 July showed Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin addressing combatants, in which he announced Wagner would stay in Belarus only temporarily and promised to make Belarusian army "the second army of the world". Defence ministry 20 July reported army was conducting exercises with Wagner at Brestski training range near Polish border. Polish interior minister 27 July said Poland, Latvia and Lithuania were prepared to close border with Belarus should they face "the threat of provocations" from Wagner; Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki 29 July expressed concern about movement of Wagner troops toward border.

Clampdown on dissent continued. President Lukashenka 1 July signed law allowing authorities to ban foreign media from Belarus in event of "unfriendly actions" by states. Minsk court 5 July sentenced Eduard Babaryka, son of former presidential hopeful Viktor Babaryka, to eight years in prison for "organising mass riots" and "inciting hatred." Minsk court 19 July started trial of journalist Zmitser Bayarovich and his wife, Valeria, for protesting 2020 election results. Court 26 July sentenced journalist Pavel Mazheika to six years in prison for "extremist activity".

In another important development. Russian news agency 25 July reported Belarus applied to join BRICS bloc of emerging economies, which includes Russia, Brazil, China, India and South Africa, in May.

➡ **Moldova Murder of breakaway Transnistria's most prominent opposition politician fuelled speculation, and Chişinău announced plans to expel 45 Russian diplomatic staff.**

Prominent opposition politician in breakaway Transnistria region found dead. Leader of opposition Communist party Oleg Khorzhan was found dead 16 July at his home in de facto capital, Tiraspol. De facto authorities 17 July said they believed he was killed during a robbery as safe inside house was emptied, but activists and opposition politicians claimed his death was politically motivated – Khorzhan had been critical of Transnistria's administration and served 4.5-year prison sentence for "inciting civil strife". Moldovan national police 17 July opened investigation, saying it was taking "all appropriate investigative measures regarding the crime of murder"; Moldova's Bureau for Reintegration, charged with govt policy on Transnistria, same day called on Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe to assist with investigation. Transnistria's de facto interior ministry 24 July announced suspect in murder case, Andrei Duminica, who denied involvement.

Authorities announced expulsion of 45 Russian diplomatic staff. Amid growing fears of Russian destabilisation efforts in Moldova, Chişinău 26 July announced it will expel 45 Russian diplomats and embassy staff by 15 Aug due to "ongoing tensions and unfriendly actions". Announcement followed media report published 24 July claiming spying technology had been installed on Russian embassy rooftop. Moscow 26 July said move "would not go unanswered".

↓ **Ukraine In major blow to Ukrainian economy and global food security, Moscow withdrew from Black Sea Grain Initiative before launching flurry of attacks on ports and grain facilities; Kyiv's counteroffensive advanced slowly.**

Russia scuttled Black Sea grain deal. Moscow, which had long threatened to quit Black Sea Grain Initiative ensuring safe passage for Ukrainian grain exports, 17 July accused West of failing to fulfil its obligations under deal (see Russia) and announced its withdrawal. Ukrainian aquatic drones earlier that day struck Kerch bridge connecting Moscow-annexed Crimea with Russia, but Kremlin stated there was no link between this attack and its decision to quit deal. Wheat prices subsequently spiked as Russia 18 July began targeting ports and grain facilities on Odesa region's Black Sea coast and along Danube river in bid to throttle agricultural exports, which are pillar of Ukrainian economy. Speaking to UN Security Council, UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths 21 July said high grain prices threaten to push millions into hunger.

Ukrainian counteroffensive moved slowly as Russia mounted offensive in Kharkiv. Counteroffensive made incremental progress as Ukrainian forces struggled to break through complex Russian fortifications and large minefields. Troops focused their probing attacks on four sections of southern front that stretches across Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions, making progress in Donetsk around Bakhmut city and 27 July recapturing Staromaiorske village on southern front. Meanwhile, Russian forces mid-July mounted ground offensive in north east of Kharkiv region, making small advances as Moscow sought to regain lost positions and divert Ukrainian forces from south and east.

Delivery of U.S. cluster munitions sparked controversy. First batch of cluster bombs 13 July arrived in Ukraine after Washington 7 July greenlighted delivery. Decision

triggered fierce debate as cluster bombs' indiscriminate nature and lingering danger from unexploded bomblets pose serious risk to civilians. Ukraine and U.S. defended decision, saying controversial weapon would compensate for lack of more precise ammunition.

NATO summit produced mixed results for Ukraine. During NATO summit in Lithuanian capital Vilnius 11-12 July, alliance pledged continued military aid to Ukraine but deferred membership prospects with carefully worded statement promising Kyiv an invitation "when allies agree and conditions are met".

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ **Cyprus** As UN continued efforts to find common ground, Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriot leadership voiced support for differing solution models.

UN continued engagement to foster dialogue. UN Sec Gen António Guterres 5 July asserted that positive shift in Greece-Türkiye relations was opportunity for settlement in Cyprus. UN 7 July adopted two reports, namely Secretary General's Report on His Mission of Good Offices in Cyprus, and Secretary General's Report on UN Mission in Cyprus. In former, Guterres stated "the absence of substantive dialogue continues to deepen the difference of views on the way forward". In latter, Guterres urged parties to return to negotiations, adding that further economic integration between two sides was needed; he also called upon Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders to cease antagonistic rhetoric. Meanwhile, Republic of Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 18 July visited anthropological laboratory of Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, agreed to meet again at UN General Assembly in Sept. In his 20 July visit to north of island, Turkish President Erdoğan attended opening ceremony of new terminal at Ercan/Tymbou airport, declaring days of airport being used for international flights were "not far off".

Parties articulated alternative visions of solution. In response to UN Security Council press statement 10 July that articulated "goal of returning to formal negotiations based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation", "TRNC" 12 July said statement was "unfortunate and unrealistic" and asserted its support for two-state solution; Türkiye next day voiced support for "TRNC"'s position, adding that Turkish Cypriots no longer sought outdated solution model, referring to federation. Republic of Cyprus and Greece during month, however, rejected two-state formula: notably, Republic of Cyprus Defence Minister Michalis Giorgallas 2 July said that Turkish narrative for two state solution cannot be part of any discussion in new negotiations, while Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis 31 July said "any partitionist thoughts of two states is completely off any agenda".

➡ **Türkiye** Security forces struck Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), primarily in northern Iraq and northern Syria, while govt invested diplomatic capital in improving ties with Greece, Egypt and Gulf states.

Military continued operations against PKK. Hostilities remained concentrated in northern Iraq and northern Syria. Notably in Iraq, clashes with PKK 9 July killed two

Turkish soldiers, while forces claimed to “neutralise” (arrest or kill) several high-ranking PKK members, including alleged PKK mastermind of 2019 assassination of Turkish diplomat on 5 July, PKK’s special forces chief on 13 July, member of PKK’s regional administrative council on 16 July. Violence within Türkiye remained limited, as military carried out operations in rural areas of Şırnak and Hakkari provinces. Interior ministry 26 July said security forces had apprehended two PKK members in Istanbul allegedly plotting “sensational attack”.

Dialogue with Greece regained forward momentum. Having concluded respective elections, Ankara and Athens reiterated willingness to cooperate. Greek FM Giorgos Gerapetritis 4 July announced readiness to start talks on resolving long-standing issues in Aegean dispute. Defence Minister Yaşar Güler and Greek counterpart Nikos Dendias next day held phone call in which both sides agreed on restarting contacts for confidence-building measures. President Erdoğan and Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis 11-12 July agreed to foster “positive momentum”, pledged to “activate multiple channels of communication” and to schedule High-Level Cooperation Council meeting in Greece this year. In response to wildfires on Greek island Rhodes, Türkiye 21 July sent three firefighting aircraft.

Govt sought to mend fences across region and beyond. Türkiye and Egypt 4 July realised pledges to reinstate ambassadorial representation. During Gulf visit, Erdoğan 17-21 July signed trade, investment and security deals which notably included record-breaking defence deal with Saudi Arabia, and issued declaration with Qatar and United Arab Emirates to enhance bilateral relations. Russian President Putin 8 July cancelled state visit to Türkiye, citing Erdoğan’s decisions during visit by Ukrainian President Zelenskyy to release prisoners of Ukraine war and cooperate with Kyiv on strategic industries. During NATO Summit, govt agreed to back Sweden’s membership.

Crackdown on Islamic State (ISIS) persisted. Security forces during July detained at least 107 individuals with alleged links to ISIS.

Central Asia

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** **European Parliament condemned crackdown on media and freedom of expression, and U.S. imposed sanctions on several Kyrgyz firms for evading Russian sanctions.**

European Parliament spotlighted human rights breaches. European Parliament 13 July adopted resolution on rights situation in Kyrgyzstan amid “alarming deterioration in democratic standards and human rights”. Resolution urged authorities to “respect and uphold fundamental freedoms, in particular those related to media and expression”.

U.S. sanctioned Kyrgyz firms for evading sanctions on Russia. U.S. Treasury 20 July imposed measures against four Kyrgyz firms, along with dozens of Russian companies, for circumventing sanctions on Russia. According to U.S., these Kyrgyz entities have exported “electronics components and other technology to Russia since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine”. Earlier that day, Bishkek denied

helping Moscow evade sanctions but admitted to “possible involvement of private companies” and said it was investigating matter.

➡ **Tajikistan Authorities declared two news websites extremist.**

Prosecutor-General’s Office 19 July announced that Supreme Court mid-June had declared as extremist Pamir Daily News, an outlet covering developments in restive Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), and banned publication. Outlet same day published statement accusing authorities of “trying to completely drown out the news from GBAO”, while Reporters Without Borders 21 July said move was “designed to cut this troubled region off from the rest of the world”. Prosecutor-General’s Office 26 July announced Supreme Court had also labelled New Tajikistan 2 website – created by banned opposition movement Group 24 – “extremist”.

➡ **Uzbekistan President Mirziyoyev won landslide victory in snap election observers said “lacked genuine competition”.**

President Mirziyoyev 9 July won re-election in snap poll, securing over 87% of ballots in vote that saw almost 80% turnout. Mirziyoyev ran against three largely unknown candidates, prompting criticism from observers. Notably, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights 10 July released statement saying “election was technically well prepared but lacked genuine competition”. Poll followed number of constitutional amendments introduced by Mirziyoyev that, among other things, reset his presidential term count and extend term from five to seven years. NGO Human Rights Watch 7 July said election formed part of “a choreographed plan to consolidate power” and that govt had “gone into reverse with its reform agenda”.