

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Kosovo** **Germany urged govt and Serbia to resume dialogue as Pristina advanced membership bid for Council of Europe, prompting protest from Belgrade.** German Chancellor Olaf Scholz 4 May held meetings in German capital Berlin with PM Kurti and Serbian President Vučić, urging both to resume dialogue for “regional stability”; EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák same day hosted trilateral talks with both leaders. Meanwhile, govt 12 May submitted membership bid to Council of Europe, Europe’s leading human rights body, with German and Montenegrin support. Vučić 6 May claimed bid “violates the Washington Agreement” — deal signed in Sept 2020 in presence of former U.S. President Trump in which Kosovo agreed to halt joining international organisations for one year — warning “our response will be stronger than they think” and will involve “diplomatic offensives” urging states to withdraw recognition of Kosovo’s independence; Serbian FM Nikola Selakovic 13 May claimed four countries had derecognised Kosovo, but FM Gervalla-Schwarz same day claimed that information is either “untrue or they have been working for a long time” on derecognition campaign. After temporary agreement for license plate dispute expired in April, EU-mediated talks between chief negotiators of Kosovo and Serbia 13 May ended without new agreement. Former president Hashim Thaçi and three others 12 May pleaded not guilty to war crime charges at Kosovo Specialist Chambers.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** **Anti-govt protests turned increasingly violent, and PM Nikol Pashinyan met Azerbaijani President Aliyev as part of efforts to launch border demarcation talks.** Political situation grew increasingly tense as opposition parties from late April blocked centre of capital Yerevan and organised protests, with at times up to tens of thousands of protestors who demanded resignation of PM Pashinyan for alleged intention to lower “bar a little on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh”. In response, police from mid-May clashed with demonstrators, detained dozens; notably, authorities 30 May arrested over one hundred. Ombudsman 2 May and NGO Freedom House 13 May raised concerns about crackdown and urged police to refrain from using disproportionate force. Despite protests, Pashinyan during month declared intention to remain in office, including his deputy chief of staff 6 May, insisting 2021 election win for Pashinyan’s party confirmed his legitimacy. Meanwhile, FM Ararat Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov 12 May met with Russian mediation in Tajikistan’s capital Dushanbe to discuss main issues related to post-2020 war situation, including border problems and resumption of transport links; Russian deputy FM and deputy PM same day visited Yerevan to explore proceeding of talks on transportation routes. In first meeting since early April, Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 22 May met in EU-facilitated talks in Belgian capital Brussels, agreed border demarcation teams would meet “in the coming days” (see Nagorno-

Karabakh (NK)). Newly formed Armenian and Azerbaijani border commissions 24 May symbolically met at state border of two countries to launch commission's work. With support of Russian peacekeepers deployed in NK, Baku 26 May handed over to Armenian side Armenian soldier detained in April at state border. Govt 28 May reported another Armenian soldier killed in shooting from Azerbaijani position at most problematic border area between Kelbajar and Gegharkunik, warned incident could disrupt plans for talks in Moscow; Baku next day denied encounter, accused Yerevan of attempting to disrupt normalisation process; Yerevan 30 May called on Russia, EU and relevant foreign organisations to condemn Baku's attempts to disrupt border stability.

➡ **Azerbaijan President Aliyev met Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan as part of efforts to launch border demarcation talks, and pardoned hundreds of prisoners to mark Independence Day.** FM Jeyhun Bayramov and Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan 12 May met with Russian mediators in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe to discuss main issues related to post-2020 war situation, including border problems and resumption of transport links, as Russian deputy FM and deputy PM visited capital Yerevan to explore proceeding of talks on transportation routes. In first meeting since early April, PM Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 22 May met in EU-facilitated talks in Belgian capital Brussels, agreed that border demarcation teams would meet "in the coming days" (see Nagorno-Karabakh (NK)). Newly formed Armenian and Azerbaijani border commissions 24 May symbolically met at state border of two countries to launch commission's work, with reported plans to meet again soon for more detailed talks in Moscow and Brussels. With support of Russian peacekeepers deployed in NK, Baku 26 May handed over to Armenian side Armenian soldier detained in April at state border. Armenia 28 May reported another Armenian soldier killed in shooting from Azerbaijani position at most problematic border area between Kelbajar and Gegharkunik, warning incident could disrupt plans for talks in Moscow; Baku 29 May denied clash and accused Yerevan of attempting to disrupt normalisation process; Yerevan 30 May called on Russia, EU and relevant foreign organisations to condemn Baku's attempts to disrupt stability along border. Meanwhile, President Aliyev 27 April pardoned 213 prisoners on occasion of Independence Day, including over 20 people identified as political prisoners by human rights activists; decree also applied to 19 people who were prosecuted following 10 July 2018 unrest in western city of Ganca, where two senior police officers were stabbed to death as police dispersed protest. U.S. embassy in Baku same day welcomed decree but urged govt to release remaining political prisoners.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict zone remained calm, while thousands of Armenian protesters rallied against PM Pashinyan's perceived negotiating position with Azerbaijan over territory's future.** Amid rising prospect of renewed peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan following both leaders' statements in April, situation in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone remained calm during month, with no reports of clashes, shootings or casualties. Thousands of protesters 28 May rallied in de facto capital Stepanakert in support of Armenian opposition, while raising concerns about Armenian PM Pashinyan's plans to enter talks with Azerbaijan on NK with perceived low demands on status of entity (see Armenia); largest protest held in Armenian-populated areas of NK since 2020 war. On diplomatic front, Pashinyan during visit to Netherlands 11 May criticised

Azerbaijan for not responding to proposal to start discussions of NK status; Azerbaijan 12 May rejected criticism. Azerbaijani President Aliyev 19 May accused Armenia of making excuses to avoid real talks and border demarcation process; Armenia same day rejected accusation. After FMs of both sides met in Tajik capital Dushanbe, Pashinyan and Aliyev 22 May met in EU-facilitated talk in Belgian capital Brussels, agreeing that border demarcation teams would meet “in the coming days” (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). Parties maintain different approaches to talks: Azerbaijan sees NK as domestic problem and wants Armenia to renounce territorial claims, while Armenia states its readiness to do so, providing Azerbaijan recognises that under revised NK’s status Armenians should be allowed to continue living in conflict zone.

➔ **Georgia Political tensions over war in Ukraine remained elevated, notably in breakaway South Ossetia, where de facto govt scheduled and then postponed referendum on accession to Russia.** Political situation throughout month remained tense as opposition continued to accuse leadership of not showing sufficient support to Ukraine, including by aligning more with Western allies on key positions related to Russia’s invasion. Tbilisi city court 16 May sentenced head of opposition TV channel Nika Gvaramia to three-and-a-half years imprisonment for abuse of power; Gvaramia rejected all charges as politically motivated. Local NGOs same day said bail or other softer punishment could replace prison term, while international human rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch same day voiced concerns about ruling. In breakaway republic South Ossetia, following his defeat in second round of presidential elections 8 May, de facto President Anatoly Bibilov 14 May signed decree to hold referendum on joining Russia on 17 July. Election winner Alan Gagloev, who was inaugurated 24 May, reportedly learned about referendum from media reports; Gagloev can postpone vote for three months, but not recall decree. Gagloev 30 May issued decree that postpones referendum until consultations with Moscow are finalised; some senior Russian officials and important politicians during month publicly opposed referendum due to risks of destabilising Russia’s relations with Georgia. Situation along lines of separation with South Ossetia and breakaway Abkhazia remained calm; no reports during month of detentions or fence construction along lines of separation. Co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, UN Representative Cihan Sultanoğlu, Special Representative of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office Viorel Moşanu, and EU Special Representative Toivo Klaar 30 May began trip to region; visit follows cancelled March talks and accusations from Russian diplomats late April that West was blocking Geneva discussions.

➔ **Russia (internal) Amid ongoing crackdown on anti-war protesters, Ukrainian forces continued cross-border shelling, and West and allies imposed more sanctions.** Authorities continued heavy crackdown on dissent, charging dozens of citizens for propagating “fakes” about army. Notably, court in Moscow 18 May arrested in absentia founder of Conflict Intelligence Team; Russian human rights group OVD-Info mid-month reported 15,445 people have been detained at anti-war rallies since invasion. Russian human rights group Agora late month reported that 53 criminal cases have been opened in 27 regions for spreading false information about Russian army; by 22 May Russian courts had heard 2,029 administrative cases accused of discrediting the armed forces. Imprisoned

opposition leader Alexei Navalny 31 May said investigators brought new charges against him for “creating an extremist group”. Meanwhile, authorities reported continued shelling of border regions from Ukraine. Notably, governor of Kursk region 19 May said one person killed and several wounded from shelling in Tetkino village, marking second civilian death in border regions since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine began on 24 Feb (see Ukraine). Governor of Belgorod region 27 May reported one person killed in Zhuravlevka village in third reported civilian casualty on Russian territory since invasion of Ukraine began. In indication govt may be preparing for long war in Ukraine, Russian parliament 25 May approved bill to abolish age limit for military service, greatly expanding range of potential contract servicemen eligible to fight in war. During month, nine arson attacks targeted military conscription offices in various regions, bringing total of such attacks since Feb to at least 14. Western states and their allies during month imposed various sanctions and visa restrictions on over 2,600 citizens of Russia and Belarus in response to Russia’s war against Ukraine; Russian foreign ministry 21 May published list of 963 U.S. citizens banned from entering country. Russia 24 May imposed sanctions against 154 members of UK parliament’s House of Lords.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** **Tensions persisted on Ukraine border amid military build-up, while govt signed into law death penalty for “terrorism”, which sparked concern over potential use against critics and opposition.** Amid heightened geopolitical tensions around ongoing war in Ukraine (see Ukraine), govt 4 May announced start of military exercises with “significant numbers of military vehicles” at border with Ukraine; govt 22 May reportedly extended training until at least 28 May. Army chief 10 May announced deployment of special forces and military equipment to southern border, alleging presence of “20,000” Ukrainian forces at border. Ukrainian military 23 May said Belarus forces were “intensifying reconnaissance, additional units are being deployed in the border areas of the Homel region”. Earlier, President Lukashenko 5 May defended Russia’s invasion but said he felt war was dragging on longer than planned. Meanwhile, govt continued repression of political dissent. Lukashenko 18 May signed law making attempted acts of terrorism punishable with death penalty; law follows numerous media reports about activists allegedly sabotaging rail links to disrupt Russia’s war effort in Ukraine; U.S. same day expressed concern that govt could use “politically motivated charges of ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’ against many of the more than 1,100 political prisoners” and “tens of thousands more” who have been detained under such charges. Authorities 18 May began trial of political activist Mikalay Autukhovich in western city of Hrodna on charges of high treason, attempted power seizure and other crimes; 11 others faced similar charges. Western states and their allies during month imposed various sanctions and visa restrictions on over 2,600 citizens of Russia and Belarus. EU Parliament 19 May demanded that EU sanctions on Russia “must be strictly mirrored for Belarus”, condemned “crackdown” and accused govt of “assisting with Russia’s illegal war on Ukraine”.

➔ **Moldova** **Amid fears of Ukraine war spillover, President Sandu sought to advance EU membership bid, while Western states signalled greater support for govt.** Following meeting with President Sandu in capital Chisinau, European Council President Charles Michel 4 May pledged increased

military support to country, vowed to “help Moldova strengthen its resilience and cope with the consequences of the spillover from Russia’s aggression in Ukraine”. Referring to incidents when de facto interior ministry of breakaway territory Transnistria 5 April reported attack on de facto security ministry allegedly involving grenade-launchers, Sandu said “we see no imminent risk right now” despite recent “provocations” in April in breakaway Transnistria; EU Parliament 5 May adopted resolution urging govt to be granted candidate status for admission to bloc; Sandu 18 May addressed EU Parliament, urging member states to support country’s membership bid. UN Sec Gen Antonio Guterres 9 May visited Chisinau, said country is Ukraine’s “most fragile neighbour”. U.S. Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines 10 May said Russia intends to establish land bridge from Crimean Peninsula to Transnistria. UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss 21 May called for Moldova to be “equipped to NATO standard”. Meanwhile, Moldovan authorities 24 May reportedly detained head of pro-Russian opposition party and former president Igor Dodon on corruption charges. De facto authorities in Transnistria 13 May reported that unidentified assailants targeted with Molotov cocktails oil depot and conscription office in de facto regional capital Tiraspol.

➡ 🇺🇦 **Ukraine** **Russian forces made gains in east and captured last pocket of resistance in Mariupol in south, as Ukrainian forces advanced in north; hostilities could intensify, escalate or spread in coming weeks.**

Russian forces 23 May began advancing on Severodonetsk and Lysychansk cities from three directions to encircle Ukrainian troops and seize last territories in Luhansk region under Ukrainian control; 31 May took control of large proportion of Severodonetsk city, although Ukrainian forces still retained some areas. Elsewhere in east, Russian forces 7 May bombed school in front line village of Bilohorivka, killing around 60. Governor of Luhansk 8 May said Ukrainian troops had withdrawn from Popasna city, marking biggest Russian breakout across old contact line that had divided warring parties since 2014 conflict; Severskiy Donets River, which Russian forces 11 May failed to cross, formed much of northern front line. In south, Russian forces 3 May began attacking Azovstal steel plant in Donbas port city of Mariupol; by 19 May, nearly 1,730 Ukrainian troops had surrendered before being sent to camps in Russian-held territories where de facto authorities announced they would face “international tribunal.” Defeat gives Russia control of land corridor between Mariupol and major port city of Kherson; reports indicated deadly insurgent attacks however continued in Melitopol city, midway between Mariupol and Kherson. In north, Ukrainian forces launched successful counter-offensives. Notably, forces 2 May took control of Stariy Saltiv town; 15 May reached Russian border north of Kharkiv, winning city temporary reprieve from Russian artillery that continued sporadically. On humanitarian front, UN 10 May said there were credible reports that Ukrainian forces mistreated, tortured or abducted Russian soldiers; 20 May estimated total 6.7mn refugees and over 8mn internally displaced from war; U.S. senate 19 May passed \$40 billion aid package. Ukrainian court 23 May handed life sentence to Russian soldier for killing civilian in first war crimes trial; sentenced two others 31 May. On diplomatic front, Russia and Ukraine 17 May signalled that peace talks reached standstill. EU leaders 30 May agreed to block over two-thirds of Russian oil imports.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus Tensions over Varosha continued, while Republic of Cyprus and UK signed deal allowing Cypriots to develop properties in so-called UK “sovereign base areas”.** Concerns flared among Greek Cypriots after video mid-month circulated allegedly showing bulldozer clearing another stretch of beach in fenced-off town of Varosha, under Turkish military control since 1974; Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 19 May said “I have been briefed officially from those monitoring developments there... we shall not leave this new provocation to go unnoticed, and we shall make all the necessary demarches”. Republic of Cyprus officials 9 May announced ground-breaking accord with UK which would enable thousands of Cypriots to develop properties in so-called “sovereign base areas” (3% of island) that the UK – owing to its colonial past – has held on island. Following resignation of Greek Cypriot chief negotiator Andreas Mavroyiannis in April, govt 15 May appointed Menelaos Menelaou as replacement. In “TRNC”, three Turkish Cypriot political parties – the National Unity Party (UBP), Democratic Party (DP), and Rebirth Party (YDP) – late April formed new coalition govt, which failed on 1 May when coalition partners withdrew support; early general elections appear likely. Criticising Greek Cypriot efforts to bolster its defence capabilities, Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 5 May said that Greek Cypriots were engaged in “an aggressive armament program and [were] preparing to shed blood”.

➔ **Turkey Authorities continued operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), arrested scores of suspected Islamic State operatives, and set strict conditions for new NATO bids amid Ukraine war.** Operations – including drone strikes – continued in northern Iraq, northern Syria, as well as to lesser extent in Turkey’s south east throughout month. Turkish military continued operations against PKK in Metina, Avasin and Zap regions of northern Iraq as part of Operation Claw Lock launched 18 April (see Iraq). President Erdoğan 23 May announced new security operations along southern borders, although it remains unclear where they will concentrate (see Syria). Security units’ operations against Islamic State (ISIS) cells/operatives across country intensified during month; police detained more than 130 individuals with alleged ISIS links, mostly foreigners. Notably, police 16 May arrested three Syrians in south-eastern Şanhurfa province, one of them reportedly planning to carry out suicide attack, 17 May arrested foreign national allegedly planning suicide attack in western Bursa province, and 24 May disrupted suicide plot by another foreign national in Istanbul city. Internationally, after Finland and Sweden during month announced intention to join NATO alliance amid Ukraine war, Ankara 13 May announced it would block requests unless both countries meet set of demands, including halting alleged support for PKK, extraditing individuals sought by Ankara and lifting arms export restrictions on Turkey. Erdoğan 13 May cited Ankara’s past decision to permit Greece’s re-entry into NATO as reason for caution with proposed accession by Finland and Sweden to alliance, saying “we do not want to make the same mistake again” due to “attitude Greece has adopted towards Turkey with NATO behind its back”. Referring to Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Erdoğan 23 May said “I will never agree to meet with him”; statement came after Mitsotakis in 17 May speech before U.S. Congress tacitly criticised Turkey for its actions in Aegean/East Mediterranean and asked U.S. not to supply Turkey with F-16 fighter jets; diplomatic tracks between

Greece and Turkey on hold since mid-May. Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 25 May visited Israel to meet his counterpart Yair Lapid; sides agreed to foster economic cooperation and carry on dialogue to normalise bilateral ties.

Central Asia

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** **Uzbek troops killed three people along Kyrgyz-Uzbek border.** Authorities 6 May said Uzbekistan's troops opened fire previous day in western Jalal-Abad region near Ferghana Valley, killing three; Uzbekistan's border service 6 May confirmed incident, said "border guards observed the smuggling of large quantities of goods" and were "forced to use weapons". Acting FM Vladimir Vorov same day spoke on phone with Kyrgyz FM Jeenbek Kulubayev and stressed need to "avoid negative consequences in the border area" and "expand Kyrgyz-Uzbek cooperation". Meanwhile, State Committee for National Security 4 May said authorities three days earlier detained 12 active members, including four leaders, of proscribed Hizb ut-Tahrir Islamic group in Kerben town in Jalal-Abad region.

↓ **Tajikistan** **Anti-govt protests in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) turned violent amid clashes with police and govt security operation, which left at least nine civilians killed.** Protests 14 May began in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), as local leaders in Khorog, regional capital of GBAO demanded resignation of region's governor Alisher Mirzonabot, probe into police killing of man that sparked unrest in Nov 2021, and end to alleged harassment and persecution by Tajik authorities. After govt refused demands, protesters 16 May announced start of demonstrations; clashes same day broke out in Khorog, leaving one protester dead and three police personnel wounded. Protesters next day marched toward Khorog's central square, where en route police dispersed crowds using tear gas; authorities same day cut off internet access in region. After protesters 17 May blocked highway between Rushan district and Khorog and clashed with police, interior ministry next day announced "anti-terrorist operation" in region, which it said killed eight people and wounded eleven, with 70 protesters detained. Interior ministry 31 May announced security forces "neutralised" five more men from Rushan district. EU, UK, French, U.S. and German embassies in capital Dushanbe 19 May called on all parties to "refrain from excessive use of force and incitement to violence". UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Affairs Fernand de Warenne 20 May criticised govt's "harsh response" as "disproportionate and deeply disturbing". Police said "internal clashes between criminal groups" 22 May killed informal leader of GBAO. NGO Human Rights Watch 26 May called on govt to "end abuses against protesters in the towns of Khorugh and Rushan". Meanwhile, Islamic State (ISIS) reportedly claimed it had fired rockets from Khawaja Ghar district of Afghanistan's Takhar province toward unspecified military targets in Tajikistan on 7 May; Tajik authorities, however, denied rocket attack and said gunfire had crossed border during battle between Taliban and ISIS fighters.

➔ **Uzbekistan** **Uzbek troops killed three people along Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, while senior official urged greater engagement with Taliban govt in Afghanistan.** Kyrgyzstan 6 May said Uzbekistan's troops opened fire previous day in western Jalal-Abad region near Ferghana Valley, injuring three alleged smugglers who later succumbed to wounds; Uzbekistan's border service 6 May

confirmed incident, said “border guards observed the smuggling of large quantities of goods” and were “forced to use weapons”. Acting FM Vladimir Vorov same day spoke on phone with Kyrgyz FM Jeenbek Kulubayev and stressed need to “avoid negative consequences in the border area” and “expand Kyrgyz-Uzbek cooperation”. In interview with U.S. broadcaster Voice of America published 4 May, Special Representative for Uzbek President on Afghanistan Ismatulla Irgashev called for greater engagement with Taliban, said new Afghan govt is “reality that must be accepted”, but insisted Uzbekistan will not formally recognise Taliban govt without international community. Meanwhile, U.S. ambassador to Uzbekistan spoke out against reports of police officers forcibly shaving young Muslim men, saying it violated individuals’ religious freedom. Ministry of defence 1 May denied report by Russia’s Sputnik news agency that it has violated Afghanistan’s airspace by flying drones over latter’s territory.