



## Europe and Central Asia

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### Balkans

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⬇️ ⚡️ **Kosovo** Fragile calm in north shattered as group of heavily armed Serbs clashed with Kosovo police, leaving one officer and three Serbs dead; coming weeks could see more violence.

*Heavily armed Serbs clashed with Kosovo police.* Kosovo Police officers 24 Sept arrived at Serb-majority Banjska village in northern Kosovo after receiving reports that two trucks without license plates had blocked bridge. Around 30 heavily armed Serbs ambushed patrol upon arrival, killing one police officer before forcing their way into nearby monastery; shootouts ensued as police mounted “clearance operation”, leaving three Kosovo Serbs dead. Minister of Internal Affairs Xhelal Svecla same day said police had “regained control” of area, made several arrests and seized large amounts of military-grade weaponry including mortars, grenade launchers and anti-tank rockets; weapons indicate Serbs in north are preparing for a fight, raising risk of further escalation in Oct.

*U.S. warned of Serbian military build-up along border amid rising tensions.* PM Kurti 24 Sept blamed “Serbian-state supported troops” for attacks; Serb President Aleksandar Vučić denied accusation and condemned killing of police officer, but added that gunmen were local Kosovo Serbs who “do not want to suffer under Kurti’s terror anymore”. Former VP of Serbian List – largest Serb political party in Kosovo – Milan Radoičić 29 Sept assumed responsibility for attack, claiming he acted alone without informing Belgrade. U.S. 26 Sept said attack “was coordinated and sophisticated” and that “the quantity of weapons suggests this was serious, with a plan to destabilise security in the region”. U.S. 29 Sept accused Serbia of military build-up along border while NATO allies authorised additional forces, warning of “increasing tensions”.

*EU-mediated Kosovo-Serbia dialogue failed to yield progress.* Ahead of escalation, EU High Representative Josep Borrell 14 Sept mediated talks in Brussels, Belgium’s capital, between PM Kurti and Serb President Aleksandar Vučić to advance normalisation process, afterward saying “it was not possible to bridge the differences”; he noted Vučić’s acceptance of EU’s compromise proposal but said “Kurti was not ready” to move forward on establishing Association/Community of Serb municipalities in north, key provision of 2013 and 2015 Brussels agreements. Kurti same day claimed his sequencing plan was “the only proposal on the table”.

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## Caucasus

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➔ **Armenia** **Azerbaijan amassed troops at border with Armenia ahead of its lightning offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), which triggered mass exodus into Armenia and anti-govt protests; EU held talks with envoys from Yerevan and Baku.**

*Armenia reported troop build-up along Azerbaijan border before NK offensive.* Azerbaijan 19 Sept launched military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, 20 Sept declaring victory after 24 hours of fighting that left hundreds dead (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Before offensive, Yerevan early Sept had begun reporting military build-up along Armenia-Azerbaijan border in south close to Iran, and between Azerbaijan's Kelbajar and Armenia's Gegharkunik region – deadliest front in periodic skirmishes since 2020 war; EU civilian monitoring mission along Armenian side of border 7 Sept echoed concerns. Yet despite rising tensions along border and Azerbaijan's offensive in NK, sides appeared at pains to avoid escalation, with PM Pashinyan 19 Sept saying Armenia would not be dragged into fight.

*Refugees poured into Armenia as anti-govt protests rocked capital.* After Baku's victory in NK, Yerevan 21 Sept announced plans to host up to 40,000 families from enclave amid humanitarian crisis and fears of ethnic cleansing. By 30 Sept, authorities reported over 100,000 arrivals, with more expected in coming weeks. U.S. and EU 26 Sept pledged millions to support displaced. Meanwhile, outrage over Armenia's inaction in NK spurred thousands into streets of capital, demanding Pashinyan's resignation. Police 25 Sept confirmed 142 people had been arrested, though opposition groups put number at around 300.

*EU held talks with envoys from Yerevan and Baku.* Envoys from Baku and Yerevan 26 Sept met with EU, German and French officials in Brussels to prepare for potential meeting between Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev early Oct; meeting followed televised address by Pashinyan 21 Sept, in which he justified talks with Baku "for the sake of independence". Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan 25 Sept met with Aliyev in Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan exclave for talks; Erdoğan later said Zangezur road, which would link Azerbaijan proper to Nakhchivan via Armenia, should be completed.

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*Govt arrested several individuals critical of offensive.* Authorities 19-21 detained at least five individuals for anti-war posts online and four others for political activism. One detainee, journalist Nurlan Gahramanly, 21 Sept claimed he had been subjected to violence while in detention.

**↓ Nagorno-Karabakh Azerbaijan launched military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, claiming victory after 24 hours and ending three decades of de-facto self-governance; mass exodus followed.**

*Azerbaijan’s 24-hour offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh ended de facto self-rule.* Baku 19 Sept launched “anti-terrorist” campaign in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), attacking territory with heavy bombardment and ground offensive. 24 hours later, Azerbaijani forces had advanced to outskirts of Stepanakert city, forcing de facto authorities 20 Sept to surrender in Russian-brokered ceasefire. Fighting reportedly left hundreds dead and many more wounded. Baku and Stepanakert held follow up talks and on 28 Sept, de facto leaders announced their self-declared govt would “cease to exist” by Jan 2024.

*Military offensive followed escalating tensions and intense diplomacy.* Initial signs early Sept raised fears of new war. Officials in Yerevan start of Sept reported military build-up in several areas along Armenia-Azerbaijan border (see Armenia, Azerbaijan), while de facto authorities in NK 5 Sept released video showing movement of Azerbaijani armoured vehicles near frontline; EU civilian monitoring mission 7 Sept echoed concerns about stepped-up tensions. Despite intensive EU and U.S. diplomacy to avert conflict, including agreement that led to humanitarian deliveries 18 Sept into NK, Azerbaijan launched offensive.

*Humanitarian crisis exploded.* Humanitarian crisis, already fraught due to Baku’s blockade of Lachin corridor connecting Armenia with NK, escalated. Stepanakert flooded with ethnic Armenians from villages seized by Azerbaijani forces amid scarce supplies of food, medicine and electricity. Azerbaijan 26 Sept announced measures to respond to needs but failed to appease locals, whose fears for their future under Baku’s rule mounted after its forces 26 Sept detained former de facto senior official Ruben Vardanyan as he tried to leave. Beginning 24 Sept, locals streamed out of enclave and as of 30 Sept, over 100,000 had crossed into Armenia; many more expected in coming weeks (see Armenia).

*Baku’s actions drew mixed responses from international community.* EU and U.S. condemned offensive; Turkish President Erdoğan 20 Sept expressed his support for Azerbaijan before 25 Sept meeting with Azerbaijani President Aliyev in Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan exclave; and Moscow refrained from criticising Baku, 25 Sept criticised Armenian PM Nikol Pashinyan’s “reckless approach” toward NK.

➡ **Georgia President Zourabichvili faced impeachment, and PM Garibashvili underscored commitment to EU integration during UN General Assembly address.**

*Ruling party moved to impeach president over Europe tour.* Ruling Georgian Dream party 1 Sept launched impeachment proceedings against President Zourabichvili, who days prior began touring EU countries to drum up support for Georgia's EU candidate status, for which decision will be announced in Oct. Ruling party chairman Irakli Kobakhidze accused Zourabichvili of violating constitution by visiting EU member states without govt approval and claimed trip "directly opposes the efforts of the Georgian government to receive the said [candidate] status". EU High Representative Josep Borrell 8 Sept said impeachment was "counterproductive polarisation" and urged Tbilisi to work on "depolarisation", "de-oligarchisation" and reforms.

*PM's speech at UN focused on breakaway regions and EU integration.* Speaking to UN General Assembly 22 Sept, PM Garibashvili emphasized Georgia's desire to reunite with breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and urged Russia to engage in Geneva International Discussions – multilateral forum to address security and humanitarian consequences of 2008 Russo-Georgian War; Garibashvili further underscored govt's commitment to EU integration. De facto foreign ministry of breakaway South Ossetia 24 Sept urged Georgia to "accept geopolitical realities" established in 2008.

➡ **Russia (Internal) Ruling party claimed sweeping victory in local elections held across Russia and in occupied Ukrainian territory, drone attacks continued, and North Korea's leader made surprise visit.**

*Ruling party won big in regional and municipal elections.* Russians 8-10 Sept cast their ballots for regional governors, regional legislatures, and city and municipal councils. President Putin's United Russia party won 15 out of 16 elections for regional legislative assemblies and every provincial governor's race aside from Republic of Khakassia, which re-elected Communist party governor Valentin Konovalov. Russia also held elections in four partially occupied regions of Ukraine, announcing ruling party victory and prompting outrage from Kyiv and its allies. Meanwhile, crackdown on dissent persisted; notably, Justice Ministry 1 Sept added Novaya Gazeta editor-in-chief and Nobel Prize winner Dmitry Muratov to its list of foreign agents.

*Ukraine's campaign of aerial strikes continued.* Ukrainian drone attack 7 Sept caused explosion near military headquarters in Rostov region's Rostov-on-Don city; Kursk region witnessed multiple drone attacks. Notably regional governor 16 Sept announced that strike on Plekhovo village killed one; drone 20 Sept hit oil depot in Sochi city's Adler district, 25km from Putin's Sochi residence; and drone attack 25 Sept destroyed several buildings. Meanwhile, reports 4 Sept surfaced claiming authorities had released General Surovikin, detained after Wagner mutiny in June; two days later, Commonwealth of Independent States reportedly appointed Surovikin head of air defence committee.

*President Putin held summit with North Korea's leader.* North Korean leader Kim Jong-un 12-18 Sept made surprise trip to Russia and 13 Sept met with Putin at Cosmodrome Vostochny space launch centre for talks. Sides did not provide details on concrete agreements, but Putin later confirmed readiness to assist North Korea

with its satellite program; in exchange, Russia is likely to receive ammunition for Ukraine war. Kim also visited Gagarin Aircraft Manufacturing Association, Sukhoi fighter jet production facility in Komsomolsk-on-Amur city and Pacific Fleet in Vladivostok city.

*Several EU countries banned entry of Russian-registered cars.* Poland 17 Sept joined Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland in banning entry of Russian-registered cars; Norway's Foreign Ministry 19 Sept announced plans to introduce similar restrictions.

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## **Eastern Europe**

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➔ **Belarus** **48 children removed from occupied Ukrainian territories arrived in Belarus, EU labelled Minsk “an accomplice” of Russian war crimes, and tensions with western neighbours remained elevated.**

*Dozens of children from occupied Ukrainian regions arrived in Belarus.* State news agency Belta 19 Sept reported arrival of 48 children from Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia (which Russia partly occupies and claims to have annexed) in Belarus. Head of charity organising removals said move sought to help “children from dilapidated cities and towns in the new territories of Russia”. Speaking on sidelines of UN General Assembly, Ukraine's first lady Olena Zelenska 20 Sept called on international partners to help ensure return of Ukrainian children forcibly taken by Russia.

*Russia and Belarus continued to deepen ties.* Russian President Vladimir Putin 15 Sept hosted President Lukashenko in Black Sea resort of Sochi, days after Putin held summit with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un; during talks, Lukashenko said Moscow and Pyongyang should consider “three-way cooperation” but did not elaborate. Talks follow European Parliament resolution 13 Sept condemning Minsk's role in Ukraine war and calling govt “an accomplice in the crimes committed by Russia”. Meanwhile, Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation 1-6 Sept held military exercises in Belarus, with troops from Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan participating.

*Tensions with Poland and Latvia persisted.* State Border Committee 1 Sept claimed Polish helicopter had violated Belarusian airspace, 28 Sept blamed Poland for another airspace violation; Warsaw denied allegations. Belarus 11 Sept accused Poland of using tear gas and physical force to push back migrants trying to cross border. Meanwhile, Latvia 19 Sept announced closure of one of two border crossing points with Belarus, citing “increasing number of illegal travellers”.

➔ **Ukraine** **Ukrainian forces stepped up attacks in Russian-annexed Crimea amid slow-paced counteroffensive, several vessels arrived in Odesa ports to export grain, and tensions with Poland sharpened.**

*Ukraine's southern counteroffensive made modest gains.* Counteroffensive continued at slow pace along southern front, which stretches across Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions. General Oleksandr Taranavsky 22 Sept announced his forces had broken through defensive lines near Verbove settlement (Zaporizhzhia) and said next goal is Tokmak city. Ukrainian forces 16, 18 Sept

recaptured Andriivka and Klishchiivka villages (Donetsk) near Bakhmut city after number of Russian forces redeployed south. Also near Bakhmut, missile 6 Sept struck market in Kostiantynivka town, killing 16; news outlet *The New York Times* 18 Sept suggested Ukrainian air defence missile malfunctioning may have caused strike. Ukraine escalated attacks on Russian-annexed Crimea having weakened Russia's air defence. Notably, cruise missile 13 Sept struck naval infrastructure in port city of Sevastopol; pair of cruise missiles 22 Sept struck Russian Black Sea Fleet headquarters. Meanwhile, senior official 27 Sept claimed remnants from Russian paramilitary Wagner Group had returned to frontline.

*Several ships reached Odesa ports to load grain.* Following Russia's withdrawal from Black Sea grain deal and subsequent attacks on ports and grain facilities, Ukraine mid Aug established temporary shipping corridor from Odesa ports to evacuate civilian ships stuck in Ukraine. Yet infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov 22 Sept announced arrival of two ships in Odesa ports using corridor to load grain bound for ports in Middle East and Africa. Meanwhile, Romania bolstered air defence systems along Danube amid heightened security concerns.

*Kyiv-Warsaw tensions rose over ban on agricultural imports.* After temporary EU ban on Ukrainian agricultural imports into Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria 15 Sept lapsed, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia same day announced unilateral restrictions to protect farmers from cheaper Ukrainian competition. Kyiv 18 Sept filed World Trade Organization lawsuit, claiming bans violate international trade rules. Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki 20 Sept said Poland would cease military aid to Ukraine.

*Govt signaled tougher stance on corruption.* Parliament 6 Sept appointed Rustem Umerov as defence minister following series of recent corruption scandals. Umerov 18 Sept fired seven top officials from Defence Ministry.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus Tensions diminished in buffer zone following violent skirmishes in Aug, while rhetoric from Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriot leadership signalled wide gulf between sides.**

After tensions in UN buffer zone subsided following violent skirmishes between Turkish Cypriots and UN personnel in Aug, parties during Sept traded criticism and rhetorical barbs over different visions to resolve Cyprus question. In fiery speech, "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") leader Ersin Tatar 13 Sept asserted that Cyprus is Turkish island and accused those supporting federative formula of aligning with "game" played against Turkish Cypriots. Addressing UN General Assembly, Republic of Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides 20 Sept said "just like in Ukraine, in Cyprus the UN Charter and international law continue to be violated" and asserted "there is not, and never will be, another basis for settlement of the Cyprus question to that dictated by the United Nations Security Council resolutions", requesting UN to appoint envoy to prepare for resumption of talks. In response, Tatar 21 Sept called remarks "shallow and insincere", saying that Greek Cypriot administration could not represent Turkish Cypriots. After rejecting calls for unification on 20 Sept, Tatar 23 Sept reiterated "TRNC" "will not compromise on the

principle of sovereignty” after meeting UN Sec Gen Antonio Guterres. Ankara and Turkish Cypriot leadership on various occasions during Sept pressed for recognition of de facto Turkish Cypriot administration in north.

➡ **Türkiye Military targeted Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in southeast, northern Syria and northern Iraq, while ties with Greece continued positive trajectory and govt engaged EU and Russia.**

*Military continued operations against PKK.* In rural Diyarbakir province, security forces 18 Sept reportedly killed four high-ranking PKK members. In Iraq, clashes 6 Sept killed Turkish soldier; authorities from Iraq’s Kurdistan region 17 Sept reported Turkish drone strikes killed four PKK members near Sinjar mountains (see Iraq). In northern Syria, drone strikes 17 Sept killed five Syrian Democratic Forces members in Hasakah and 19 Sept killed high-ranking People’s Protection Units (YPG) member in Manbij (see Syria). In first attack in Ankara since 2016, PKK militants 1 Oct conducted suicide bombing in front of interior ministry and opened fire on guards, injuring two; in retaliation, military launched airstrikes in northern Syria and northern Iraq and staged wave of raids across Turkish provinces (await next month’s edition for full coverage).

*Relations with Greece remained on course to improve.* Greek FM Giorgos Gerapetritis 5 Sept met Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan in Ankara, where pair agreed to seek “new approaches” to resolving issues in Aegean. Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis 17 Sept reiterated importance of dialogue for maritime delimitation, adding that issues of sovereignty will not be negotiated. Mitsotakis and President Erdoğan 20 Sept met on sidelines of UN General Assembly, agreeing to resume 2022 confidence building talks. Mitsotakis next day said geopolitical tensions remain but there has been “good progress” in normalisation.

*Govt continued engagement with EU and Russia.* EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi 5 Sept visited Ankara and announced several financial aid packages. Responding to European Parliament’s report on 14 Sept that criticised govt’s democracy record, Erdoğan 16 Sept said Türkiye could “part ways” with the EU if necessary but backtracked on 18 Sept, noting “window of opportunity” for revitalising ties. Meanwhile, talks with Russia to reinvigorate Black Sea Grain Deal continued but meeting between Erdoğan and Russian President Putin 4 Sept ended without breakthrough.

*Crackdown on Islamic State-linked individuals continued.* Security forces during Sept detained at least 125 individuals with alleged links to ISIS.

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## **Central Asia**

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➡ **Kyrgyzstan Tensions with Tajikistan increased over top Kyrgyz official’s border dispute comments; U.S. president met with Central Asian leaders amid growing engagement in region.**

*Tajikistan summoned Kyrgyz ambassador following remarks on border dispute.* One year on from deadly clashes along disputed part of Kyrgyz-Tajik border, National Security Committee head Kamchybek Tashiev 15 Sept urged Tajikistan to renounce its territorial claims to Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan’s foreign ministry 16 Sept

summoned Kyrgyz ambassador and 18 Sept warned that “such comments could seriously damage the ongoing negotiation process on delimitation and demarcation of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border”.

*Central Asian leaders pledged greater regional cooperation.* Tajikistan 14-15 Sept hosted leaders of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in capital Dushanbe, as well as Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev who attended as “honoured guest”. Leaders discussed ways to promote trade, tackle insecurity and better manage energy resources amid water shortages across region.

*U.S. president held summit with Central Asian leaders in New York.* U.S. President Joe Biden 19 September met with Central Asian leaders on sidelines of 78<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in New York amid stepped-up efforts to bolster ties in region. Biden hailed “historic” meeting and pledged greater cooperation in number of areas, including security, trade and investment, and regional connectivity. NGO Human Rights Watch day prior issued statement noting “renewed focus” on region following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and warning Biden not to “allow this to eclipse urgent human rights concerns”. Meanwhile, Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation 1-6 Sept held military exercises in Belarus, with troops from Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan participating.

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