



Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia and Herzegovina Republika Srpska (RS) announced participation in October poll under state-level Election Law; UN adopted resolution on Srebrenica.**

RS announced participation in local elections. Ruling coalition of self-governing entity RS 21 May confirmed participation in 6 Oct local elections supervised by Central Electoral Commission, meaning election will be held in accordance with state-level Electoral Law. Move de-escalated rising tensions between entity and High Representative Christian Schmidt over latter's 26 March amendments to state-level election law. Still, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik 21 May said decision to participate in poll "does not mean the recognition" of any of Schmidt's powers and promised RS would apply entity-level Election Law in 2026 general election, which RS National Assembly adopted in April but which is being reviewed by local authorities amid concerns about constitutionality.

UN approved resolution commemorating Srebrenica. UN General Assembly 23 May voted in favour of resolution declaring 11 July as "International Day of Reflection and Remembrance of the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide". Dodik same day announced RS govt would send proposal on "peaceful disassociation" to Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity within 30 days; U.S. embassy next day warned move "is dangerous, irresponsible, anti-Dayton, and puts the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and multi-ethnic character of BiH at risk".

➔ **Kosovo Pristina closed six Serb bank offices in north, while govt faced setback in its bid to join Council of Europe.**

Talks over currency issue stalled as Pristina closed branches of Serbian bank. EU 15 May announced that Kosovo and Serbia chief negotiators had failed to reach compromise on currency issue following Central Bank's 1 Feb decision to ban Serbian dinar, primary currency used among Kosovo Serbs. Days later, Kosovo Police 20 May closed six branches of Serbia-run bank in four northern municipalities, saying move sought "to establish order and legality". Serbia's Minister of Internal Affairs Ivica Dačić same day decried move as "terror against Serbian people" and warned such actions could lead to "new conflicts in the Balkans". EU 21 May said closures were "escalatory" and went "against the spirit of normalisation".

Kosovo faced setback in bid to join Council of Europe (CoE). CoE's executive body, Committee of Ministers, 16-17 May held meeting but did not make decision on

Kosovo's membership to human rights body; FM Gervalla-Schwarz 17 May criticised move and accused Serbia of "lobbying campaign against Kosovo's membership". Earlier, Italy, France and Germany 15 May sent letter to PM Kurti stating membership was conditional on govt taking steps toward creating Association of Serb-majority Municipalities — which would enable greater autonomy for Serb municipalities.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** **Peace talks with Azerbaijan continued, protests against border delimitation deal spread to capital, and relations with Russia remained strained.**

Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process saw more positive momentum. Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process gained momentum following border agreement in April, in which Yerevan agreed to return four villages to Baku, with leaders from both sides expressing optimism about signing peace deal by Nov climate conference (COP29) in Azerbaijan. Notably, PM Pashinyan 14 May said "the time has come" to sign deal; earlier, Azerbaijani President Aliyev 23 April said "it is absolutely realistic to reach an agreement... before COP29". Country's FMs 10-11 May held talks in Kazakh city Almaty. Countries' border delimitation commissions 15 May held their ninth meeting, signed protocol confirming demarcation of section of their northernmost border as per April agreement; Baku 24 May assumed control of four villages, with troops from both sides responsible for protecting their respective sections of newly demarcated border segment.

Protests against border deal led by Archbishop Galstanyan continued. Protests that erupted in Tavush region in response to border deal continued. Archbishop Galstanyan of Tavush Diocese emerged as prominent leader of movement, 4 May instigating march from Tavush to capital Yerevan. Church backed demonstrations, with Supreme Spiritual Council 7 May urging govt to heed protesters' demands. Upon reaching Yerevan, tens of thousands 9 May converged at Republic Square, where Galstanyan called for govt's resignation; protests continued in following days, leading to hundreds of arrests amid confrontations with police. Following brief lull, thousands 26 May attended demonstration in Yerevan where Galstanyan reiterated his intention to challenge Pashinyan and declared readiness to lead new interim government. Parliament speaker Alen Simonian 21 May condemned Church for meddling in politics, suggesting govt may take steps to limit its involvement.

Relations with Russia cooled further. Pashinyan and Russian President Putin 8 May agreed on withdrawal of Russian border guards from several regions in Armenia and Zvartnots International Airport; Foreign Ministry 7 May announced Armenia will cease financial contributions to Russia-led military alliance, Collective Security Treaty Organization; and Kremlin 24 May recalled its ambassador to Armenia for consultations, but gave no reason for move.

➔ **Azerbaijan** **Peace talks with Armenia continued, death of Iranian president raised concerns in Baku about impact on rapprochement, and relations with France deteriorated further.**

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Death of Iranian officials overshadowed Azerbaijan-Iran rapprochement. Helicopter carrying Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi 19 May crashed in Iran, killing Raisi and other Iranian officials who were returning from inauguration of Qiz Qalasi and Khoda Afarin dams at Iran-Azerbaijan border alongside Aliyev. Meeting between the two leaders had marked important step forward after Jan 2023 attack on Azerbaijani Embassy in Iran’s capital Tehran. Concern rose in Azerbaijan that Raisi’s death could jeopardise rapprochement; Aliyev 21 May visited Iranian embassy in capital Baku, offered condolences and expressed hope that agreements reached during meeting with Raisi would be honoured.

In important international developments. French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin 16 May accused Azerbaijan of aggravating unrest in New Caledonia, special overseas collectivity of France, which has seen weeks of protests by indigenous Kanak population (see New Caledonia); Baku same day denied allegation. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan 1 May signed memorandum of understanding in Uzbek capital Tashkent to link power grids for better-integrated energy systems.

↓ Georgia Georgia descended further into crisis over ‘foreign influence’ legislation as protests expanded and opponents faced violence and intimidation; foreign partners condemned law.

Legislature approved ‘foreign influence’ bill. Parliament 14 May approved controversial law on ‘Transparency of Foreign Influence’, which requires NGOs and media outlets that receive over one fifth of their funding from abroad to register as organisations representing foreign interests. President Zourabichvili 18 May vetoed law, which parliament 28 May voted to override, paving way for speaker to sign bill into law.

Unrest in streets deepened as activists faced violence. Mass protests, led primarily by young people, continued in capital Tbilisi and spread to other cities amid fears legislation will lead to crackdown on media freedom and civil liberties – vital issues ahead of Oct parliamentary election. Police responded harshly to demonstrators, while activists, opposition politicians and journalists faced beatings and intimidation from unidentified assailants, including physical assaults and threatening phone calls; activists claimed authorities orchestrated actions.

Efforts to reverse legislation extended beyond streets. On domestic front, President Zourabichvili 26 May proposed roadmap out of crisis, dubbed “Georgian Charter”, inviting fractious opposition parties to unite under one bloc to take on Georgian Dream in Oct elections; if successful at polls, provisional govt made up of opposition representatives would be established, tasked with enacting pro-EU reforms and scheduling early elections in 2025. Group of NGOs 30 May announced intention to contest legislation at Constitutional Court. On international front, U.S. Sec-State Antony Blinken 23 May announced visa restrictions on number of govt officials, while EU High Representative Josep Borrell 28 May warned law “will negatively impact Georgia’s EU path”.

Kobakhidze met Turkish leader in Ankara. PM Kobakhidze 16 May met with Türkiye’s President Erdoğan in Turkish capital Ankara, during which pair signed Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation.

➡ **Russia (Internal) President Putin questioned legitimacy of Ukraine’s leader following his own inauguration, Moscow held tactical nuclear weapons drills with Minsk, and West imposed more punitive measures.**

Putin reshuffled govt following inauguration. President Putin was inaugurated 7 May for fifth presidential term and began reshuffling govt. Notably, Kremlin 12 May announced First Deputy PM Andrei Belousov would replace Sergei Shoigu as Defence Minister. Belousov – an experienced economist and technocrat – is expected to control military spending and fight corruption.

Putin claimed Zelenskyy could no longer be considered Ukraine’s legitimate leader. Putin 24 May said “legitimacy of the current head of state (in Ukraine) has ended”, referencing expiration of President Zelenskyy’s term on 20 May, extended under martial law. Announcement is part of Russian campaign to delegitimise Zelenskyy as head of state with whom Kremlin will negotiate end to the war. Earlier, Ukraine’s state security service 7 May announced investigators had foiled Russian plot to assassinate Zelenskyy. Meanwhile, Ukraine escalated strikes on border regions in response to Russian offensive in Kharkiv region (see Ukraine); notably, residential building in Belgorod 12 May partially collapsed following missile attack, killing seventeen. Reports emerged late May that U.S President Biden had given Ukraine green light to use U.S. weapons on Russian soil to defend Kharkiv.

Moscow and Minsk conducted tactical nuclear weapon drills. While Russia conducts regular strategic nuclear weapons drills, Moscow 21 May launched tactical nuclear drills with Belarus close to Ukrainian border for first time since collapse of Soviet Union. Ministry of Defence 6 May said Putin ordered drills in response to “provocative statements and threats by certain western officials”, including those by French President Macron in Feb on sending troops to Ukraine. Meanwhile, U.S. Space Command 21 May reported Russia 16 May launched counterspace weapon capable of inspecting and attacking other satellites.

West imposed more punitive measures. U.S. imposed more sanctions, while EU countries 21 May adopted plan to use windfall profits from frozen Russian central bank assets for Ukraine; Putin 23 May signed decree allowing seizure of U.S. assets in Russia in response to any U.S. seizure of Russian assets. EU 27 May set up new sanctions framework targeting human rights violations in Russia.

Eastern Europe

➔ Belarus Moscow and Minsk conducted joint tactical nuclear drills, crackdown on dissent continued, and Poland pushed to fortify border.

Belarus conducted nuclear drills with Russia. Defence Ministry 7 May conducted surprise inspection of army's readiness to deploy tactical nuclear weapons. Checks came after Russian President Putin day prior announced joint tactical nuclear weapons drills with Belarus beginning 21 May; move, according to Russian Ministry of Defence, was in response to comments from Western officials about possible troop deployments to Ukraine (see Russia). Meanwhile, Russia 25 May transferred at least ten aircrafts to Belarus for "joint flight tactical exercise" held 27-31 May.

Crackdown on dissent continued. Notably, Investigative Committee of Belarus 16 May initiated criminal cases against 104 opposition activists in exile for attending 25 March 'Belarus Freedom Day', which commemorates country's 1918 proclamation of independence but which is banned by regime; as part of investigation, authorities same day announced raids and seizures of activists' property. EU High Representative Josep Borrell 20 May condemned Minsk's treatment of political prisoners, and warned regime is "increasingly targeting those who have fled the country".

Poland moved to fortify eastern border with Belarus and Russia. Poland's PM Donald Tusk 18 May announced Warsaw would invest \$2.5bn to strengthen security and deterrence along western border, said move sought to stave off rising threat from Belarus and Russia.

➔ Moldova Parliament voted to hold EU membership referendum alongside presidential elections in Oct, while govt deepened defence cooperation with EU.

Parliament 16 May voted to hold EU membership referendum on 20 Oct 2024, same day as presidential elections in which Maia Sandu is seeking re-election. Meanwhile, Chişinău 21 May signed security and defence partnership with EU, first country to sign such a pact with bloc, according to High Representative Josep Borrell. EU gave few details about agreement, but according to media outlet Financial Times, it will see Moldova step up intelligence sharing, conduct joint military drills and "be included in the bloc's joint weapons procurement". U.S. Sec-State Antony Blinken 29 May announced \$135mn in aid to Moldova to bolster energy security and combat Russian disinformation.

➔ Ukraine Moscow intensified attacks in north east, forcing Ukraine to reinforce troops amid likely easing of restrictions on use of western-supplied weapons inside Russia.

Russia stepped up attacks in north as fighting in east ground on. In north east, Russian forces 10 May launched ground assault into Kharkiv region, advancing 5-10km deep into Ukraine; attack marked Russia's largest territory grab in eighteen months and displaced over 14,000 people. President Zelenskyy 10 May announced redeployment of troops, which helped stall offensive; still, speed of Russian advance indicated defensive lines along northern frontier are at best porous and likely non-

existent in some areas, which could mean further Russian probes of weak spots, as with reported troop concentration near Sumy city, forcing Ukraine to keep troops redeployed from east stationed there. Russian President Putin 17 May claimed offensive's aim was to create "sanitary zone" to protect Belgorod region. In east, Ukrainian troops struggled to hold embattled Chasiv Yar in Donetsk region; fall of strategically important town would bring fight near urban hubs of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Meanwhile, military 2 May said Russian forces gained foothold in Ocheretyne town, moving frontline near Pokrovsk city, primary logistics hub in west Donetsk.

Russian airstrikes continued as Ukraine targeted Crimea. Russia continued striking energy infrastructure in bid to exploit Ukraine's degraded air defence before effects of \$61bn U.S. aid package set in. Kyiv launched drone and missile strikes in Russian-annexed Crimea; notably, missiles 15-17 May likely destroyed three fighter jets at Belbek airbase. Meanwhile, NATO Sec-Gen Jens Stoltenberg 24 May urged NATO allies to consider lifting restrictions on use of western-supplied weapons on "legitimate military targets on Russian territory". Reports emerged late May that U.S. President Biden had given Ukraine green light to use U.S. weapons on Russian soil to defend Kharkiv.

In important international developments. EU member states 8 May reached deal to use interest generated from frozen Russian Central Bank assets for Ukraine, while several European countries pledged additional military support. Over fifty of the 160 invited countries confirmed attendance at peace conference 15-16 June in Switzerland, including India; Biden will likely skip conference.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ Cyprus UN personal envoy carried on with diplomacy in bid to find common ground aimed at returning to formal talks.

UN Sec-Gen's Personal Envoy to Cyprus Maria Holguin Cuellar conducted third round of visits to stakeholder countries since Jan. After meetings in Turkish capital Ankara 6 May, Holguin said Turkish FM Hakan Fidan was "willing to listen with an open mind". Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar 8 May refused to hold trilateral meeting with Holguin and Republic of Cyprus President Christodoulides unless "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") is considered separate and sovereign entity. After briefly meeting Tatar 13 May, Holguin expressed her surprise at Tatar's refusal to entertain trilateral meetings and reiterated her wish to pursue formal talks until end of her mandate in July. Holguin 13 May met Greek FM Gerapetritis in Greek capital Athens who said Greece was exerting all its influence to bring about trilateral meeting on Cyprus. Tatar 15 May revealed he insisted on "direct flights, direct trade and direct contact" in addition to recognition of "TRNC's" equal sovereignty as preconditions for return to formal talks. Christodoulides 15 May said sole aim of his govt was return to talks.

➡ Türkiye Military continued strikes on Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in northern Iraq and northern Syria ahead of expected summer operation in Iraq, while President Erdoğan hosted Greek counterpart in capital Ankara.

Operations against PKK continued in northern Iraq and northern Syria. In northern Iraq, amid ongoing preparations for larger-scale operation in summer, military targeted PKK positions and militants in Hakurk, Gara and Qandil regions; PKK IED attack 22 May killed Turkish soldier in northern Iraq. Defence Minister Yaşar Güler 3 May said military had observed via drones that PKK militants were crossing into Iran after conducting attacks on Turkish forces. Güler 13 May said Bafel Talabani, head of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party in Sulaymaniyah, was “preparing his own end” due to alleged ties with PKK (see Iraq). In northern Syria, defence ministry 10 May claimed it “neutralised” seven “PKK/People’s Protection Units (YPG)” militants.

Authorities targeted alleged Islamic State (ISIS) members. Police during May detained at least 330 individuals, including one Iraqi national on Interpol’s notice list, suspected of ties to ISIS. Notably, police 14 May detained 44 individuals in Şanlıurfa province (south east) and 20 May detained twenty individuals in Izmir city (west).

Diplomatic engagement with Greece continued. Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis 13 May met President Erdoğan in capital Ankara to discuss bilateral issues, trade ties, progress on “positive agenda” and confidence-building measures; Erdoğan described meeting as “very productive, constructive and cordial” and that there were “no problems that cannot be resolved”, while Mitsotakis confirmed “bilateral relations were growing in a more positive context”. Sides continue to focus on improving ties in areas of trade and other fields of mutual interest.

Central Asia

➔ **Kyrgyzstan Mob attack in capital prompted hundreds of foreign students to leave Kyrgyzstan, concerns about free speech continued, and incident occurred at Kyrgyz-Tajik border.**

Mob attack in capital Bishkek triggered exodus of foreign students. Hundreds of Kyrgyz youths 17 May stormed hostel in Bishkek and attacked foreign students, including Pakistanis and Indians, following 12-13 May brawl in student dormitory between Kyrgyz youths and Pakistani nationals. Violence injured dozens, prompted hundreds of Pakistani students to leave Kyrgyzstan and triggered diplomatic tensions with Pakistan and India. Bishkek 22 May announced arrest of six Kyrgyz and four foreign citizens for suspected involvement in 12 May incident.

Watchdog condemned media censorship. Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders 3 May published its annual World Press Freedom Index, warning that media censorship has intensified “in a spectacular mimicry of Russian repressive method” in Kyrgyzstan, among other countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Meanwhile, Alamu district court 14 May sentenced journalist and govt critic Oljobai Shakir to five years in prison for inciting “mass unrest”.

Incident occurred at border with Tajikistan. State Committee for National Security 7 May said security forces fired warning shots at Tajik shepherds, who had crossed border into Batken region to graze their livestock and reportedly thrown stones at

military; Kyrgyz and Tajik border services next day issued statement saying sides had organised meeting in Batken to discuss ways to prevent further such incidents.

➡ **Tajikistan Incident occurred at Kyrgyz-Tajik border.**

Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security 7 May said security forces fired warning shots at Tajik shepherds, who had crossed border into its Batken region to graze their livestock and reportedly thrown stones at military; Kyrgyz and Tajik border services next day issued statement saying sides had organised meeting in Batken to discuss ways to prevent further such incidents. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy 24 May urged Central Asian leaders to attend peace summit in Switzerland in June (see Ukraine).

➡ **Uzbekistan Tashkent signed regional deal on energy systems with Baku and Astana; Russian President Putin visited Uzbekistan.**

Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan 1 May signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) in capital Tashkent to link their power grids; MoU aims to ensure integration of energy systems and efficient use of renewable energy sources. Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy 24 May urged Central Asian leaders to attend peace summit in Switzerland in June (see Ukraine). Two days later, Russian President Putin 26 May travelled to Uzbekistan for two-day visit; President Mirziyoyev 27 May announced Russia would build Central Asia's first nuclear power plant in Uzbekistan, one of several agreements signed during meeting between the two leaders.