

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Amid ongoing failure to form state-level govt, tensions grew over draft legislation in majority Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS) to establish its own reserve police force, and murder of prominent businessman and govt critic in entity. RS Parliament 18 April adopted Draft Law on Amendments to Law on Police and Internal Affairs which would establish new reserve police force; move came despite concerns from Bosniak-Croat Federation entity, which signalled possible response with similar step. Office of the High Representative, international overseer of implementation of 1995 peace agreement, criticised RS draft law and expressed concern over “negative spiral of mistrust” undermining stability, urging RS not to proceed with legislation. Amendments also ban photos of public servants including police performing their duties, prompting concerns from media and international partners. Three main political parties’ leaders continued efforts to form new state-level govt following Oct 2018 elections, reportedly agreeing on ministries, but disagreements continued over activation of NATO Membership Action Plan to help prepare for possible future membership of alliance, which party of Bosnian Serb member of presidency Milorad Dodik opposes. Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly 8 April announced it had suspended Bosnia due to its failure to appoint new delegation. Main political parties in RS 2 April signed declaration condemning 29 March constitutional court ruling that again banned annual RS “statehood day” celebrations. Prominent Bosnian Serb businessman and critic of ruling Bosnian Serb nationalist party Slaviša Krnić shot dead in his car near his home north of RS capital Banja Luka 22 April; bodyguard and suspected attacker also killed in subsequent shoot-out. Media watchdog NGO Reporters Without Borders’ 2019 World Press Freedom Index noted hostile environment for press freedom in Bosnia.

➔ **Kosovo** Tensions increased around early elections in Serb-majority municipalities in May, while attempt to relaunch stalled normalisation dialogue with Serbia failed. President Thaçi 8 April announced early local elections 19 May in four Serb-majority municipalities in north, where mayors resigned Nov 2018 in protest at govt’s introduction of 100% tariff on Serbian imports. Despite calling early polls a “provocation”, main Serb party Srpska Lista 10 April said it would participate in polls. Opposition Vetëvendosje party 23-24 April tried to block Central Election Commission (CEC)’s certification of Srpska Lista candidates, saying that three of them had resigned as mayors in Nov in breach of constitution, and were now running again in same municipalities. PM Haradinaj 9 April announced he had dismissed Kosovo Serb Minister of Local Govt Administration for using hate speech after he described ethnic Albanians as terrorists and accused them of fabricating crimes against them in 1998-99 war; govt 11 April moved to criminalise denial of crimes committed by Serbian forces during war. Western Balkans Summit in Berlin 29 April, aimed at relaunching stalled EU-facilitated Kosovo-Serbia normalisation dialogue, ended without agreement on restarting negotiations; next meeting planned for early July in Paris; President Thaçi called for U.S. to be included in dialogue. Media watchdog NGO Reporters Without Borders’ 2019 World Press Freedom Index noted improvement in media freedom in country. Court ordered arrest of four out of

110 citizens (including 32 women and 74 children) returning from Syria 19 April suspected of involvement in terrorism, and placed ten women under house arrest.

➡ **North Macedonia** First round of presidential election 21 April saw virtual tie between two leading candidates, pro-Western Stevo Pendarovski who is backed by ruling Social Democrats, and conservative Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, backed by opposition VMRO-DPMNE party; second round scheduled for 5 May. Greek PM Tsipras visited Skopje 2 April, first official visit by a Greek leader to capital since North Macedonia's 1991 independence, for talks on improving trade and defence ties. Media watchdog NGO Reporters Without Borders' 2019 World Press Freedom Index noted improvement in media freedom in country.

Caucasus

➡ **Armenia** In ongoing govt efforts to reform state structures and reduce budget, National Assembly 18 April approved amendments reducing number of ministries from seventeen to twelve and deputy PMs from three to two. National Security Service 18 April brought corruption charges against senior official and leading figure in April 2018 "Velvet Revolution" Davit Sanasaryan, who strongly denied any wrongdoing; PM Pashinyan expressed support for investigation, calling it proof that no one in his govt was immune to prosecution. Portuguese parliament and Italy's Lower House both passed resolutions during month recognising Armenian genocide in Ottoman Empire at start of twentieth century.

➡ **Azerbaijan** EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini 4 April expressed hope that EU and Azerbaijan would conclude new framework agreement soon, intensifying debate among Azerbaijani opposition groups and observers on content of new agreement, which reportedly does not explicitly mention Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan, but will state support for territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Civil society groups mainly expressed concerns about human rights and role of civil society; Azerbaijan govt promised to EU authorities it will release all political prisoners aside from religious activists and members of Muslim Unity Movement.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Meeting between Azerbaijani and Armenian FMs in Moscow 15 April resulted in agreement on further measures to de-escalate tensions, mitigating negative environment created by aggressive rhetoric by both sides' military leaderships that followed late March commitments between Azerbaijani and Armenian leaders. At Moscow talks, Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs agreed to encourage people-to-people contacts including visits by journalists, and further stabilisation of situation in conflict zone, in particular during agricultural activities including through contact with military leaders. Azerbaijani foreign ministry stated support for mutual visits by journalists, despite opposition among Azerbaijani journalists and opposition groups, particularly hardline Karabakh Liberation Committee, which declared it will prepare list of Azerbaijanis who wish to visit Armenia.

➡ **Georgia** Breakaway republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia criticised late-March NATO drills in Georgia. Moscow deployed squadron of attack and transport helicopters to Abkhazia 22 April to take part in joint drills with Abkhaz forces,

reportedly along with some 3,000 servicemen and over 400 pieces of hardware, including tanks, self-propelled artillery and Russian Black Sea Fleet ships.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Concerns continued to grow over tensions within Ingushetia and with its neighbouring republic Chechnya over controversial Sept 2018 border delineation deal between the two republics. After late March mass protests in Ingushetia against border deal, during which reports emerged of clashes with police and some police refusing to stop protests, security forces reportedly searched homes of five Ingush activists, members of NGO Ingush Congress of National Unity, 3 April, and detained two activists. Several activists also fined or jailed early April over March rallies; eight reportedly sent to Kabardino-Balkaria regional capital Nalchik for pre-trial detention; arrests continued throughout month. Protesters planned more demonstrations, but authorities denied permits. Chechnya and Dagestan 16 April announced they had suspended ongoing negotiations over border delineation in light of unrest in Ingushetia. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) 23 April detained five suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS) in Dagestan and Chechen capitals, alleged to have been planning terrorist attacks including one involving a drone, and seized arms, ammunition and bomb components. National Antiterrorism Committee 3 April reported that police had shot dead two suspected militants in Kabardino-Balkaria who refused order to stop their car and opened fire on police. Russian Security Council head Nikolai Patrushev 19 April reported that in 2018 security services had killed 64 alleged militants and detained and convicted 285 in North Caucasus, and disrupted 37 terrorist cells. U.S. imposed travel ban on Chechen PM Muslim Khuchiyev, citing “credible information” that he “was involved in torture”; Moscow said decision reflected “further deteriorating” bilateral relations and said it would “not be left unanswered”.

Eastern Europe

➡ **Belarus** Tensions emerged again with Russia after Moscow announced ban on imports of apples and pears from Belarus; President Lukashenka subsequently suggested govt may need to start repairs on pipeline that delivers Russian oil to Europe, which would suspend its use. Amid ongoing concerns over restrictions on independent media, police 9 April raided office of independent television company Belsat TV, reportedly as part of investigations into libel case.

➡ **Ukraine** Comedian Volodymyr Zelensky’s decisive victory in presidential run-off election prompted speculation over implications for conflict with Russia and prospects for reintegration of Donbas conflict zone in east, while Russia’s announcement of simplified passport procedures for residents of separatist-controlled areas, and parliament’s passing of Ukrainian language law, signalled immediate challenges facing president-elect. Zelensky won 73% of vote in 21 April presidential election run-off, following campaign characterised by absence of information on his policies beyond desire to resolve Donbas conflict but continue to move country toward West; and allegations by incumbent President Poroshenko that Zelensky is Russia appeaser and tool of oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskiy. Immediately ramping up pressure on president-elect, Moscow 24 April announced it would simplify Russian citizenship applications for residents of non govt-controlled areas, prompting condemnation from Kyiv and international partners including U.S.,

Canada and EU member states. Poroshenko called move preparation “to annex Ukrainian Donbas or create a Russian enclave” and said he had appealed to UN Security Council to discuss issue; Security and Defence Council Secretary Oleksandr Turchynov said Russia was preparing “legal conditions” to openly use force against Ukraine with pretext of protecting Russian citizens. Parliament 25 April passed controversial law on quotas for use of Ukrainian language in news, media and print publications, and stating that “attempts to establish multilingualism on an official level” will be considered unconstitutional. Move seen partially as response to election of Russian-speaker Zelensky, who previously voiced opposition to promoting Ukrainian using “the stick method”; Zelensky promised to “review” law. Violence continued in conflict zone; casualties in period 1-29 April included: ten Ukrainian Army soldiers, some twenty separatist fighters, and one civilian. Several civilians reported wounded by shelling and explosives; one state demining worker killed and two injured near Maiorsk 9 April. Amid continued concern over govt’s flagging battle against corruption, Poroshenko 11 April appointed 38 judges to newly-established High Anti-Corruption Court, including eight whom independent experts assessed as unqualified.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➡ **Cyprus** UN Sec-Gen Guterres continued to push for new round of reunification talks, including in his 16 April report to UN Security Council. UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute 8 April met with Greek Cypriot President and Turkish Cypriot leader; Turkish Cypriot side and Ankara remain sceptical of “federal solution” and call for “new formats”. Following significant late-Feb hydrocarbon discoveries in Republic of Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), Turkish Cypriot leadership 21 April announced new seismic exploration within parts of EEZ, conducted by Turkish company.

➡ **Northern Ireland (UK)** Dissident republicans shot dead journalist during rioting in Londonderry, increasing concerns over escalation of dissident violence amid tensions surrounding UK’s departure from EU and implications for border, and longstanding deadlock over Northern Ireland power-sharing govt. Following police raids searching for weapons and ammunition, dissident republicans 18 April rioted in republican neighbourhood of Creggan, Londonderry, throwing over 50 petrol bombs at police and setting two vehicles on fire; gunman shot at police, killing journalist and LGBT activist Lyra McKee who was observing riots. Police next day blamed “New IRA” group for murder and said they were treating it as terrorist incident. Leaders of six biggest Northern Irish political parties 19 April issued joint statement rejecting murder and attack on “peace and democratic processes”. “New IRA” 22 April admitted it was responsible for murder.

➡ **Turkey** Security forces continued operations against the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in south east Turkey and northern Iraq, while contested results for Istanbul in 31 March local elections led to increased domestic tensions, and relations with U.S. remained strained over purchase of Russian air defence systems. In south east, operations against PKK continued: four Turkish soldiers were killed in PKK attack on military base in Hakkâri 19 April. Turkish military responded with ground operations in south east and air raids into northern Iraq targeting PKK. Tensions

followed 31 March local elections as ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) contested opposition Republican People's Party (CHP)'s narrow victory in Istanbul, alleging election irregularities. High Election Board (YSK) partial recount resulted in narrowed margin of victory for CHP; AKP and MHP also demanded re-run of Istanbul vote. In majority-Kurdish south east, AKP increased its overall vote share especially in rural areas, while pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) largely maintained or increased its votes in urban areas. YSK 10 April refused to grant mandates to HDP mayors-elect in six district municipalities in Erzurum, Van and Diyarbakır, and two town municipalities in Kars and Siirt, allowing AKP runners-up to assume mandates. In Ankara, mob 21 April attacked CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu during the funeral of a Turkish soldier; police briefly detained nine people, including an AKP member who was seen punching Kılıçdaroğlu. Meeting with Russian President Putin in Moscow 8 April, President Erdoğan announced imminent delivery of Russian S-400 air defence systems, also discussing situation in northern Syria's Idlib province and Russia-Turkey Investment Fund. This followed U.S.'s 2 April pledge to suspend transfer of F-35 fighter jets to Turkey, amid U.S. warnings that S-400s are not compatible NATO systems.

Central Asia

➡ **Kazakhstan** Interim President Tokayev 9 April announced early presidential elections to be held 9 June (instead of April 2020), said he would "guarantee a free and fair election". Nur Otan party 23 April nominated Tokayev as party's presidential candidate; country's only registered opposition party, Nationwide Social Democratic Party, 26 April announced it will boycott polls in protest at participation of "puppet" candidates from pro-govt parties. Police arrested activists calling for fair elections during Almaty marathon 21 April; two of them jailed for fifteen days for protesting without permit. Tokayev met with Russian President Putin in Moscow 3 April, discussed cooperation including on new nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Amid ongoing tensions between President Jeenbekov and his predecessor former President Atambayev, parliament 4 April approved bill preserving former presidents' immunity from prosecution, but also stating that former presidents can be stripped of ex-president status and prosecuted if suspected of "especially serious crimes". Following March incident around disputed segment of border with Tajikistan, State Border Service reported that Tajik man had forcibly taken eight-year-old Kyrgyz boy into Tajik territory 22 April, inflaming tensions in area.

➡ **Tajikistan** President Rahmon and Russian President Putin 17 April agreed to continue security cooperation and joint efforts to "fight against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and the illegal trade in weapons". Tensions around disputed area of border with Kyrgyzstan inflamed with further incident 22 April (see Kyrgyzstan).

➡ **Turkmenistan** Russian state-owned energy company Gazprom 15 April said it had resumed imports of natural gas from Turkmenistan following three-year gap.