

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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➔ **Kosovo Parliament failed to adopt non-binding resolution calling for implementation of U.S.-brokered 2020 deal with Serbia.** Opposition Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) 6 Aug introduced resolution to parliament calling on govt to implement Sept 2020 Washington-backed deal with Serbia; deal concerns economic issues and notably requires Serbia to pause efforts aimed at de-recognition of Kosovo; 57 ruling Vetëvendosje party members – out of 83 MPs present – abstained from vote.

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## **Caucasus**

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➔ **Armenia Deadly clashes with Azerbaijan continued on international border, while Russian border guards deployed in north-eastern region.** Clashes on international border persisted throughout month, which – combined with late July hostilities – constituted deadliest period since 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. Fighting in Aug reportedly killed two Armenian soldiers and left one Azerbaijani and one Armenian wounded. Nearly all incidents occurred in two locations along border, namely between Azerbaijan's Kelbajar and Armenia's Gekharkunik provinces and at crossing of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan enclave, Armenia's Ararat district and Turkey. Meanwhile, defence ministry 5 Aug announced Russian border guards had deployed to Voskepar village in north-eastern Tavush region bordering Azerbaijan; Russian troops formed new military post near road connecting Armenia with Georgia, and Armenian media outlets reported plans for similar Russian posts in more than ten other locations along Armenian-Azerbaijani border, indicating Moscow's willingness to establish presence in hotspots of ongoing tensions. PM Pashinyan 18 Aug announced formation of new unit of border guards in next five years to replace regular military units at border. Pashinyan 19 Aug appointed former Parliament Speaker Ararat Mirzoyan as FM, filling post left vacant since late May. Parliament 27 Aug adopted new govt programme for next five years, expressing Yerevan's readiness to normalise relations with Turkey.

➔ **Azerbaijan Deadly clashes with Armenia continued on international border.** Clashes on international border persisted throughout month, which – combined with late July hostilities – constituted deadliest period since 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. Fighting in Aug reportedly killed two Armenian soldiers and left one Azerbaijani and one Armenian wounded. Nearly all incidents occurred in two locations along border, namely between Azerbaijan's Kelbajar and Armenia's Gekharkunik provinces and at crossing of Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan enclave, Armenia's Ararat district and Turkey. Meanwhile, after sentencing 13 Armenian soldiers to six years imprisonment in late July, Baku military court 2 Aug sentenced two Armenians detained in Oct 2020 during Nagorno-Karabakh war to 20 years' imprisonment; according to Armenia's longstanding position, all detainees are prisoners of war, who should be released.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh Hostilities intensified in conflict zone, while Russian-mediated talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan on regional transportation links resumed.** Exchanges of fire between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces increased in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), mainly near Shusha town controlled by Azerbaijani forces. Notably, Azerbaijani troops 11 Aug launched unprecedented combat drone attack against positions of local “Nagorno-Karabakhi military troops” since Autumn 2020 war, which prompted Russian peacekeepers to record ceasefire violation for first time in their daily public reports. Russian peacekeepers 20 Aug started regular patrols in three areas in NK, including two along south of front line close to Shusha. De facto NK defence ministry 28 Aug reported one of its soldiers wounded in clashes with Azerbaijani soldiers near Tagavard village. Deadly clashes also continued along state border (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). On diplomatic front, negotiations stalled. Armenian PM Pashinyan 12 Aug called for talks under Minsk Group mediation, while Azerbaijan throughout month insisted that NK conflict had been resolved, implying Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe Minsk Group’s mediation mandate is over, said it prefers bilateral talks with Yerevan, Russian-only mediation or 3+3 format including Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Russia and Iran. Azerbaijani media and experts during month criticised Russian peacekeepers for allegedly favouring Armenian troops in NK; Azerbaijani President Aliyev 14 Aug criticised Russia for not doing enough to implement ceasefire agreement. Despite dim prospect for peace negotiations, trilateral working group on NK comprising Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia 17 Aug resumed talks in Russian capital Moscow on regional transportation routes; talks were launched with Russian mediation in Jan 2021 and had remained deadlocked since May. Aliyev seeks corridor connecting Azerbaijan with Turkey, while Armenia desires cargo transit through Azerbaijani territory to Russia. Turkish President Erdogan 29 Aug expressed readiness for talks on regional transportation and economic cooperation with Armenia if Yerevan joins Ankara’s proposed 3+3 format uniting Russia, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (see Armenia).

➡ **Georgia Breakaway territory Abkhazia received Russian support amid new wave of COVID-19 cases, and breakaway South Ossetia signed dual citizenship law with Moscow.** In Abkhazia, de facto govt 12 Aug announced ban on mass gatherings as daily COVID-19 cases rose during month, notably reaching 162 on 17 Aug; de facto authorities 27 Aug confirmed total of 372 deaths and 24,952 cases to date among total population of approximately 200,000 people. In show of support, Russian defence ministry 17 Aug constructed field hospital with 100 beds in de facto territory, and following de facto President Aslan Bzhania’s late July visit to Russian capital Moscow, Abkhazia received delivery of some 5,000 Russian-made coronavirus vaccines purchased with diaspora-raised funds. In breakaway territory South Ossetia, Russian President Putin 4 Aug signed new law on dual citizenship with de facto leadership, facilitating access to Russian citizenship for young people in breakaway region; Georgia 5 Aug condemned law as “a continuation of policy of unlawful occupation and de-facto annexation”.

➡ **Russia (internal) Ahead of Sept elections, authorities criticised regional body OSCE’s decision not to send electoral monitors, and continued to take steps restricting space for opposition.** Ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for 17-19 Sept, Organization for Security and Co-

operation in Europe (OSCE) 4 Aug announced that it will not send election observers for first time since 1993, citing COVID-19-related restrictions on number of observers imposed by Russian authorities. FM Sergei Lavrov 9 Aug accused West of preparing group to challenge election results and using international organisations to complicate elections, while Head of Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights Valery Fadayev 18 Aug accused OSCE of portraying elections as “unfair” and “illegitimate”. Ruling United Russia party 24 Aug held congress, attended by President Putin. Authorities continued to restrict space for opposition. Notably, court 3 Aug sentenced opposition leader Alexei Navalny’s associate to one-and-a-half years’ restrictive freedom for violating health regulations during unsanctioned protest in Jan; authorities 6, 16, 20 and 25 Aug indicted and sentenced six other Navalny associates on similar charges. Investigative Committee 11 Aug also brought new charges against Navalny, accusing him of founding non-profit organisation Anti-Corruption Foundation with aim of “popularising and spreading his convictions”; reports surfaced during month that police in capital Moscow visited citizens associated with his organisation. Marking one-year anniversary of Navalny’s poisoning, UK and U.S. 20 Aug announced sanctions on seven individuals “directly responsible for planning or carrying out the attack”. Human rights centre Memorial 18 Aug reported number of political prisoners had increased from 349 to 410 since early 2021. Meanwhile, security forces in Russian-annexed Crimea 18 Aug detained two leaders and three members of international jihadist organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islam.

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## Eastern Europe

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➔ **Belarus** Amid new Western sanctions to mark first anniversary of disputed presidential election, govt continued crackdown on dissent and allegedly lent support to border crossings of illegal migrants. Authorities continued to target opposition, independent media and civil society. Notably, Prosecutor-General’s Office 3 Aug ordered closure of four NGOs, bringing total number of civil society organisations shut since mid-July to over 60. Authorities 6 Aug sentenced opposition leader Mikalay Kazlou to three months’ imprisonment for disclosing confidential information; police 11 Aug detained over 20 members of opposition Skhod initiative, next day detained presidential candidate of 2020 election Andrey Dzmitryyev; police 26 Aug reportedly arrested youth opposition leader Dzyanis Urbanovich and two associates. International NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 12 Aug also called on govt to immediately release journalist sentenced on 2 Aug to 18 months imprisonment for allegedly insulting President Lukashenka and two police officers; court 13 Aug designated prominent news outlet Tut.by and its associated website as “extremist”; police 18 Aug detained staff and searched offices of news agency BelaPAN in capital Minsk. Marking first anniversary of disputed election in which Lukashenka claimed victory, U.S., UK and Canada 9 Aug unveiled additional financial sanctions, including against businesspeople, state-owned companies and Belarusian National Olympic Committee. Foreign ministry 11 Aug requested U.S. reduce its embassy staff to five people by 1 Sept and revoked consent to appoint ambassador. Amid surge in illegal crossings of asylum seekers and migrants that transited from Iraq to Lithuania, Poland and Latvia via Belarus, EU 10 Aug welcomed Iraq’s decision to suspend flights to capital Minsk. Lithuanian

President Nausėda 13 Aug deployed armed forces to border, while U.S. Deputy Sec State Wendy Sherman same day called on Lukashenka to “immediately halt a campaign of orchestrating irregular migrant flows across its borders”. German Chancellor Angela Merkel 17 Aug accused govt of using crossings as “hybrid way to undermine security”, while EU interior ministers 18 Aug held emergency meeting, accusing Belarus of conducting “direct attack aimed at destabilizing and pressurizing the EU”.

➔ **Ukraine** **Low-level clashes continued in Donbas conflict zone and President Zelenskyy hosted international conference to draw attention to Russian-annexed Crimea.** Deadly violence in Donbas conflict zone continued, leaving nine govt soldiers killed during month, including from anti-tank rocket attacks on 7, 10 Aug and sniper fire on 16, 19 Aug, according to Ukrainian military press corps. Ukrainian researchers reported combat 1 Aug killed at least one Russian-backed fighter, and Russian-backed armed groups claimed over ten fighters killed throughout month. Unknown assailants 11 Aug killed one civilian by live fire, and 5, 9 Aug injured at least two others, according to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. On diplomatic front, German Chancellor Merkel 22 Aug visited President Zelenskyy in capital Kyiv, pledging support should Russia abuse its growing energy dominance or further undercut Ukraine’s sovereignty, but gave no public indication of what actions Germany might take. Kyiv 23 Aug launched Crimea Platform conference, aimed at drawing international attention to Russian annexation, with presence of 42 foreign envoys; Russian FM Sergey Lavrov 25 Aug called initiative “a futile, Russophobic display”. Trilateral Contact Group on Donbas peace process 26 Aug met following hiatus of nearly one month. Security and Defense Council 20 Aug voted to impose sanctions against judges, civil servants and security personnel in Russian-occupied Crimea, as well as persons associated with media outlets deemed harmful to country’s national security, resulting in blocking of anti-govt news site Strana.ua. U.S. State Dept 20 Aug announced new sanctions connected to Nord Stream II pipeline against one Russian vessel and its Russian insurers; move does not affect Washington’s May 2021 decision to waive sanctions on company leading pipeline’s construction and its head.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus** **Tensions persisted on island over passport dispute, while international partners criticised Turkish Cypriot plan to reopen section of Varosha/Maraş.** Republic of Cyprus 23 Aug announced it would cancel or refuse to renew passports of handful of Turkish Cypriot officials of “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (“TRNC”), notably “TRNC” leader Ersin Tatar, citing their actions that “undermine the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and security of the Republic of Cyprus”; Tatar called move “an assault on the efforts to find a settlement”. Criticism continued of Turkish Cypriot’s Ankara-backed initiative in July to reopen section of Varosha/Maraş, area under Turkish military since 1974. After EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell late July said EU will consider taking punitive measures, president of EU Parliament 1 Aug urged Ankara to stop “unacceptable violations” in Varosha. In letter to Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades, Russian President Putin 2 Aug called violations of UN Security Council resolutions “unacceptable” and expressed support for finding solution to Cyprus

issue within “framework of international law”. Tatar 2 Aug reiterated that “Varosha is within the borders of the TRNC”. Meanwhile, reports mid-month surfaced that UK, in particular, had intensified efforts to forge dialogue for relaunch of formal negotiations, seeking to take advantage of presence of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders at UN General Assembly scheduled for late Sept. Tatar 9 Aug underscored desire for two-state solution, saying “it is time for the world to recognise the reality that we have two different states, [and] any effort to push us into a mixed marriage is doomed to fail”.

➡ **Eastern Mediterranean Maritime and diplomatic tensions continued between Greece and Turkey.** In letter to EU Commission VP Margaritis Schinas, Greek Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi 3 Aug accused Turkey of endangering migrants, claimed Turkish Coast Guard escorted inflatable raft carrying migrants off Lesbos island and abandoned them when waves capsized raft. Turkish defence ministry 8 Aug published video allegedly showing Greek Coast Guard offloading vessel full of migrants on Turkish islet Başak, near Kastellorizo island; Ankara 11 Aug issued advisory for firing exercises east of Rhodes island 18-19 Aug; Athens 13 Aug issued advisory for aeronautical exercises held in same area 21 Aug. Turkish naval authorities 11 Aug announced vessel would conduct scientific research in uncontested waters in Aegean Sea 12 Aug-1 Sept. On diplomatic front, despite mutual support to address late July-early Aug unprecedented wildfires in both countries, ties continued to face strains. Notably, Turkey 1 Aug issued diplomatic note to Greek embassy in Ankara, claiming plain-clothed individuals killed Turkish citizen in cross-border fire on border area of Evros/Meriç; Greece same day rejected allegations and reminded Ankara of its obligation not to “allow the activity of traffickers”. Turkish authorities at Istanbul airport 13 Aug detained and deported President of Pan-Pontian Federation of Greece George Varythymiadis; Greek embassy in Ankara issued emergency démarche.

➡ **Turkey Authorities continued to target pro-Kurdish opposition, and to launch operations abroad against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK); concerns grew over potential new wave of Afghan refugees.** Govt continued efforts to delegitimise pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). Police 1 Aug detained 11 people on propaganda-related charges who participated in HDP demonstration in Istanbul; security forces 14 Aug detained five individuals in Muş province, including HDP provincial co-chair, on terrorism charges, and 20 Aug detained 19 individuals, including HDP officials, in Istanbul. Lawsuit to ban HDP continued; HDP lawyers 16 Aug requested additional time from Constitutional Court to prepare for defence. Meanwhile, PKK 12 Aug conducted mortar attack on Turkish military base in northern Iraq, killing one Turkish soldier. Reported Turkish drone and airstrikes 16-17 Aug around Iraq’s Sinjar district targeting PKK-linked Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS) and medical clinic killed at least ten people, including civilians and senior YBS member Said Hassan (see Iraq). Turkish airstrikes targeting Peoples Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria continued (see Syria). Security forces also continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS) across country, with police detaining some 70 individuals for their alleged ISIS links. Notably, police 14, 19 Aug detained 20 ISIS suspects, majority of them foreign nationals, during raids in Istanbul. Following Taliban’s seizure of Afghan capital Kabul (see Afghanistan), Ankara expressed concern over potential new mass influx of refugees; 22 Aug beefed up security at border with Iran and accelerated border

wall construction. President Erdogan 16 Aug acknowledged risk of new refugee wave, said govt would work with Pakistan to bring stability, and 19 Aug said Turkey had no intention of becoming “Europe’s migrant storage unit”. Meanwhile, intercommunal tensions increased between Syrians and locals in Ankara’s Altındağ district when group of Turkish citizens 12 Aug attacked shops and homes belonging to Syrians after fight between Turkish and Syrian youths left one Turkish citizen dead.

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## Central Asia

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➔ **Kyrgyzstan Border tensions continued with Tajikistan.** Border force 23 Aug announced officials held talks with Tajik counterparts in Batken region to resolve new flare-up; talks held following incident previous day in which unknown individuals attacked Kyrgyz cars when reports emerged that Tajik authorities had begun construction work at disputed Golovnoi water facility, scene of deadly escalation in April; construction reportedly halted after talks. President Japarov 30 Aug said border talks with Tajikistan have “intensified” and urged both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to “continue negotiations based on principle of mutual respect”. Presidents of five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – 6 Aug met in Turkmenbashi city, Turkmenistan, to discuss range of issues, including regional cooperation and “earliest possible settlement of the situation in neighboring Afghanistan”. Meanwhile, international NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 10 Aug urged Japarov to reject bill approved late July by parliament, which introduces new state powers for monitoring and overseeing online content, said legislation “threatens to seriously undermine the country’s fragile press freedoms”; Japarov 24 Aug however signed bill into law. Japarov 27 Aug also signed into law series of electoral changes approved in April 2020 referendum, including reducing number of lawmakers. State Committee for National Security 14 Aug detained Islamic State recruiter.

➔ **Tajikistan Following Taliban’s takeover of major Afghan cities, country faced influx of Afghan military aircraft and forces; meanwhile, border tensions with Kyrgyzstan persisted.** Presidents of five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – 6 Aug met in Turkmenbashi city, Turkmenistan, to discuss range of issues, including regional cooperation and “earliest possible settlement of the situation in neighboring Afghanistan”. Kyrgyz, Russian and Tajik armed forces 10 Aug concluded joint military exercises close to Afghan border, held amid “threat of penetration of radical terrorist groups into the border countries of the Central Asian region”. Following Taliban’s seizure of major Afghan cities including capital Kabul (see Afghanistan), reports mid-month surfaced that dozens of Afghan military aircraft and hundreds of soldiers crossed borders into Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; following talks with Pakistan FM Shah Mahmood Qureshi, President Rahmon 25 Aug called for “inclusive [Afghan] government with the participation of all ethnic minorities, especially the Tajiks of Afghanistan”. Meanwhile, Kyrgyz border force 23 Aug announced officials held talks with Tajik counterparts in Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region to discuss new flare-up; talks held following incident in which unknown individuals attacked Kyrgyz cars when reports surfaced that Tajik authorities had begun construction work at disputed Golovnoi water facility, scene of deadly escalation in

April; construction reportedly halted after talks. Delegation to Tajik-Uzbek border demarcation commission 24-29 Aug held talks with Uzbek counterparts. Ahead of 30-year anniversary of country's independence on 9 Sept, President Rahmon 30 Aug proposed amnesty for some 16,000 people, including prisoners and those suspected or accused of crimes.

➔ **Uzbekistan Amid concerns over regional security, country faced influx of Afghan military aircraft and forces following Taliban's takeover of major Afghan cities.** Presidents of five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – 6 Aug met in Turkmenbashi city, Turkmenistan, to discuss range of issues, including regional cooperation and “earliest possible settlement of the situation in neighboring Afghanistan”. Presidential envoy to Afghanistan Ismatulla Irgashev 11 Aug met senior Taliban leadership in Qatar alongside senior Russian and Turkmen officials to discuss bilateral relations, border issues, economic projects, as well as security situation. Following Taliban's seizure of major Afghan cities including capital Kabul (see Afghanistan), reports mid-month surfaced that dozens of Afghan military aircraft and hundreds of soldiers crossed borders into Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; notably, Uzbek defence ministry 16 Aug said air defence downed Afghan aircraft that had crossed into Uzbek airspace, later said collision with Uzbek fighter jet caused crash. Delegation to Tajik-Uzbek border demarcation commission 24-29 Aug held talks with Tajik counterparts. Meanwhile, ruling Liberal Democratic Party 7 Aug announced it will nominate President Mirziyoev as candidate for presidential election scheduled for 24 Oct.