

# Europe and Central Asia

---

## **Balkans**

---

### **➔ Bosnia July saw progress towards organising local election in Mostar and meeting priorities for EU membership application.**

Following June signing of landmark deal on new statute to govern Mostar city, House of Representatives 7 July adopted amendments to Election Law agreement allowing local elections to proceed in Nov; EU delegation 8 July welcomed move. COVID-19 cases significantly increased in Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entities throughout July with over 300 new cases per day and total of 10,766 cases as of 29 July; 3,000 frontline medical workers 8 July went on strike in Sarajevo demanding pay supplement for overtime; govt 16 July decided to open borders unilaterally to EU citizens. Parliament 22 July agreed on rules of procedure for EU-Bosnia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, ending five-year standstill and fulfilling one of 14 priorities for EU membership application.

### **➔ Kosovo EU-led Kosovo-Serbia dialogue resumed after two-year hiatus, and legal proceedings against President Thaçi over allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity continued.**

Following June cancellation of U.S.-sponsored talks in Washington, EU-led Kosovo-Serbia dialogue 10 July resumed at Franco-German-hosted virtual summit, in first official round of dialogue between two entities since Nov 2018; Serbian President Vucic and PM Hoti held video meetings with French President Macron, German Chancellor Merkel and EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell with Hoti saying dialogue should lead to "mutual recognition" with Serbia as "only way to normalize relations and open the way for both countries in the EU integration process" and talks should be guided by principle of "non-negotiable" nature of Kosovo's territorial integrity. EU-facilitated dialogue between both sides on normalisation of relations 12 July took place with Borrell and EU Special Representative for Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčak; parties agreed on main elements of dialogue process, while Borrell welcomed both parties' commitment to talks. Hoti and Vucic 16 July met face-to-face in Brussels with Borrell and Lajčak to discuss economic issues and missing and displaced persons, reaching agreement on next steps in subsequent round of EU-led dialogue held 23 July. Following end June indictment of Thaçi by Special Prosecutor of The Hague Special Chambers on alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity relating to 1998-1999 conflict in Kosovo, Special Prosecutor 13 July questioned President for four days in The Hague; Thaçi 16 July stated to press that if prosecutor and judge evaluate testimonies professionally "they can easily conclude that I have not committed any war crimes." Throughout July govt saw spike in new COVID-19 cases, causing PM Hoti 12 July to tighten measures such as ban on religious events and public gatherings, as well as making mask wearing mandatory. Govt 30 July signed agreement with EU Commission for €100mn in macro-financial assistance.

➔ **Montenegro** **Dispute between govt and Serbian Orthodox Church continued while voter registration irregularities surfaced ahead of 30 Aug parliamentary elections.** Govt and Church leaders 21 July failed to agree on changes to controversial Dec 2019 Freedom of Confession Act; Church accused govt of engaging in dialogue for “political marketing” purposes; critics of the law have argued that it facilitates govt register of all religious sites in attempt to reduce role of Serbian Orthodox Church and allow govt to claim religious sites as state property. Crime and Corruption Reporting Network and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network mid-July reported more than 50,000 “phantom voters” will be eligible to vote in 30 Aug parliamentary elections; in some municipalities, number of registered voters reportedly exceeds actual population. Meanwhile, National Coordination Body for Infectious Diseases 5 July blamed rise in COVID-19 cases (2,065 active cases as of 29 July) on members of pro-Serb opposition Democratic Front (DF) party, alleging that members imported cases from Serbia; DF accused coordination body of supporting ruling Democratic Party of Socialists.

➔ **North Macedonia** **Country held parliamentary elections in mid-July.** Following 15 July parliamentary elections, ruling party Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) led by former PM Zoran Zaev emerged as strongest party with 46 seats but failed to win majority; opposition VMRO-DPMNE followed closely with 44 seats, while Albanian Democratic Union for Integration won 15 seats; opposition parties collectively submitted over 177 individual complaints to Administrative Court on alleged electoral violations. Following 2019 decision to reject opening of accession talks, EU Commission 1 July presented to EU Council draft negotiating framework for North Macedonia, laying out guidelines and principles for accession talks. Democratic Union for Integration leader Ali Ahmeti 22 July confirmed he had accepted request for questioning from Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor’s Office on wartime and post-war crimes by Kosovo Liberation Army, of which he was a member.

---

## **Caucasus**

---

➔ **Armenia** **Deadly violence erupted along north-eastern part of border with Azerbaijan, fuelling tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis living abroad.** Following relative calm at frontline since Sept 2018 agreement that launched direct communication channel between Armenia and Azerbaijan, violence 12-16 July flared up at densely populated frontline between Movses in Armenia and Agdam in Azerbaijan during which both sides used heavy weaponry in severest escalation since April 2016; as of 21 July, Armenia reported four military casualties and one civilian wounded; cause of escalation remained unclear and both sides traded accusations of initiating first attack. After border escalation, tensions rose between Armenian and Azerbaijani migrants and members of diaspora living abroad: in Russia, home to one of largest Armenian and Azerbaijani diaspora populations, Moscow authorities 18 July arrested more than 25 individuals suspected of attacking several pedestrians and drivers; clashes 21 July also broke out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Los Angeles, U.S. (see Nagorno-Karabakh conflict).

➡ **Azerbaijan**      **Death of popular general during clashes at border with Armenia stirred one of largest demonstrations in years.** Following relative calm at frontline since Sept 2018 agreement that launched direct communication channel between Armenia and Azerbaijan, violence 12-16 July flared up at densely populated frontline between Movses in Armenia and Agdam in Azerbaijan during which both sides used heavy weaponry in severest escalation since April 2016; as of 21 July, Azerbaijan reported twelve military fatalities, including well-regarded senior military official Major General Polad Hashimov, and one civilian killed; cause of escalation remained unclear and both sides traded accusations of initiating first attack (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Following death of Hashimov, highest-ranking official killed on battlefield since 1994 ceasefire that ended war over Nagorno-Karabakh breakaway region, tens of thousands of protesters 15 July took to streets in capital Baku, demanding that authorities go to war to return Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; police arrested dozens after small number of protestors stormed parliament. President Aliyev next day dismissed FM Elmar Mammadyarov, key emissary in peace talks with Armenia for sixteen years, replacing him with former Minister of Education Jeyhun Bayramov; dismissal followed recent corruption investigations into foreign ministry and perception of Mammadyarov's "passive" approach to address recent border clashes. Azerbaijan's military same day said that its new missile system has range to reach Soviet-era nuclear power plant near Yerevan, prompting outrage in Armenia; high-ranking Azerbaijani official then clarified "Azerbaijan has no policy of targeting critical strategic facilities". After border escalation, tensions rose between Armenian and Azerbaijani migrants and members of diasporas abroad: in Russia, home to one of largest Armenian and Azerbaijani diaspora populations, Moscow authorities 18 July arrested more than 30 individuals suspected of attacking several pedestrians and drivers; clashes 21 July broke out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Los Angeles, U.S.. Amid COVID-19 concerns, govt 18 July extended nationwide quarantine until 31 Aug, with stricter measures in place in Baku and other cities until 5 Aug.

↓ 🌟\* **Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**      **In major escalation, deadly clashes erupted along state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, killing at least 18, raising risk of further hostilities in August.** Following relative calm at frontline since Sept 2018 agreement that launched direct communication channel between Armenia and Azerbaijan, violence 12-16 July flared up at densely populated frontline between Movses in Armenia and Agdam in Azerbaijan during which both sides used heavy weaponry in severest escalation since April 2016; as of 21 July, Azerbaijan reported twelve military fatalities, including a well-regarded general, and one civilian killed, while Armenia reported four military casualties and one civilian wounded; cause of escalation remained unclear and both sides traded accusations of initiating first attack. Azerbaijan authorities 15 July reported detention of Armenian citizen after crossing into Azerbaijan's southern exclave of Nakhchivan. Armenia 27 July also reported sniper fire killed one Armenian soldier along border. In absence of international mediation and with both sides on high alert, risk of further clashes in Aug remains high. Following mid-July deadly escalation, external actors called for deescalation: Kremlin 15 July called on both sides "to exercise restraint and honour their obligations as part of a ceasefire"; UN Sec-Gen Antonio Guterres 14 and 22 July urged both countries to exercise maximum restraint in clashes at frontline; EU

foreign policy chief Josep Borrell 14 and 22 July called for both sides to defuse tensions. After escalation, tensions also rose between Armenian and Azerbaijani migrants and members of diaspora abroad: in Russia, home to one of largest Armenian and Azerbaijani diaspora populations, Moscow authorities 18 July arrested more than 25 individuals suspected of attacking several pedestrians and drivers; clashes 21 July broke out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Los Angeles, U.S..

➡ **Georgia** **Talks between Georgia, Russia and de facto South Ossetian officials resumed following incident at line of separation in South Ossetian conflict zone, while de facto authorities in Abkhazia initiated steps to address COVID-19 fallout.** In Abkhazia, after de facto govt 14 July declared region free of COVID-19, de facto officials early July travelled to Russia to discuss reopening of border to Russian tourists in attempt to address increasing financial pressure and budget shortfall; however, 25 new coronavirus cases confirmed during month. For second time since border closure in Feb due to coronavirus outbreak, de facto Abkhaz govt 13-17 July allowed over 2,000 residents to return to Abkhazia from Georgia-controlled territory, including ethnic Abkhaz and Georgians. Govt 11 July reported Russian border guards inflicted bullet-injury on Georgian citizen at line of separation in South Ossetian conflict zone; U.S. 17 July condemned incident during Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Permanent Council session. Representatives from Georgia and Russia and de facto officials from South Ossetia 30 July held first meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (forum to discuss situation on line of separation) since Aug 2019 to discuss “issues pertaining to stabilisation and normalisation on the ground” and impact of closed boundary crossings; parties agreed to plan subsequent meeting scheduled for Sept. U.S. House Appropriations Committee 9 July approved bill to provide \$132mn aid to Georgia, but for first time made aid conditional on govt implementation of new electoral reform, support for independence of judiciary, free media access to information and govt measures to limit “informal rule of oligarchs”.

➡ **Russia/North Caucasus** **Constitutional referendum paved way for President Putin to run for additional terms, arrest of local governor in Far East sparked mass protests, and U.S. imposed sanctions on Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.** Central Election Commission 1 July confirmed 77.9% of voters supported constitutional changes to reset presidential two-term limit, allowing President Putin to run for two or more six-year terms after current one ends in 2024; Putin 3 July said vote results showed “high level of unity in society on key questions that are of national significance”; opposition member Alexei Navalny same day said his supporters would “never recognise this result”. Hundreds of protestors 16 July gathered in capital Moscow to collect signatures to contest constitutional changes in court; police arrested and detained over 140 demonstrators. In Far East, authorities 9 July arrested Sergei Furgal, local governor of Khabarovsk region and member of nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, for alleged involvement in murders of several businessmen in 2005-06; Moscow court 10 July ruled in favour of his detention for two months pending trial. Governor’s detention 11 July sparked mass protests throughout month including rallies in Khabarovsk of at least 10,000 people who believed arrest was politically motivated. In North Caucasus, Kadyrov 1 July expressed support for

Putin to seek additional presidential terms. U.S. State Department 20 July imposed sanctions on Kadyrov, prohibiting him from travel to U.S. for “numerous gross violations of human rights dating back more than a decade, including torture and extrajudicial killings.”; Kadyrov 24 July responded by announcing sanctions against Pompeo.

---

## **Eastern Europe**

---

➔ **Belarus**      **Mass demonstrations continued in lead-up to Aug presidential elections, leading to sporadic clashes with police and large-scale arrests.** Amid President Lukashenko’s bid for sixth term in office, which triggered major demonstrations in June, Central Election Commission (CEC) 14 July confirmed registration of five presidential candidates for 9 Aug elections, including Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya - wife of video blogger and former presidential candidate Syarhey Tsikhanouski who was incarcerated in May for taking part in unsanctioned rally; CEC also barred nine other candidates from running, including main opposition candidates Viktor Babariko and former Ambassador to U.S. Valery Tsepkalo; Tsepkalo’s campaign said Tsepkalo would challenge ruling in court. Several hundred protesters 14 July gathered in capital Minsk to protest CEC’s barring of Babariko and Tsepkalo, while social media reported protests in Brest and Gomel cities; in Minsk, violent clashes same day erupted between police and demonstrators, with police reporting arrest and detention of over 250 protestors; NGO Amnesty International 15 July condemned police’s “excessive and unnecessary use of force.” Around 2,500 Babariko supporters next day protested against decision to reject candidacy outside CEC building in Minsk. Representatives of Babariko and Tsepkalo 17 July united behind registered candidate Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya to “defeat” the “long-time dictatorial regime”; united opposition parties 19 and 24 July held three mass rallies of about 5,000 people in Minsk, Dzyarzhynsk and Vitebsk, urging voters to cast ballots for Tsikhanouskaya. Tens of thousands 30 July rallied in Minsk in support of Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya in reportedly largest campaign rally to date. Tsepkalo campaign officials 24 July confirmed Tsepkalo had fled to Russia. Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe 15 July said it had not received invitation to monitor Aug election while Commonwealth of Independent States 20 July confirmed it would deploy monitoring mission. Security Council Secretary Andrey Ravkov 29 July confirmed arrest of 33 suspected Russian mercenaries on allegations that they entered country to “destabilise the situation during the election campaign”.

➔ **Ukraine**      **Amid ongoing deadly clashes at frontline in East, parties to Minsk accords late July agreed to re-commit to ceasefire.** Parties 23 July reached ceasefire agreement on situation in Eastern Ukraine, which President Zelenskyy described as “breakthrough”; agreement establishes mechanism to address reported violations, bans heavy weaponry in civilian areas, and contains unusually explicit prohibitions on offensive and reconnaissance activity; sides pledged also to open civilian crossings at Zolote and Shchastya by 1 Nov. Amid Zelenskyy’s support for agreement, pro-military activists called provisions unconstitutional; Russian envoy to Minsk negotiations Boris Gryzlov voiced “satisfaction” that Kyiv had agreed to measures “after nearly five months of

resistance”. Accord follows 3 July meeting between political advisors to Normandy Four leaders in Berlin, and comment by deputy head of Russian presidential administration Dmitry Kozak 4 July who said sides were close to adopting new ceasefire measures. Zelenskyy 30 July appointed Leonid Kravchuk, Ukraine’s first president, chief envoy to Minsk negotiations, replacing second president Leonid Kuchma; Kravchuk called for “compromise” on implementing accord’s political provisions and suggested creating special economic zone in Donbas. Meanwhile, fighting at contact line continued throughout month, killing at least seven govt servicemen; Russia-backed forces also lost 10-14 personnel, according to Ukrainian casualty tracker; shelling killed two civilians in govt-controlled Zhovanka and in separatist-controlled Pervomaisk, and injured eight in separatist-held areas. Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Special Monitoring Mission Chief Monitor Yaşar Halit Çevik 11 July said that mission observed five-fold increase of military hardware near contact line between 4 April and 20 June. Over 3,000 people 6 July had water cut off after shelling destroyed pipelines on outskirts of Horlivka city in Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR). DPR de facto authorities reported total of 1,751 COVID-19 cases as of 31 July, and Luhansk People’s Republic registered 612 cases same day. DPR 6 July announced re-opening of quasi-border crossing at Olenivka. Kyiv 30 July asked Belarusian govt to extradite members of private Wagner military battalion arrested 29 July in Minsk, citing group’s suspected involvement in war crimes in Donbas.

---

## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

---

➔ **Cyprus**      **Tensions continued in Eastern Mediterranean.** Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 7 July accused Turkey of being “an agitator that’s seeking to dominate the entire eastern Mediterranean”. Turkey 15 July issued advisory for drilling activities until 20 Aug in maritime areas claimed by Republic of Cyprus and Greece; Greek FM same day called on EU to impose “crippling sanctions” in response to Turkish efforts to drill in Greek-claimed waters; Athens 21 July lodged diplomatic protest with Ankara. Prospect of Turkish naval escort for Turkish drilling ship *Oruç Reis* 22 July prompted Greece to prepare naval operations in same area and 26 July issue its own advisory for military operations; Turkish presidential office 28 July said President Erdogan requested pause in drilling operations pending talks with Greece. U.S. 8 July announced inclusion of Republic of Cyprus in its International Military Education and Training program for 2020-2021; Cypriot defence minister welcomed move while Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı 9 July said these sorts of initiatives “negatively affect the continuing efforts between the two sides of the island to achieve stability in the region”. On 20 July, 46th anniversary of Turkish military intervention in Cyprus, President Erdoğan said “a fair, permanent solution on Cyprus is only possible with the acceptance of equal status for Turkish Cypriots.” UN Security Council 28 July unanimously voted to extend UN peacekeeping force until Jan 2021.

➔ **Turkey**      **Military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) continued in northern Iraq and south-eastern Turkey, while govt intensified efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish political opposition; tensions with Greece persisted.** In northern Iraq, Turkey expanded military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) while Iraqi President Salih 16

July called for international stance against Turkey's violations of Iraqi territorial sovereignty (see Iraq). In Turkey's south east, security forces continued operations against PKK; PKK reportedly launched attacks 17 July in Hakkari-Şemdinli, 20 July in Hakkari-Çukurca and 26 July in Nusaybin city, Mardin province. 20 July marked 5th anniversary of ceasefire breakdown between PKK and Turkey; since then conflict has claimed at least 5,000 fatalities in Turkey and northern Iraq. In northern Syria, low-intensity clashes continued between Turkish security forces and People's Protection Units (YPG) (see Syria). Govt intensified steps toward criminalising members of Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP): over 100 pro-Kurdish HDP members were detained during month; out of 65 municipalities HDP won in March 2019 elections, 51 now run by state-appointed "trustees". Govt continued crackdown on Islamic State (ISIS) in Turkey: security personnel reportedly detained over 90 individuals with suspected ISIS links throughout month. Tensions persisted with Greece over maritime boundaries: following late June phone call between Turkish and Greek leaders, Turkish FM 14 July said "we can solve these issues through dialogue". However, Turkish drilling activity continued, prompting Athens 21 July to lodge diplomatic protest with Ankara (see Cyprus); Greek military recorded near-daily airspace violations by Turkish aircrafts during first three weeks of July. In meeting with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell in Ankara, Turkish FM 6 July said Turkey will not hesitate to reciprocate new European measures against it for Eastern Mediterranean drilling; Borrell said EU-Turkey relations are not "passing through the best moment". Following Turkish-backed forces advance in Libya, Turkish delegation 3 July met Libyan PM Fayeaz al-Sarraj in Tripoli and visited military training sites; Ankara 5 July announced that al Jufra airbase and Sirte were Turkey's next targets (see Libya).

---

## **Central Asia**

---

➔ **Kazakhstan**      **Govt reimposed lockdown as number of reported COVID-19 cases continued to rise sharply.** Following 11 May lifting of nationwide state of emergency, President Tokayev 1 July announced return to COVID-19 lockdown until 19 July; PM Mamin 14 July further extended lockdown until 2 Aug and Tokayev 29 July again extended it for two weeks. While former President Nazarbayev's spokesman 2 July announced Nazarbayev's recovery from coronavirus, two govt officials mid-July reportedly died from disease, including deputy defence minister. Chinese embassy 9 July warned of "unknown pneumonia" outbreak in Kazakhstan that was supposedly deadlier than COVID-19; Health Ministry next day rejected claims. Amid rising number of pneumonia cases widely attributed to spread of coronavirus, health minister 17 July announced govt will start including pneumonia cases in official coronavirus figure in Aug; NGO Human Rights Watch 21 July welcomed move and said policy change was "vital to stemming the spread of the disease". After Tokayev 10 July threatened to dismiss govt if coronavirus situation does not improve within two weeks, health minister 21 July announced situation had started to stabilise, citing 60% increase in number of recoveries.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan**      **Amid spike in COVID-19 cases following mid-May lifting of lockdown, President Jeenbekov scheduled elections for late 2020.** President Jeenbekov 3 July announced parliamentary elections to be held 4

Oct. PM Boronov 6 July said govt would not return to lockdown despite surge in COVID-19 cases, citing high economic costs. Amid rising number of pneumonia cases, Vice PM Ismailova 17 July announced govt will start including pneumonia cases in official coronavirus figure; NGO Human Rights Watch 21 July welcomed decision, said policy change was “vital to stemming the spread of the disease”. Ethnic Uzbek rights defender Azimjon Askarov 25 July died in prison hospital in capital Bishkek; officials claimed Askarov had died from pneumonia; UN 28 July called for investigation into Askarov’s death.

➡ **Tajikistan** **Authorities accused of limiting space for govt critics and monitors, while court sentenced seven Tajik citizens for Nov 2019 Islamic State deadly attack.** Court in capital Dushanbe 14 July sentenced seven Tajik citizens to prison terms of up to 27 years for deadly Nov 2019 Islamic State attack on Tajik border post south west of Dushanbe that killed two security personnel and fifteen militants. After authorities 25 June detained without charge Asroriddin Rozikov, son of imprisoned senior member of banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, NGO Human Rights Watch 9 July condemned “arbitrary” detention as “part of intensified efforts by Tajik authorities to spread fear among perceived govt critics and peaceful dissidents everywhere”. Austrian Supreme Court early July retrospectively invalidated extradition of Tajik activist Hizbullo Shoalizoda in March; Shoalizoda, now in Tajikistan, was 10 June sentenced to 20 years in prison on extremism charges. Govt mid-July rejected mandate extension of two leading Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe officials; UN special rapporteur for freedom of speech 10 July condemned govt’s decision as effort “to shield themselves from well-deserved criticism and monitoring”. Govt 29 July said it will provide one-time financial allowance (\$40) for 488,000 people with social and financial needs to help alleviate impact of COVID-19.

➡ **Turkmenistan** **Govt took series of unprecedented public health measures amid mounting COVID-19 concerns.** After World Health Organization (WHO) mission 6 July arrived in capital Ashgabat for ten-day visit to assess public health situation and help govt prevent COVID-19 outbreak, leader of WHO mission 15 July expressed concerns about reports of pneumonia and urged govt to act “as if coronavirus was circulating”. While govt continued to claim it had not registered any coronavirus cases, it also announced unprecedented public health measures: authorities early July imposed country-wide restrictions until 1 Aug, including closure of restaurants and malls; health ministry 12 July strongly recommended wearing of face masks, citing dust particles in air, and advised public to practice social distancing. Turkish embassy official night of 7-8 July reportedly died of heart failure in hospital in Ashgabat where he was treated for pneumonia. Amid ongoing reports of economic crisis, President Berdymukhammedov 3 July replaced minister of finance and economy in cabinet reshuffle.

➡ **Uzbekistan** **Amid economic strain, govt reimposed lockdown to contain COVID-19 outbreak.** In response to spike in COVID-19 cases following 15 June lifting of lockdown, govt 10 July rolled out three-week lockdown and 26 July extended it until 15 Aug. President Mirziyoyev mid-July reprimanded senior officials over mismanagement of public health crisis: 15 July expressed dissatisfaction with officials in Tashkent region and city where authorities

registered majority of lethal coronavirus cases; next day criticised health minister Alisher Shodmonov. Group of medical personnel in open letter 20 July criticised Mirziyoyev for “failure” to ensure adequate pay and protective equipment in hospitals. Mirziyoyev 27 July met Tashkent officials to discuss fight against coronavirus; promised more support from govt while urging officials to improve working conditions for medical personnel. Meanwhile, UN report 6 July reported 18% decrease in exports in first quarter and found 1.3% of population had sunk into poverty as result of coronavirus outbreak.