

# Europe and Central Asia

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## Balkans

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➔ **Kosovo EU- and U.S.-led Kosovo-Serbia dialogue resumed in Brussels.** EU Special Representative Miroslav Lajčák and U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary and Special Representative for Western Balkans Matthew Palmer 1 June concluded two-day visit to Kosovo; envoys met with PM Kurti, President Osmani and opposition representatives. In press conference, Palmer stressed that “it is up to the sides to agree on parameters” of dialogue. During joint visit to Serbia, EU and U.S. envoys 3 June met with President Vučić and PM Ana Brnabić; Brnabić declared that dialogue with Kosovo was priority and Vučić same day commented he believed in “compromise solution”. Belgrade-Pristina dialogue 15 June resumed in Belgium’s capital Brussels. After meeting, Vučić accused Kurti of “complete lack of responsibility” because Kurti allegedly demanded recognition of Kosovo and refused to discuss 2013 deal to establish Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo; Kurti defined meeting as “constructive”, while noting Vučić refused his new proposals on issues related to free trade, peace treaty, and mutual recognition and reciprocity. In letter to Kurti publicised 28 June, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: “We want to see Kosovo advance more quickly on its European path” and urged next dialogue meeting with Serbia to take place “as soon as possible”.

➔ **Montenegro Parliament passed resolution prohibiting Srebrenica genocide denial and dismissed justice minister, creating rift within ruling coalition.** Parliament 17 June passed resolution condemning June 1995 Srebrenica genocide and banning its denial; same day dismissed Minister of Justice Vladimir Leposavić for doubting International Criminal Tribunal’s classification of Srebrenica events as genocide. Ruling coalition faced internal strains as largest coalition partner pro-Serbian Democratic Front 17 June announced boycott of parliament, accusing govt of cooperating with opposition Democratic Party of Socialists during vote. Governing coalition member Democratic Montenegro party backed current govt and PM, rejecting call for new parliamentary elections. Serbian President Vučić mid-June responded to developments, saying: “We expected them from all those who would like to weaken Serbia, but we did not expect it from those who were always closest to us”. Meanwhile, Council of Europe report 3 June warned of increasing ethnic divisions and hate speech in Montenegro.

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## Caucasus

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➔ **Armenia Acting PM Pashinyan won snap parliamentary elections, while diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving weeks-long military standoff on border with Azerbaijan continued.** Acting PM Nikol Pashinyan’s Civil Contract party 20 June took on main rivals Armenia Alliance bloc, led by former President Robert Kocharyan, in snap parliamentary elections dominated by bellicose rhetoric and political polarisation; Civil Contract party emerged victorious with 53.91% of votes (amounting to 71 seats) while Armenia Alliance won 21.09% (29 seats). Armenia Alliance bloc 22 June suggested they would soon submit to

Constitutional Court report that proves existence of electoral violations; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) election observers 21 June noted that elections were “competitive and generally well-managed”. Following escalation of border tensions since mid-May with Azerbaijan, diplomatic efforts continued in attempt to resolve border standoff. Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives 2 June met in Moscow to discuss de-escalation. Pashinyan 15 June proposed that all troops withdraw from frontier to end military standoff and start talks on demarcation of border under supervision of international observers; OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs offered to facilitate negotiations. Series of border incidents further fuelled tensions with Baku. Azerbaijan 2 June reported that about 40 Armenian soldiers 1 June crossed into Azerbaijan’s Kelbajar district; Armenia denied report as “disinformation”. Mine blast in Kelbajar district on Armenian border 4 June killed three Azerbaijani civilians; Azerbaijan 8 June detained and later released Armenian soldier in Lachin district, as alleged member of “reconnaissance-sabotage group”, which Armenian defence ministry denied; Azerbaijan reported shelling in Kelbajar district; Armenia 10 June reported that Azerbaijani Armed Forces tried to carry out engineering work in border area of Armenian Gegharkunik region. Azerbaijan and Armenia 26-27 accused each other of ceasefire violations in several sections of frontier but no casualties were reported.

➡ **Azerbaijan Diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving weeks-long military standoff on border with Armenia continued, while govt bolstered ties with Turkey.** Following significant escalation in border tensions with Armenia in May, Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani representatives 2 June met in Moscow to discuss de-escalation. Armenian acting PM Pashinyan 15 June proposed that all troops withdraw from frontier to end military standoff and start talks on demarcation of border; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairs offered to facilitate negotiations. Series of border incidents further fuelled tensions with Yerevan. Govt 2 June reported that group of about 40 Armenian soldiers 1 June crossed into Kelbajar district; Armenia denied reports as “disinformation.” Mine blast in Kelbajar district on Armenian border 4 June killed three Azerbaijani civilians; govt 8 June detained and later released Armenian soldier in Lachin district, on claims he was member of “reconnaissance-sabotage group” which was denied by Armenia; govt reported shelling in Kelbajar district. Armenian defence ministry 10 June reported that Azerbaijani Armed Forces tried to carry out engineering work in border area of Armenian Gegharkunik region. During visit to Shusha city in Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkish President Erdoğan and President Aliyev 15 June signed milestone joint declaration that introduces regular joint sessions between Turkish and Azerbaijani security councils, bolsters military cooperation, includes roadmap for consolidation of diaspora relations and expresses formal support for Turkish position on Armenian genocide issue; Armenian MFA 15 June denounced joint visit to Shusha as “provocation against regional peace and security.”

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) In spite of ongoing border tensions, Azerbaijan exchanged Armenian detainees in return for mine maps from Armenia.** Following mediation efforts by Georgian, U.S., EU and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe representatives as well as commander of Russian peacekeeping mission, Azerbaijan 12 June released 15 Armenian detainees in exchange for maps delivered from Yerevan that indicated

sites of landmine clusters in Agdam district. Armenian Acting PM Pashinyan 12 June praised handover of Armenian prisoners as “start of a new process” and added that Armenia had provided Azerbaijan with some mine maps back in Dec 2020 “in order to create a constructive atmosphere”. Azerbaijan’s State Security Service and Prosecutor-General’s Office 7 June confirmed that 13 Armenian soldiers were charged with crossing into Azerbaijan and terrorism; 10 June announced criminal cases against 26 more Armenian soldiers had been submitted to court in Azerbaijan. Series of incidents on state border continued to fuel tensions, including deadly mine blast and shelling (see Armenia and Azerbaijan). During Turkish President Erdoğan’s visit to Shusha city, Erdoğan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 15 June signed milestone joint declaration on bilateral ties (see Azerbaijan); Aliyev and Erdoğan also confirmed that declaration bolstered military cooperation, and contained “very clear” statements on importance of transport corridors between two countries and opening of consulate in Shusha; Armenian MFA 15 June denounced joint visit to Shusha as “provocation against regional peace and security.” Meanwhile, protesters in Nagorno-Karabakh 21 and 22 June demanded resignation of de facto President Arayik Harutyunyan following reports that he was seen at office of Armenia’s ruling Civil Contract party on Armenia’s parliamentary election day held on 20 June. Following protests, Harutyunyan remarked that “a snap election will be held in a reasonable time frame” but that he would not stand in elections and would quit politics.

➡ **Georgia Discord surfaced between govt and opposition, threatening implementation of April agreement, while govt and breakaway territories engaged in meetings to resolve issues.** Discord and political rivalry between govt and opposition challenged implementation of EU- and U.S.-brokered April agreement that ended months-long political standoff. Notably, opposition MPs – most of whom rejoined parliament late April – 9 June opposed ruling Georgian Dream party’s draft bill on amnesty, which includes protection for police officers charged with “abuse of power” during June 2019 unrest when thousands protested in capital Tbilisi after Russian MP addressed session in parliament building from seat of Georgian parliament speaker and spoke in Russian. Ruling party MPs in turn 11 June voted down alternative law proposed by opposition parties. Meanwhile, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) co-chairs, EU and UN 6-10 June held discussions on humanitarian and security issues with officials from breakaway territories and govt in capital Tbilisi, South Ossetia’s de facto capital Tskhinvali, Abkhazia’s de facto capital Sukhumi and Russian capital Moscow. Georgian representatives raised imprisonment of four Georgian citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while South Ossetian representatives raised continued discontent with police outpost established in 2019 at Ossetian village of Tsnelisi area at line of separation. OSCE Sec Gen Helga Schmid 14-16 June visited Georgia, including Tsitsagiantkari village at line of separation with South Ossetia, and took part in 100th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meeting. Fifty-third round of Geneva International Discussions 29 June began; Georgian delegation sought to raise issue of Georgian detainees in breakaway territories while South Ossetian and Abkhazian sides concentrated on non-use of force agreement.

➡ **Russia (internal) U.S. expressed support for imprisoned opposition figure Alexei Navalny, while parliament continued to introduce restrictions on foreign organisations operating in country.** At 16 June summit between Moscow and Washington (see U.S.-Russia), U.S. President Biden warned President Putin of “devastating” consequences should opposition figure Alexei Navalny die in prison. U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan 20 June said U.S. was “preparing another package of sanctions” related to poisoning of Navalny. Lower chamber of parliament 16 June adopted law criminalising activities of foreign non-governmental organisations as well as participation in and fundraising for such activities. Ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for 19 Sept, ruling United Russia party 19 June revealed candidates for its federal list, which include Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and FM Sergei Lavrov. In North Caucasus, Head of Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov 23 June told Putin that international terrorism in Chechnya has been “completely and forever” eradicated; according to Kadyrov, “security issues are no longer relevant” and main issues now are economic and social development. Kadyrov, who has been head of republic since 2007, 26 June declared that he had agreed to run for new term after receiving Putin’s endorsement.

➡ **U.S.-Russia U.S. and Russian presidents held face-to-face summit in Geneva, agreeing to continue arms control dialogue and return ambassadors.** U.S. President Biden and Russia’s President Putin 16 June met in Swiss city Geneva for first face-to-face meeting since Biden took office to discuss diverse issues, including arms control, cybersecurity, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan and Arctic; Biden described meeting as “good and positive” while Putin said sides “will begin consultations on the entire complex of interactions on the diplomatic track”. Sole document signed by both parties during summit related to strategic stability; sides committed to “principle that there can be no winners in a nuclear war”, with bilateral dialogue on arms control set to commence in due course. Leaders also agreed to return ambassadors to their respective posts. Separately, Moscow 18 June announced it would withdraw from Open Skies Treaty – multilateral accord permitting signatories to undertake non-military reconnaissance flights over other countries – on 18 Dec, stating that U.S. formal withdrawal from treaty in Nov 2020 “grossly violated the balance of interests, rights and obligations” of signatories.

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## **Central Asia**

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➡ **Kyrgyzstan Amid ongoing tensions with Tajikistan, sides struck new agreement to stabilise border.** Following deadliest fighting on Kyrgyz-Tajik border in years in April, authorities 4 June announced they bolstered border security presence after observing that Tajikistan had violated past agreements by installing container and deploying military personnel and equipment on unmarked border segment in Kyrgyz’s Chon-Alai district in southern Osh region; Tajik officials same day dismissed concerns. Kyrgyz and Tajik officials 5 June struck new nine-point agreement, including provisions to withdraw troops and military equipment and relocate respective border posts 3km from border; Kyrgyz authorities next day withdrew reinforcements after reporting that Tajik side had removed container. Heads of Tajikistan’s northern Sughd region and Kyrgyzstan’s southern Batken region 16 June held meeting to discuss border issues, reportedly forging agreement

on water distribution. Meanwhile, group of Kyrgyz lawyers and activists 6 June requested International Criminal Court initiate investigation into Tajikistan's military conduct during recent escalation; Kyrgyz govt 15 June criticised application, stating that "such initiatives can harm the political and diplomatic solution of the issue". During 28-29 June official visit to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, President Japarov described late-April military escalation as "heavy test" for both countries. Meanwhile, around 50 protesters 30 June gathered in capital Bishkek in opposition to controversial bill that could establish govt watchdog to monitor posting of online content; activists complained bill violates freedom of speech.

➔ **Tajikistan Amid ongoing tensions with Kyrgyzstan, sides struck new agreement to stabilise border; concerns rose over border security with Afghanistan.** Following deadliest fighting on Kyrgyz-Tajik border in years in April, Kyrgyz authorities 4 June announced they had bolstered border security presence after observing that Tajikistan had violated past agreements by installing container and deploying military personnel and equipment on unmarked segment of border in Kyrgyz's Chon-Alai district in southern Osh region; Tajik officials same day dismissed concerns. Kyrgyz and Tajik officials 5 June struck new nine-point agreement, including provisions to withdraw troops and military equipment from border and relocate respective border posts 3km from border; Kyrgyz authorities next day withdrew reinforcements after reporting that Tajik side removed container. Heads of Tajikistan's northern Sughd region and Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken region 16 June held meeting to discuss border issues, reportedly forging agreement on water distribution. During 28-29 June official visit to capital Dushanbe, Kyrgyzstan President Japarov described late-April military escalation as "heavy test" for both countries. Meanwhile, Head of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region Yodgor Fayzov 21 June convened meeting with military and law enforcement officials on border situation with Afghanistan where conflict had been escalating in recent weeks (see Afghanistan); highlighted risk of possible refugee influx of between 5,000 to 10,000 people and ongoing border insecurity due to presence of extremist groups along border. Border service revealed that 17 Afghan soldiers 27 June crossed border into Tajikistan, as they were fleeing Taliban operations in Afghanistan's Balkh province, while media reports late June said Taliban offensive had pushed over 130 Afghan soldiers to cross border over to Tajikistan.

➔ **Uzbekistan Authorities made series of arrests of suspected extremists, and concerns rose over border security with Afghanistan.** Authorities 15 June apprehended group allegedly planning terrorist attacks in Syria. Police next day detained 20 people in Mirzaobod and Yangier districts of eastern Sirdaryo region suspected of distributing "extremist materials" on social media, reportedly confiscating weapons and literature. Authorities 17 June detained six suspected members of proscribed Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir in Urgut district in south-eastern region of Samarkand. Meanwhile, authorities confirmed that 53 Afghan troops and allied militia fighters 23 June crossed border into Uzbekistan to flee stepped-up Taliban offensive (see Afghanistan); also said that after questioning, Afghan pro-govt forces were allowed back into their country. Authorities mid-June announced military drills along border. UN Special Envoy on Afghanistan Deborah Lyons 22 June warned about potential security repercussions of worsening Afghan conflict on "many other countries, near and far."

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## Eastern Europe

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➔ **Belarus Western countries announced additional sanctions on govt, while opposition called for greater international pressure.** After authorities forcibly diverted passenger aircraft in May and arrested Belarusian critic, U.S. Sec State Antony Blinken 3 June announced termination of business dealings with nine state-owned enterprises. EU ambassadors 4 June agreed to ban Belarusian airlines from using EU airspace or airports. U.S., UK, Canada and EU 21 June announced sanctions, including asset freeze and travel bans, and in joint statement said: “We are united in calling for the regime to end its repressive practices against its own people”. Govt 28 June suspended participation in EU’s Eastern Partnership initiative; EU Council President Charles Michel same day said decision “will escalate tensions further”. U.S. 29 June prohibited sale of passenger flight tickets between U.S. and Belarus. Opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya 8 June urged international states to impose tougher sanctions on govt, saying: “We can block the regime economically so that it won’t be possible to pay the police and the military”. President Lukashenka 8 June signed into law amendments to criminal code that strengthen punishment for criticising govt or participating in anti-govt rallies. Court in capital Minsk 10 June sentenced four individuals associated with presidential campaign of opposition figure Viktor Babaryka to five years’ imprisonment for their alleged role in anti-govt protests last year.

➔ **Ukraine Deadly combat continued in Donbas as President Zelenskyy reinvigorated bid for NATO membership and U.S. reaffirmed support for Minsk diplomatic process.** In Donbas conflict zone, live fire 19 and 27 June injured civilian while killing two Ukrainian servicemen and injuring six during month, according to official and media reports. At least one Russia-backed fighter was killed by live fire, while sides traded accusations over deaths of additional nine fighters, as well as over the cause of five injuries. In joint communiqué following 14 June NATO summit, member states reiterated their 2008 pledge to issue Georgia and Ukraine Membership Action Plans, but provided no timeline; President Zelenskyy 18 June told Western news outlets that he wanted “yes or no” on NATO membership, and “clear dates”. Following 16 June Geneva summit with Russia’s President Putin, U.S. President Joe Biden said he and his counterpart “agreed to pursue diplomacy related to the Minsk agreement”; Putin separately stated that Biden had apparently deemed agreements “the basis for conflict regulation”, noting that this contradicted Kyiv’s recent statements about need for alternate approach. U.S. Deputy Sec State Victoria Nuland reiterated U.S. support for Minsk agreements in 17 June interview, saying U.S. would examine possibilities for greater involvement in peace process following consultations with Kyiv. Ukraine’s Security and Defence Council 18 June announced that govt was imposing sanctions on businessman Dmytro Firtash in connection with his titanium business, which officials say supplies raw materials used by Russian military. Russia’s defence ministry 23 June announced that maritime patrol had fired warning shots at British military vessel 19km from Crimean Peninsula in Black Sea, which UK denied; Ukrainian FM Dmytro Kuleba called incident “clear proof” that Russia’s “occupation and militarization of Crimea pose a lasting threat to Ukraine and allies”. U.S. and Ukraine-led Sea Breeze naval exercise 28 June began in Black Sea.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➔ **Cyprus** **Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders agreed to open border crossings, while UN continued diplomatic engagement with Cypriot parties in hope of scheduling new international conference.**

In show of goodwill, Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades and “TRNC” President Ersin Tatar 2 June confirmed agreement on reopening all crossing points on island from 4 June onward; crossings between north and south had been essentially closed since Feb 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Anastasiades and Tatar 22 June held separate meetings with U.N. Special Envoy on Cyprus Dispute Jane Holl Lute as part of efforts to search for common ground and assess prospects for second 5+1 conference. Tensions at sea continued, notably when Turkish Coast Guard 22 June blocked and reportedly boarded Greek Cypriot fishing boat off Dipkarpaz town (north-eastern part of Cyprus). Turkey issued numerous advisories for military drills, including in area south of Dipkarpaz 1-18 June, in Gulf of Morphou (northern part of Cyprus) on 23 June and south of Dipkarpaz 1-16 July. Following 30 May parliamentary elections in Republic of Cyprus — which saw ruling Democratic Rally party claim 27.8% of the votes, marking party’s worst election result in 40 years — Tatar 1 June noted hardline forces favouring unitary state were gaining ground in south. At 24-25 June summit, European Council said it remained “fully committed to the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem on the basis of a bicomunal, bi-zonal federation with political equality”; Turkish ministry of foreign affairs 25 June responded that it is impossible for EU “to make a positive contribution to the Cyprus issue” as long as bloc “ignores Turkish Cypriots and disregards their equal rights”.

➔ **Eastern Mediterranean** **Ankara and Athens held leader summit in Brussels, while maritime tensions in Aegean sea continued.**

Greek PM Mitsotakis and Turkish President Erdoğan 14 June held private meeting in Brussels where they agreed to mutually recognise COVID-19 certificates and reaffirmed their commitment to 25 economic cooperation measures. Erdoğan also revealed that he and Mitsotakis agreed to communicate over direct line “without involving others”. Despite positive diplomatic steps, maritime tensions continued. Greek Coast Guard HQ 12-13 June announced two collision incidents of Turkish and Greek Coast Guard vessels east and south of Greece’s Lesbos island; Turkish Coast Guard claimed collision was result of pushback operation against group of irregular migrants by Greek vessel and occurred within Turkish territorial waters. Greece carried out military exercises on land and at sea, including in south west of Greece’s Crete island 15-16 June and around Crete 28 May-11 June; 21 June issued advisory announcement for aeronautical exercises south of Greek islands Kastellorizo/Meis, scheduled for 29 June. Turkish defence ministry protested, claiming violation of agreement not to carry out exercises during tourist season, and 22 June announced military exercises between 15 June-15 September in response. European leaders discussed relations with Turkey during 24-25 June European Council summit; in its conclusions, Council supported de-escalation and dialogue in Eastern Mediterranean; Turkish ministry of foreign affairs 25 June responded that lack of progress on positive agenda was “delaying tactic” by some member states in order “to postpone concrete decisions”, such as modernisation of EU-Turkey customs union.

➡ **Turkey Authorities continued to restrict pro-Kurdish opposition, and arrested over 200 Islamic State suspects; meanwhile, military operations targeting Kurdish militants in neighbourhood continued.**

Govt efforts to delegitimise pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) persisted. Constitutional Court 21 June accepted indictment seeking closure of party; 843-page indictment, among other aspects, demands that 451 party members be banned from politics for period of five years. Lone gunman 17 June stormed HDP provincial office in Izmir city and opened fire at employees, killing one; Erdoğan 21 June condemned attack. In near neighbourhood, Ankara continued efforts to curtail Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) presence, which increasingly drew in Peshmerga forces and fuelled intra-Kurdish friction in northern Iraq (see Iraq). Notably, Turkey 5 June carried out drone strikes near Makhmur camp in northern Iraq with Turkish officials claiming it functions as "incubator" for militants, reportedly killing three civilians. PKK attack same day killed five Peshmerga forces in Iraq's Dohuk area. President Erdoğan 6 June claimed that Turkish security forces "neutralised" Selman Bozkır, one of PKK's high-ranking members in northern Iraq. Ankara also blamed "PKK/YPG" for 12 June missile attack on hospital in Syria's Afrin city, and same day retaliated against what it called "PKK/YPG" targets in Tal Rifat (see Syria). Meanwhile, Turkish security units continued to carry out operations against Islamic State (ISIS); police detained over 200 individuals for their alleged ISIS links, including Syrians and Iraqis. Presidents Erdoğan and Biden 14 June met on sidelines of NATO summit held in Belgian capital Brussels; Erdoğan characterised talks with Biden as "productive and sincere" while Biden said meeting was "very good". European leaders discussed relations with Turkey during 24-25 June European Council summit, agreeing to continue offering financial support for Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey.