

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

- **Bosnia** Leaders of country's three main nationalist parties agreed to talks to form new govt following Oct 2018 elections; during 28 March visit, EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn urged members of tripartite presidency to form new govt quickly to resume reforms. Court in The Hague upheld genocide conviction of former Bosnian-Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadžić and extended his prison sentence to life.
- **Kosovo** U.S. and EU continued calls on Pristina to revoke 100% customs tariff on imports from Serbia, and for the two countries to resume normalisation talks; visiting U.S. envoy David Hale early month said U.S. and its Western allies would support any accord they reached, and called for end to "mutual provocations". Parliament 7 March adopted eleven-point platform for negotiations with Serbia, stipulating need mutual recognition between countries and maintenance of current borders. Serbian President Vučić 8 March condemned platform, saying it was not compatible with the dialogue. EU Parliament 28 March voted again in favour of granting Kosovo citizens visa-free travel to bloc.
- **North Macedonia** Skopje court 15 March sentenced sixteen people to jail for role in April 2017 attack on parliament, including former interior minister Mitko Cavkov, jailed for eighteen years for "terrorist endangerment of the constitutional order".

Caucasus

- **Armenia** PM Pashinyan 5 March met with European Council President Donald Tusk in Brussels for talks on EU-Armenia relations and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reportedly discussing comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement and possible visa-free travel.
- **Azerbaijan** Following Feb reform announcement, President Aliyev made further progressive steps, 16 March pardoning 400 prisoners, including 51 political prisoners, ahead of Norouz new year holiday; EU welcomed step, saying it expected that "further similar steps will follow in future in line with Azerbaijan's international commitments".
- **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Despite tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) peace process early March, much-anticipated official summit 29 March resulted in commitment to strengthen ceasefire, improve communications and implement humanitarian projects. Armenian defence minister late Feb announced military strategy that would consider possible attacks at enemy positions rather than just self-defence, while Azerbaijani President Aliyev 14 March accused Yerevan of attempting to block Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group-led negotiation process after Armenia proposed discussion on inclusion of de facto NK leadership in

negotiations. After Director of Armenia's National Security Service during visit to NK conflict zone 27 Feb announced full support to local nationalist calls for continued development of Armenian settlements, Azerbaijan 11 March announced launch of large-scale military exercises close to NK conflict zone – first since Armenian PM Pashinyan took office in May 2018. Armenia 12 March convened first-ever joint Security Council meeting with NK leadership in de facto NK capital Stepanakert, during which Pashinyan reiterated support to existing negotiation format and framework, and stated that inclusion of de facto officials not a pre-condition, but necessary for a more effective peace process. Azerbaijan 26 March reported one soldier killed in exchange of fire in southern direction of Line of Contact (LoC) in NK conflict zone. First official summit between Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev held in Vienna 29 March: both leaders assessed meeting positively and voiced readiness to continue talks. Minsk Group co-chairs released statement together with Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers which highlighted commitment of leaders “to strengthening the ceasefire and improving the mechanism for direct communication”; also mentioned agreement on “a number of measures in the humanitarian field”.

➡ **Georgia** Crossings between Georgia and its breakaway regions reopened after two months closure as Russian border guards 15 March lifted all remaining restrictions, allowing regular movement of people and vehicles to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. News made public just hours before visit of foreign mediators of Geneva International Discussions (GID) to South Ossetia; co-chairs praised decision, but said closure “not justified” and asked for more coordination between conflict parties before any similar measures are introduced in future. Among those detained for trying to cross “illegally” was 29-year-old ethnic Georgian found dead at Russian military unit detention centre in eastern Abkhazia, where de facto officials said he committed suicide; Georgian officials launched investigation into case. NATO Sec Gen Jens Stoltenberg 25 March reiterated at joint NATO-Georgia military exercises near capital Tbilisi that “Georgia will become a member of NATO”; said alliance will not accept “that Russia or any other power can decide what members can do”.

↓ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Protests resumed in Ingushetia over Sept 2018 border agreement with Chechnya, raising concerns about possible threat to regional stability, while EU condemned human rights situation in region, and security operations continued. Ingush activists 20 March refiled petition to hold referendum on border deal with Chechnya to Ingushetia's Central Electoral Commission; Ingush leader Ynus-Bek Yevkurov 20 March withdrew proposed legislation which would have cancelled need for new referendums on any regional border changes. Despite move, thousands gathered in Ingush capital Magas 26-27 March to protest deal and called for Yevkurov to resign. Several injured in clashes with security forces; demonstrators dispersed after police agreed to sanction new protest. Thousands of protesters also blocked highway at entrance of Nazran city 27 March. In Chechnya, Shali city court 18 March sentenced Oyub Titiyev, director of Chechnya office of Memorial human rights organisation, to four years in penal colony on drug charges; Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner called Titiyev's conviction “latest example of the hostile and dangerous environment” for rights activists in Chechnya. Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture 11 March released statement condemning alleged widespread use of torture and ill-treatment of

persons detained in Chechnya and urged Russia to conduct effective investigations in Chechnya and elsewhere in North Caucasus region. Security operations against militants continued; in Stavropol region, security forces 14 March killed two suspected militants in shoot-out in Shpakovsky district and arrested a third. In Dagestan, authorities 15 March reportedly detained two individuals suspected of financing Islamic State (ISIS) from Makhachkala and Kizilyurt districts, and 25 March detained three others from Khasavyurt district suspected of abetting woman in Nov 2018 suicide attack in Chechen capital Grozny. In Ingushetia, several gunmen 26 March injured three people, including Nazran mayor's son, in shooting at Nazran town hall.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** Police arrested at least a dozen opposition activists and prevented several hundred from holding unauthorised anti-govt rally in Minsk 25 March to mark 101st anniversary of independence from Russia.

➔ **Ukraine** Police and protestors clashed on one occasion and hostilities increased slightly in Donbas as Ukraine prepared for first round of presidential elections 31 March. Ceasefire violations increased in conflict zone, with Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) monitors recording average of just under 400 explosions per day compared with under 300 in Feb. Violations peaked in first week of March, fell precipitously following 8 March recommitment to ceasefire, then saw another spurt 19-21 March. SMM reported five civilian injuries, three from explosive device and two from shelling; armed groups reported two additional civilian deaths from shelling; three people reportedly died of natural causes while crossing line of separation. Ukrainian armed forces reported eleven combat deaths 21 Feb-31 March; Ukrainian unofficial sources reported 21 members of armed groups killed in same period. Ukrainian authorities unilaterally opened Zolote checkpoint 24 March, citing 2015 agreement within Normandy Four negotiation format, however no crossings transpired, and head of so-called Luhansk People's Republic said crossing would remain closed until "coordinated decision" by both sides. Ahead of 31 March first round of presidential election, far-right National Corps party held three "days of rage" during month to call for arrest of former National Security Council deputy head and others recently alleged to have overseen corruption schemes in defence sector. Protestors clashed with police 9 March after reportedly attempting to storm campaign rally by President Poroshenko; police reported 22 officers were injured; subsequent protests largely peaceful. Exit polls showed Volodymyr Zelensky with commanding lead in first round, with Poroshenko in second place. In 20 March interview with *The Hill*, Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko accused U.S. Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, who denounced ongoing corruption in 5 March speech, of giving him a list of people who should be immune from prosecution; Yovanovitch denied claim.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Attempts continued to resume reunification talks. Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 11 March met Turkish Cypriot "foreign affairs minister" counterpart

Kudret Özersay to discuss recent developments; same day met with UN Special Envoy Jane Holl Lute, after which he tweeted “all options are on the table for a permanent solution in Cyprus”. ExxonMobil 28 Feb announced discovery of significant (more than double previous estimate) gas reserves in Block 10 of Republic of Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), prompting analyst warnings of risk of increased tensions with Greece/ Republic of Cyprus and possibly U.S. if Turkish military moves to prevent exploration activities.

➡ **Northern Ireland (UK)** Amid growing concerns over possible security implications of UK’s departure from EU for arrangements on border with Republic of Ireland, police 5 March discovered three small parcel bombs at transport hubs in London and another next day at Glasgow University; police 12 March said republican dissident group New IRA claimed responsibility for sending five packages, with fifth package found in post office in Republic of Ireland 22 March. Police 7 March claimed to have uncovered “significant terrorist hide” containing mortar parts in County Armagh (south).

➡ **Turkey** Operations against Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) continued in south east and in northern Iraq, authorities maintained crackdown on pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and Kurdish movement sympathisers, and tensions increased with U.S. over Syria and Ankara’s purchase of Russian missile systems. In south east, security forces continued operations against PKK, with casualties remaining low. Turkish military cross-border air raids 3-6 March targeted PKK positions in northern Iraq’s Haftanin and Hakurk areas. Govt crackdown on HDP and its municipal affiliate continued ahead of 31 March municipal elections. Early results 31 March suggested President Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) lost mayoral race in Ankara and Istanbul to opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), despite AKP’s electoral alliance securing 51.63% of national vote; pro-Kurdish HDP retained key strongholds in south east, including Diyarbakır, Mardin, and Van, while losing Şırnak, Ağrı, and Bitlis. Strains on U.S.-Turkey relations increased: following Washington’s 22 Feb announcement to maintain residual contingent of forces in support of Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria, Erdoğan 4 March reiterated intention to conduct Turkish military operation to expel YPG from Syria’s north east. Following meetings with U.S. officials in Ankara, Erdoğan 6 March refused to cancel purchase of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile system and expressed interest in procuring anti-ballistic S-500 missiles from Moscow at later date; U.S. 9 March warned deal would undermine military cooperation within NATO and jeopardise delivery of F-35s and Patriot missiles to Turkey. Counterterrorism efforts against jihadist cells and foreign terrorist fighters continued; authorities 13 March arrested fourteen foreign nationals in Ankara and a Danish citizen in Bursa, all suspected Islamic State (ISIS) members.

Central Asia

➡ **Kazakhstan** In televised address 19 March, President Nazarbayev unexpectedly resigned after almost 30 years in office, retaining positions of head of ruling party Nur Otan and Security Council chairmanship. Senate chair Qasym-Jomart Toqayev sworn in next day as interim president until next presidential election due 2020, while Nazarbayev’s daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva replaced

Tokayev as chair of Senate. Parliament 20 March approved proposal by Tokayev to rename capital Astana to Nur-Sultan, prompted some protests in capital and other cities; dozens arrested. EU Parliament 14 March urged govt to end human rights abuses “and all forms of political repression”.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Deadly clashes broke out in Ferghana Valley over Kyrgyz construction of new road in disputed area near Tajikistan exclave Vorukh 13-14 March, killing two Tajik citizens and wounding dozens of Tajik and Kyrgyz citizens; border reopened 18 March following talks. Amid ongoing tensions between President Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev, who remains leader of Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK, largest in parliament), SDPK 18 March announced it will join opposition, reflecting apparent split in party. During visit by Russian President Putin late March, leaders agreed to expand Russian military base in northern town Kant.

➡ **Tajikistan** Deadly clashes broke out over new road in Tajikistan exclave in Kyrgyzstan Vorukh 13-14 March, killing two villagers (see Kyrgyzstan). Opposition activist Sharofiddin Gadoyev, who was reportedly kidnapped while visiting Moscow in Feb, then handed over to Tajik authorities and tortured, returned to the Netherlands early March following international pressure on Dushanbe; said he was pressured to back President Rahmon’s son Rustam in 2020 presidential election.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Along with Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania, govt 4 March established new trade route to Romania, Black Sea-Caspian Sea International Transport Corridor. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders March urged Turkmenistan to stop harassment of journalists following arrest of journalist Soltan Achilova 11 March. Amid signs of increasing economic difficulties, reports emerged late Feb that authorities were restricting internal travel from regions to capital Ashgabat.

➡ **Uzbekistan** U.S. charged Gulnara Karimova, daughter of late President Karimov, with conspiracy to violate U.S. foreign corruption laws over her alleged involvement in major international bribery scheme; came after Uzbek court ordered Karimova be transferred to prison for breaking terms of her five-year house arrest on corruption charges. Govt 25 March signed \$10bn worth of cooperation agreements with United Arab Emirates on areas including investment, industry and infrastructure development and others.