

# Europe and Central Asia

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## **Balkans**

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↑ **Bosnia** Members of country's tripartite Presidency agreed on new PM, paving way for new govt thirteen months after Oct 2018 elections. Tripartite presidency members 19 Nov agreed to nominate Zoran Tegeltija, Bosnian Serb ally of Serb Presidency member Milorad Dodik, as new Chair of Council of Ministers, while Dodik agreed to allow submission of Reform Program for NATO Annual National Plan, despite his longstanding opposition to Bosnia's NATO Membership Action Plan. Appointment of Tegeltija, first nominated by Dodik after 2018 elections, must be confirmed by parliament. EU and U.S. welcomed end of deadlock on new govt; EU called for progress on EU-oriented reforms including on judiciary, anti-corruption and organised crime. Earlier in month, parliament of country's majority Serb entity Republika Srpska 12 Nov adopted resolutions reaffirming entity's right to referendums on self-determination and NATO membership, and rejecting wide-ranging "Bonn Powers" of Office of the High Representative, international overseer of implementation of 1995 peace agreement; opposition politicians noted resolutions carry no legal weight.

➡ **Kosovo** Leader of Vetevendosje ("Self-Determination" party, which won 26.29% of votes in Oct election, 32 of 120 seats in parliament) Albin Kurti continued talks with second-placed Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK, which won 24.46%, 29 seats) on formation of coalition govt, and efforts to secure support of three minority MPs. Final result announced 7 Nov, however following complaints from losing parties Election Complaints and Appeals Panel 11 Nov ordered recount of votes from over half of polling stations in Kosovo, and invalidated 3,782 ballots cast in Serbia on procedural grounds, prompting criticism from Belgrade and challenge at Supreme Court by Vetevendosje party against decision. Election turnout reported as 44.72%, higher than previous polls. Ghana 11 Nov announced it had reversed its 2012 recognition of Kosovo independence, saying decision had been "premature". Hungarian nominee for EU enlargement commissioner 14 Nov told MEPs he would aim for "successful conclusion" to EU-mediated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina in 2020. After meeting with his Serbian counterpart in Paris 12 Nov, President Thaçi said dialogue should continue "without any conditionality".

➡ **North Macedonia** Following Oct decision by European Council not to begin formal EU accession talks with North Macedonia due to French opposition, PM Zaev 14 Nov reiterated that "there is no alternative to the EU and NATO" for country; also noted "huge encouragement" from his Greek counterpart on North Macedonia's EU aspirations, as well as neighbouring Bulgaria. Speaking at Russia-North Macedonia economic forum in Skopje same day, Zaev said efforts to improve economic cooperation with Russia not an alternative to Euro-Atlantic integration. Zaev met with Albanian PM Rama and Serbian President Vučić 10 Nov, agreeing to lift trade barriers between their countries.

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## Caucasus

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➔ **Armenia** During visit by Russian FM Lavrov to Yerevan 10-11 Nov, the two countries' FMs announced planned memorandum providing Russian specialists unrestricted access to biological laboratories in Armenia that were set up with U.S. assistance. Former President Sargsyan appeared in public for first time since 2018 21 Nov, and criticised current leadership and lack of reforms.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Political council of ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) 28 Nov decided to initiate dissolution of parliament and asked President Aliyev to call snap general election, originally scheduled for Nov 2020, soon; YAP claimed landslide victory in previous elections in 2015 that were boycotted by all opposition parties.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Relative calm in conflict zone continued, but rhetoric between Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders remained tense ahead of planned meeting between their foreign ministers early Dec. In conflict zone, neither side reported casualties or major incidents, making Nov one of calmest months of 2019. Also in line with March agreement between leaders, groups of journalists from Baku, Yerevan, and Stepanakert visited each other's capitals during last week of Nov for meetings with experts, journalists and NGOs, first such visits in over fifteen years seen as possible step forward in preparing populations for peace. Harsh rhetoric between leaders focused on historical interpretations of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict. During speech in Baku 14 Nov, Azerbaijani President Aliyev said NK had always been Azerbaijani land, accused Armenians of "genocide" against Azerbaijanis during 1992-1994 war, and excluded possibility of NK independence. Armenian PM Pashinyan 20 Nov gave speech in Italy accusing Azerbaijan of continuously preparing for war, and calling for Azerbaijan to consider interests of people living in NK, who will stay in region regardless of final outcome. During visit to Yerevan 10-11 Nov, Russian FM Lavrov supported Armenian demand to recognise NK's role in peace process, stating that without consent of NK people no agreement could be reached; Baku responded with call to include Azerbaijani internally displaced persons from NK in peace process.

⚡ **Georgia** Govt facing political crisis as thousands of people joined protests in Tbilisi and other cities starting 14 Nov, clashing with police and govt supporters. Protests began after parliament failed to adopt legislation for new electoral system that would allow opposition to gain more parliamentary seats in election scheduled for late 2020, breaking promise by PM Ivanishvili following protests in June; some leading ruling party figures resigned in protest, many accusing Ivanishvili of preventing adoption of promised amendments. Some 20,000 protested in Tbilisi 17 Nov, biggest protest since ruling Georgian Dream party came to power, joined by all opposition parties. Govt 18 Nov began forceful dispersal of protesters blocking govt buildings; three people injured, including one policeman; police arrested 37 people, some of whom were handed down short prison sentences. Embassies of EU member states and U.S. released statement 17 Nov calling for calm and return to discussion of electoral code. Georgian Dream and opposition met 30 Nov to discuss amendments to electoral system but unable to reach agreement. In breakaway republic South Ossetia, humanitarian impact of ongoing closure of roads connecting it to Georgia-controlled territory worsened with onset of winter, with thousands of

ethnic Georgians in area experiencing food shortages and lack of access to emergency health services. South Ossetia de facto authorities 9 Nov arrested well-known Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili and jailed him for two months for “illegal border crossing” after he entered breakaway region to visit patient, prompting outrage in Tbilisi, where hundreds of doctors organised strike 18 Nov; de facto authorities launched investigation into Gaprindashvili’s role in 2008 war, claiming he supported Georgian army. Co-chairs of Geneva International Discussions 11 Nov called for continued dialogue on contentious Georgian police outpost and demanded opening of crossings “without delay”.

➡ **Russia/North Caucasus** Authorities announced head of Interior Ministry’s Anti-Extremism Centre in Ingushetia, Ibragim Eldzharkiyev, and his brother reportedly shot dead by unknown gunman in Moscow 2 Nov; Eldzharkiyev was believed to have been previously targeted by gunmen in Jan 2019 near Ingush-Chechen border. Relatives of man arrested in Dagestan capital Makhachkala on charges of weapons possession who claimed he was tortured in prison held rally in his support 29 Nov; court next day placed him and his alleged accomplice under arrest; police claim they are connected to armed militant groups. Chechnya’s Supreme Court 26 Nov began trial over case of eight Dagestanis whose relatives claim they were kidnapped and killed by Chechen law enforcement; latter claim men were planning terror attack and were killed in a shoot-out. European Court of Human Rights in Oct registered complaint from rights activists that case was not being duly investigated; Russian Supreme Court in Aug declined to transfer case outside of Chechnya.

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## Eastern Europe

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➡ **Belarus** Snap parliamentary elections 17 Nov saw all 110 seats in lower house won by candidates belonging to parties loyal to President Lukashenka, with opposition candidates winning no seats; turnout reported at 77%. International election observers reported significant problems; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe criticised “obstacles to political party registration, fees and limited space for holding public gatherings, and criminal sanctions for defamation”, and “overall lack of respect for democratic commitments”. Lukashenka, in power since 1994, told media he planned to run for a sixth term in 2020 presidential election. Over 1,000 people reportedly joined anti-Lukashenka rally in Minsk 8 Nov.

➡ **Moldova** Coalition govt led by pro-Western PM Sandu collapsed 12 Nov after losing no-confidence vote prompted by disagreement on how to appoint prosecutor general. Parliament 14 Nov approved new govt led by former finance minister Ion Chicu, nominated by pro-Russian President Dodon, to have transitional role until elections.

➡ **Ukraine** Sides progressed on withdrawal of troops from pilot zones along front line, while leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France geared up for early-Dec peace talks. Participants of so-called Normandy Format set to gather 9 Dec for first time since 2017 for summit to negotiate next steps on resolving Donbas conflict; expected to sign communiqué that may serve as starting point for more detailed and far-reaching measures. President Zelenskyy 20 Nov listed several desired outcomes

from summit: concrete agreement on prisoner exchange, modalities for a sustainable ceasefire, strategy for Ukraine to regain control of its eastern border, and plans for elections under Ukrainian law on territories currently held by separatists. In conflict zone, Ukrainian military and Russia-backed separatists completed troop disengagement at two pilot zones along front line, Zolote (1 Nov) and Petrivske (12 Nov); Zolote withdrawal coincided with 75-80% drop in reported ceasefire violations, however ceasefire violations increased again by mid-month, recorded at same level as July before “unlimited ceasefire” agreement. Ukrainian govt forces lost three servicemen in combat 23 Oct-23 Nov, Russia-backed forces sixteen according to various reports; four civilians injured, all in separatist-controlled territories. Kyiv eased some restrictions on freedom of movement of civilians across contact line end-Nov, simplifying procedures for minors and transporting goods, and opened new bridge at pedestrian crossing point Stanytsia Luhanska. Zelenskyy continued apparent efforts to balance normalising relations with Russia and moving closer to West, including 15 Nov signing of law to unbundle natural gas supplier Naftogaz, condition of Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. International Court of Justice 8 Nov issued judgment recognising its own jurisdiction in suit Kyiv filed in 2017 accusing Moscow of violations of International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Security services mid-Nov arrested Georgian citizen Al-Bara Shishani, alleged senior member of Islamic State (ISIS), in Kyiv. Moscow 18 Nov returned ships it seized in Azov Sea Nov 2018, in reportedly badly damaged state.

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## **Western Europe/Mediterranean**

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➡ **Cyprus** Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 25 Nov met Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı in Berlin for informal UN-mediated talks; President Anastasiades deemed meeting “first positive step” toward resumption of formal UN negotiations as both parties reiterated commitment to goal of creating bi-communal federation on island. Intercommunal tension on island rose as supporters of Republic of Cyprus’ ultranationalist party National Popular Front 15 Nov burned flag of “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” during demonstration; Akıncı and Ankara condemned incident. European Council 11 Nov implemented framework for restrictive measures in response to Turkey’s “unauthorised” drilling activities in eastern Mediterranean; sanctions targeted individuals and entities involved in drilling and included EU travel bans and asset freezes.

➡ **Northern Ireland (UK)** Annual report by Independent Reports Commission 4 Nov stated UK’s planned departure from EU could lead to rise in paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland; also claimed return of devolved govt powers key to reducing potential violence. Irish PM Varadkar 15 Nov announced talks over restoring devolved power at Stormont would not recommence until after UK general election in Dec.

➡ **Spain** Protests over Catalonia independence continued, and trial of regional president began. Catalan separatists 5 Nov burned pictures of king in anti-monarchy protest attended by some 2,000 people during royal visit to Barcelona. French riot police 12 Nov clashed with estimated 2,000 pro-Catalan independence protesters

blocking road between France and Spain. Trial of president of Catalonia regional govt Quim Torra began 18 Nov in Barcelona, on charges of refusing to remove Catalanian independence symbols from public buildings.

➡ **Turkey** Govt continued criminalising pro-Kurdish opposition and intensified crackdown on suspected Islamic State (ISIS) operatives, while military continued operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in south east Turkey and northern Iraq, and began joint patrols with Russia in parts of border areas in Syria's north east. Fatalities in PKK conflict decreased amid harsher winter conditions; Turkish military 13 Nov launched "Kıran-6" operation against PKK in Van, Hakkari and Şırnak provinces; air raids targeting PKK militants in northern Iraq also continued. Govt intensified efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), replacing several more HDP co-mayors with state-appointed trustees. In north east Syria, Turkish and Russian troops 1 Nov carried out first joint patrol in designated border areas; as of end-Nov, twelve joint patrols were carried out. Two Turkish soldiers killed by mortar fire in north east Syria 27 Nov. FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 18 Nov threatened further military action if U.S. and Russia fail to ensure full withdrawal of Kurdish-led People's Protection Units (YPG) from agreed areas (see Syria). President Erdoğan 13 Nov met with U.S. President Trump in Washington DC in attempt to address tensions caused by Turkey's incursion in Syria, Ankara's acquisition of Russian S-400 missile systems and other points of contention. While both sides expressed intent to improve relations, hardly any concrete progress was marked. Following Oct assassination of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi near border in Syria, govt redoubled crackdown on ISIS networks in Turkey. Turkish forces captured sister of al-Baghdadi in Azaz in north east Syria 4 Nov before arresting 25 other close relatives in Turkey mid-month. More than 100 individuals suspected of ISIS links were also detained during month, while govt intensified repatriation efforts of foreign nationals with ISIS ties. U.S. 19 Nov imposed sanctions on three Turkey-based companies and two Turkish citizens for allegedly providing financial and logistical support to ISIS.

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## Central Asia

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➡ **Kazakhstan** Dozens of people joined sanctioned demonstration in capital Nur Sultan and unsanctioned rally in former capital Almaty 9 Nov demanding fair elections, parliamentary republic and release of political prisoners; police did not intervene. Media Watchdog Freedom House named Kazakhstan as one of countries with worst deterioration in Internet freedoms over past year.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Reports emerged of massive corruption scheme in country's custom services resulting in illegal outflow of hundreds of millions of dollars, prompting public outcry. Ethnic Uighur Chinese businessman who provided secret evidence on scheme to journalists from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and other media was shot dead in Istanbul 10 Nov. Office of President Jeenbekov 22 Nov denied involvement with another figure named in investigation. Estimated 2,000 people joined protest in Bishkek 25 Nov calling punishment for those involved, including high-level customs official (who denied involvement). Head of financial police 26 Nov told MPs almost \$1 bn believed to have been illegally transferred out of country under scheme, which is now under investigation.

↓ **Tajikistan** Authorities reported 20 alleged Islamic State (ISIS)-linked militants including at least one woman attacked Tajik border post in south, 50km south west of capital and close to border with Uzbekistan 6 Nov, with two security personnel and fifteen militants killed in subsequent clash, five arrested. According to official statements, attackers were mostly Tajik nationals with links to Islamic State-Khorosan Province, crossing from Afghanistan, although later information created some uncertainty over details of attack. ISIS claimed responsibility for attack 8 Nov, and claimed number of security personnel killed higher.