



Europe

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Events affecting minorities in Europe during 2015 were dominated by violent attacks by religious extremists, including two major incidents in Paris that together killed almost 150 people, as well as a foiled attempted shooting on a train travelling from Amsterdam to Paris. The year also marked the emergence of a crisis that saw more than a million refugees and migrants enter the region, including a large proportion of Syrians displaced by the conflict. Amid fears of further attacks inspired by the militant group Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), many governments have increasingly seen the swelling number of refugees as an issue of security rather than one of humanitarian protection.

These developments have impacted deeply not only on the treatment of refugees and migrants by many European countries, but also caused a shift in popular attitudes towards ethnic and religious minorities in general that has contributed to the rise of right-wing political organizations across the region. In Denmark, France and elsewhere, this increased popularity was reflected in significant gains in national elections in 2015, as well as a rise in hate speech and hate crime towards Muslim communities in particular. However, other parties with a broader racist or xenophobic message, such as Greece's Golden Dawn or Hungary's Jobbik, which secured more than a fifth of all votes in April elections, have also been able to exploit popular frustrations at the continuing financial crisis to achieve support for campaigns targeting immigrants, Jews, Roma and other minorities.

In this context, concerns around integration, assimilation and cultural difference have become increasingly divisive, reflected at times in suspicion and surveillance of minority spaces such as mosques as well as an increased focus on language, social values and other issues. While these concerns have shaped official policy, they have also driven hate crime and hate speech across Europe. Indeed, many community members have been targeted solely on the basis of identifiable markers, while places of worship, graveyards, cultural centres and other sites have also been attacked. However, while Muslims in many countries appear to be increasingly targeted, ethnic minorities of African or Asian

origin, Roma and immigrant populations continue to experience high levels of verbal and physical assault.

France

France suffered two major attacks carried out by religious extremists during the year. On 7 January, an assault by armed gunmen on the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, allegedly in reprisal for publishing cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, was followed by a series of other attacks that culminated in shootings at a Jewish supermarket in the city's eastern suburbs on 9 January. With a total of 17 people killed, the attacks were among the worst security incidents the country had experienced in several decades. While some of the subsequent public discussion focused on the exclusion of France's Muslim minority and the ghettoization of its immigrant population in marginalized suburban *banlieues*, the attacks also served to reinforce existing religious and ethnic divisions within French society.

These issues were brought into even sharper relief in November, when a series of coordinated suicide bombings and shootings targeting cafés, restaurants, a music venue and near the *Stade de France* stadium left 130 people dead and injured more than 350. In the wake of the attacks, France declared a state of emergency and imposed a range of provisions that greatly extended police powers to undertake searches, house arrests and other actions. Amid heightened security, hate crimes against Muslims rose sharply in the following days, with 32 incidents recorded by France's National Observatory of Islamophobia across the country within just one week. But while the attacks undoubtedly intensified negative attitudes towards the country's Muslim minority, the community has long faced worsening hostility and a widespread feeling that they are not fully part of French society.

Popular intolerance towards Islam and broader concerns about France's immigrant population, attitudes rooted in both ethnic and religious discrimination, have been reinforced by the rise of far-right political groups. While this trend has been apparent for a while, reflected in the unprecedented number of seats won by the far-right Front National (FN) in local elections in



2014, the attacks contributed to a further surge in votes for the party during the December regional elections.

Nevertheless, the fears expressed by the FN around assimilation, diversity and multiculturalism have long had currency within mainstream French society, resulting at times in incidents of hate speech and hate crime targeted at dress and other markers.

One incident, captured on film in the wake of the Paris attacks, involved a woman on a train in Paris insulting a Muslim man because she regarded his attire – a beard, a small cap and a *qarmis*, a long garment traditionally worn by Muslim men – as 'illegal' and 'offensive'. The French state has a long established principle of *laïcité*, loosely signifying the separation of the state from religion. This has been reflected in various state policies, including the controversial ban on face coverings in public that came into force from April 2011 – a stipulation that prevents Muslim women from wearing a full-face veil, the *burqa* or *niqab*, in public. This was preceded by the 2004 law banning conspicuous

Above: Muslim women in France. *Baba1948*.

religious symbols at school, meaning female Muslim students were unable to wear a headscarf or *bijab* in class. Though not explicitly targeted at any one religion, in practice French Muslims, particularly girls, were most affected by the ban.

Though the ban has been justified by its supporters as a positive step to promote gender equality, arguing that many Muslim women wearing the *burqa* or *niqab* are coerced into doing so by other members of their community, others have argued that it has served to further isolate women in that situation who may be pressured into not appearing in public as a result. Furthermore, critics have argued that it has contributed to a broader climate of discrimination for Muslim women who wear face coverings, whether through choice or coercion. One example took place in December in Vénissieux, near Lyon, when the headmaster of the Jacques Brel secondary school reportedly asked a group of Muslim mothers to wait outside during a puppet show organized for their

children. Though the reason given was that they were wearing *hijab* and therefore were in breach of France's Charter for Secularity in School, the Charter in fact forbids only pupils from wearing religious symbols to school, while making an exception for accompanying parents and adults.

Another area that has proved divisive is diet, with many schools deciding during the year to stop offering pork-free menus in the name of *laïcité*. This approach, while receiving the support of some public officials – Jean-Paul Beneytou, mayor of the small town of Chilly-Mazarin, claims that it was simply a way to 'preserve public sector neutrality' – the effect has been to further segregate minority students. The families of Muslim and Jewish children who do not eat pork for religious reasons have complained when pork main dishes are featured on the menu, as their children are no longer offered a different option.

Social prejudice in France towards its Muslim minority has also shaped its response to the current refugee crisis in Europe, with thousands of refugees and asylum seekers from largely Islamic countries like Syria now seeking sanctuary in the country. This has led to increasing tensions in certain areas, particularly the coastal town of Calais, as some locals have set up vigilante groups that have reportedly carried out attacks on refugees. In early 2016, demolition works in the open-air, state-sanctioned Calais refugee camp dubbed 'the Jungle' commenced. Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International warned that this action risked making people already vulnerable to social and economic issues even more so. The camp's makeshift church and mosque were also razed to the ground, despite not being included in the original demolition plans, sparking anger and indignation among the camp's population.

Besides being the European country with the largest Muslim minority community, France is also home to approximately 500,000 Jewish people – the largest Jewish community in Europe. However, a significant number have been emigrating in recent years, partly in response to the perception that they are no longer welcome. While the attack on a kosher supermarket in eastern Paris shortly after the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in January, where 15

Jewish people were held hostage and four were killed, was particularly extreme, hate crime and hate speech more generally has reportedly been on the rise. According to figures released by the Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPCJ), anti-Semitic acts in France continued throughout 2015, including death threats, online hate speech and physical assaults on people wearing the *kipph* and other religious markers. They recorded 808 anti-Semitic acts during the year, although SPCJ also noted that many victims were hesitant to file complaints after others had recently been killed on account of their faith. Perhaps as a result of these incidents and of an increasingly widespread feeling of being 'unwelcome', approximately 8,000 French Jewish people migrated to Israel in 2015.

Another minority that struggles with social exclusion is France's Roma, who face discrimination in many areas of their lives, particularly housing. The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) reported in July that an average of 150 Roma were evicted by the French authorities every week during the first half of the year. Anti-Roma sentiment in France remains pervasive. During the year, several bus drivers in Montpellier declined to pick up Roma children on their way to school, for example, while in a small municipality near Paris, several newly enrolled Romanian Roma pupils were offered to be taught in a separate building away from any school. The right-wing mayor of Champlan refused to bury a two-month-old baby because of his Roma identity, reportedly stating that graveyards are 'for those who pay taxes'. The mayor of a neighbouring town stepped in and gave permission for the burial to take place there; he called his colleague's decision 'incomprehensible'.

Georgia

Preliminary results from Georgia's 2014 census, the first in more than a decade, were released during the year, showing that the country's population as at the beginning of 2015 was just 3.7 million, compared to a little below 4.4 million in 2002. Though the official figures are widely disputed, they nevertheless indicate that Georgia's population has been

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Estonia's Seto people host Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture in Obinitsa village

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Seto are indigenous to the territories of what is now south-east Estonia and north-west Russia. But while in Russia Seto are recognized as a small indigenous people, in Estonia their status has not been formally recognized, despite their self-identification. With a total population of 12,000, of whom 2,000 live in Setomaa, their traditional territory, Seto have a unique identity sustained by their own language, heritage and identity. An example of this is Seto polyphonic '*leelo*' singing, a tradition included on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's global list of intangible

cultural heritage and an important source of pride for the community.

The year 2015 was a remarkable one for Seto people as one of their cultural centres, the village of Obinitsa, held the title of Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture. This annual award was developed by the Youth Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (MAFUN) with the aim of strengthening the common identity of Finno-Ugric peoples, to which Seto belong, raising awareness of kindred Finno-Ugric communities and languages, as well as stimulating local development in different Finno-Ugric regions. Loosely modelled after the European Capitals of Culture programme, it has been adapted to reflect Finno-Ugric realities. This means a focus on rural areas as the primary repositories of the living Finno-Ugric heritage.

As the Seto village of Obinitsa has a long history of collaboration with other Finno-Ugric peoples, the title was well-deserved. The central objective was to mutually learn and teach about different aspects of cultural heritage between communities: for

Below: Obinitsa's delegation in Petseri, Russian Federation. Helju Majak.



example, Seto masters taught representatives of other Finno-Ugric peoples the community's handicrafts, cooking, singing and dancing, while at the same time learning from their counterparts. These exchanges led to a number of new creative economy initiatives, including in the field of tourism development. During the year, over 60 cultural events – exhibitions, workshops, concerts, film festivals and much more – were held. A new art gallery and a Finno-Ugric flag square were opened. As a result, this tiny village of 168 residents hosted over 25,000 visitors.

In addition to holding traditional cultural events, Obinitsa became an arena to discuss a number of topics of central importance for Finno-Ugric communities, many of whom are facing a dramatic decline in the number of people who can speak their languages and the threat of assimilation into dominant cultures. A conference on ethno-futurism (an international movement with Estonian, including Seto, roots) and a Forum of Finno-Ugric Villages are just a few examples of how Obinitsa served as both a cultural and intellectual centre for the Finno-Ugric world. A key factor of Obinitsa's success as Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture was effective communication about the initiative both in Estonia and other Finno-Ugric countries and regions. This was accomplished through, for example, a multimedia website, an active social media presence, webcasts of video clips documenting nearly every programme event and a special Setomaa theme page on Estonia's most popular web portal.

While Obinitsa also faced a number of challenges during the year, such as mobilizing the entire village population and ensuring sufficient financing to support the year's ambitious programme, the end result was a remarkable success, and an inspiration both for Seto people and other kindred Finno-Ugric peoples. The initiative is an impressive example of how cultural heritage can be placed in the service of not only artistic and intellectual expression, but also further socio-economic development and broader recognition of an indigenous community. ■

shrinking. Demographic decline is not a new phenomenon in Georgia, however: in its early years of independence, a large number of Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Russians and other minorities left the country amid fears of rising ethno-nationalism, economic insecurity and the escalation of civil conflict in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and then Abkhazia, now a *de facto* separatist republic. While many have left the country in the years since, emigration levels have been disproportionately high among minorities, meaning their representation within Georgia has declined markedly. Despite significant progress in certain areas, including a number of recent measures to support the full participation of minorities in public life, the country's history of division continues to be felt to this day, reflected in ongoing tensions over minority languages, religions and cultures. Religiously motivated violence and an inadequate response from law-enforcement agencies to address the problem have also persisted, despite efforts to promote integration.

As Georgia is a largely Orthodox Christian country, the Orthodox Church's resurgence since the end of Soviet rule has heavily influenced the development of Georgian nationalism. In addition to widespread popular support, the Church's position has also been strengthened through a 2002 agreement with the state that provides official recognition and a range of benefits that include tax relief, exemptions and a significant role in the country's education system. Minority religions, in contrast, are often seen as a threat to Georgian identity, particularly when a specific ethnicity is perceived to have ties with nearby countries – for example, the description of Georgian Muslims in some media outlets as 'Turks'. In some state schools, particularly in the autonomous republic of Adjara bordering Turkey, Muslim students have reportedly been stigmatized and even at times faced pressure to convert – a situation that, as described by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) in its 2015 opinion, undermines the legal principle of the school as a 'neutral space where religious indoctrination, proselytism and forced assimilation are forbidden'.

As a separatist republic still lacking

international recognition, language and identity are also strongly contested issues in Abkhazia, which declared independence from Georgia following its secession in the 1990s. In this context, ethnic Georgians living in the region are still marginalized from public life. This is especially evident in Gali, one of the most volatile areas near the border of Abkhazia, where officially only instruction in Abkhaz and Russian is permitted at the pre-school and primary level, meaning that Georgian language speakers are denied the right to receive education in their mother tongue. Some families have reportedly been forced to move to the Zugdidi region in western Georgia so that their children can attend Georgian schools.

While the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia and other government bodies have taken steps to protect important minority heritage sites such as mosques, as well as provide some support to contemporary cultural activities such as theatrical productions in minority languages, the contribution of Georgia's minority traditions to the country's heritage is often undervalued. Furthermore, while many religious and cultural monuments belonging to minorities are in need of immediate rehabilitation, recent research has suggested that less than 1 per cent of funding provided by cities and towns to religious organizations, including for the preservation of buildings, went to non-Orthodox groups. Furthermore, in parts of the country the construction of new places of worship by minority communities is still constrained by regulations and local resistance. During 2015, Muslims in Batumi, the capital of Adjara region, continued to be denied permission to build a second mosque in the city – an ongoing issue – obstructed by nationalist politicians who have attacked the proposal as a threat to Georgian identity. Other religious minorities, such as Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses, have also experienced barriers in securing permission to construct churches or Kingdom Halls. These and other restrictions highlight the continued need, as emphasized by the FCNM Advisory Committee during the year, for authorities to promote the 'integration of society while fully valuing and respecting its ethnic, cultural, religious, and language diversity'.

Greece

Greece's protracted economic crisis, which showed little sign of abating during 2015, has fuelled the rise of far-right parties, such as Golden Dawn, with a strong anti-immigrant focus. In recent years, these organizations have exploited popular frustration and insecurity through xenophobic political rhetoric, in the process winning a significant portion of votes. Despite efforts to clamp down on its activities during the year – including the commencement of a trial in April of 69 Golden Dawn members on charges of participating in violence and criminality – Golden Dawn still managed to secure 7 per cent of votes and 18 seats in the September elections. The areas where Golden Dawn appeared to enjoy the most popularity were those most affected by Europe's refugee crisis, with at least 800,000 mostly Syrian refugees reaching Greece by sea. The islands of Kos and Lesbos, for example, which received a large influx of refugees in the first half of the year, saw votes for Golden Dawn almost double in September. The European Union's (EU) registration system on the islands has been criticized for implementing a tiered system that reportedly privileges Syrian nationals over refugees from other countries. Meanwhile Afghan families were reportedly receiving just one full meal a day and were allowed only one month's leave to stay in the country, compared to the six months granted to Syrians. This system, apparently designed on the assumption that other nationalities had weaker asylum claims than Syrian nationals, was reportedly leading to tensions between refugees from different countries. On a positive note, however, many islanders from Lesbos received worldwide praise for their humanitarian efforts in helping to rescue hundreds of refugees throughout the year and by giving them food and water. Petitions have been set up to nominate some of these residents as candidates for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Besides targeting migrants, Golden Dawn has a policy of physically and verbally attacking certain ethnic and religious groups, such as the country's Jewish minority. In October 2015, three Golden Dawn European Parliament members (MEPs) published a video online containing anti-Semitic and anti-migrant content, accusing the Merkel government in Germany of supporting a 'Zionist'

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Using culture to break down stereotypes of Italy's Roma

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Italy's Roma are among the country's poorest and most marginalized communities, with a long history of discrimination that has only intensified in recent years. A recent poll by the Pew Research Center found that as many as 85 per cent of Italians hold negative views towards Roma, reflected in high levels of hate crime and enduring stereotypes against the community.

Today it is estimated that around 180,000 Roma are in Italy, 35,000 of whom are forced to

live in decrepit and dangerous camps at the edges of towns without access to sanitation, running water or other services. These settlements, besides being under constant threat of eviction by local authorities, have regularly been attacked by racist groups, with politicians themselves at times encouraging the violence. Following the announcement in March 2015 by Pope Francis of the 2016 Jubilee of Mercy in Rome – a major religious celebration expected to bring thousands of pilgrims and tourists to the capital – local authorities used the event as a pretext to carry out further forced evictions of Roma settlements, which tripled to an average of nine evictions per month. Far-right and xenophobic political parties in Italy – especially the Lega Nord (Northern League) – took to Italian TV and social media to

Below: Roma and non-Roma children perform a play in an Italian school about the history of Roma people. 21 Luglio.



campaign against Roma settlements, with Matteo Salvini, leader of the party, urging citizens to 'raze Roma camps with bulldozers'. This sparked vehement reactions from left-wing parties, which rejected Salvini's proposal and called for more effective and inclusive actions to integrate the Roma minority.

While strengthening legal protections for the community is an important step in improving the situation of Roma, cultural expression and interaction also have an important role in addressing popular attitudes and misconceptions about the community. As a result, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on advocacy and social emancipation for Roma in Italy have developed programmes that explore the potential of the arts to engage different communities, break down barriers and enable those without a public platform to express themselves. Among other activities, the organization 21 Luglio previously developed a programme that seeks to address the barriers and discrimination that Roma frequently experience at school by bringing them together with non-Roma children to engage in dance and theatre – an accessible and effective way to bring different communities together. Another rights group, Romà Onlus, also works to empower Roma through teaching Roma history and customs to raise awareness among other Italians of the community's rich heritage. One project, for example, has focused on traditional Roma cuisine as a way of engaging non-Roma. Initiatives such as these can be powerful platforms to break down barriers and counter negative representations of Roma disseminated by media, right-wing politicians and racist groups. One of the challenges that Italy's Roma face is that, since they are widely ostracized, the community is largely segregated from other Italians – a fact that can enable harmful or misleading representations to take root. Cultural engagement, by raising awareness and promoting interaction, not only helps to undermine hate speech but can also enhance the community's sense of identity. ■

conspiracy against Europe. Anti-Semitism is not confined to Golden Dawn alone, however: the Coordination Forum for Countering anti-Semitism recorded several anti-Semitic incidents during 2015. Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis was depicted as a 'Jewish loan shark' in a cartoon that appeared in the Greek daily newspaper *Ta Nea*. In June, anti-Semitic graffiti warning that 'the Jews are murderers' appeared in Kavala and the town's Holocaust memorial was desecrated, while in October one of Athens' main Jewish cemeteries was vandalized with sprayed swastikas and insults against Jews. The anti-Semitic group Combat 18 Hellas later claimed responsibility for the attack by posting pictures on its website.

As is the case in many European countries, the estimated 265,000 Roma in Greece regularly experience marginalization and stigmatization. Although the government's National Strategy for Social Integration of Roma focuses on improving the integration and living conditions of Roma, the community still faces high levels of physical segregation, discrimination and negative stereotypes. In October 2015, after a two-year trial, charges against Roma couple Christos Salis and Eleftheria Dimopoulou – accused of stealing a 4-year-old child named Maria – were dropped, when the court ruled that evidence against the couple was inconclusive. This is a significant step forward in the struggle to debunk myths and stereotypes attached to the Roma minority, such as the one that accuses them of kidnapping children.

In May 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mutuma Ruteere, declared that 'Roma of Greece, while being for the vast majority Greek citizens, continue to face discrimination and remain economically and socially vulnerable.' The most concerning aspects are highlighted as being housing, social care and health services. As most Roma settlements are not connected to Greece's national power grid, it is impossible for Roma people to register with local authorities as they are unable to provide gas or electricity bills as proof of residence. For the same reason, Roma children living in informal camps are not able to complete primary

school education. A 2015 study conducted by Antigone, an anti-racism information centre in Thessaloniki, analysed the discrimination that can also take place within Roma communities: varying educational attainment, financial status, religious beliefs and cultural practices are said to be key contributing factors, with Roma women facing gender-based discrimination as well.

Russian Federation

Russia's annexation of Crimea in early 2014 and its subsequent support of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine has had considerable impact within Russia itself. To some extent, it has fragmented the Russian nationalist movement between pro-government and opposition groups, meaning that public events such as rallies have attracted fewer supporters than in previous years. Despite this, three 'Russian marches', as well as other nationalistic public events, were held on 4 November 2015, the Day of National Unity. And while public actions focusing on the conflict in Ukraine have generally decreased since 2014, Russian nationalists have intensified the military training of their recruits. Anti-extremism legislation also continued to be used during the course of the year to silence dissent on Russia's involvement in Ukraine. Among others, charges of incitement to ethnic hatred were brought against the director of Moscow's Library of Ukrainian Literature, Natalia Sharina, allegedly for disseminating 'anti-Russian propaganda', as well as against a shop assistant, an ethnic Russian, who had shared social media links to Ukrainian television programmes on the Ukrainian crisis.

While the Russian authorities have been repressive of minority and indigenous organizations in Crimea, as described in the Ukraine section, state officials have also cracked down on freedom of expression and assembly in Russia itself. For example, on the anniversary of the Tatars' defence of the Kazan Khanate before Ivan the Terrible's conquest in 1552, a commemorative event on 10 November in Russia's Republic of Tatarstan was partially disrupted as the demonstrators were prevented from congregating by the walls of Kazan's Kremlin, as is traditionally done. Two Tatar leaders were reportedly prevented from attending as their car was stopped by the police, allegedly

for carrying narcotics. The demonstrators called for Tatarstan's sovereignty, education in Tatar language and the freeing of Rafis Kashapov, a community representative who received a three-year prison sentence in September for criticizing Russia's policies in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

In March 2015 the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Committee adopted its 'Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the Russian Federation'. The Human Rights Committee expressed its concern at 'manifestations of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism as well as other racist and xenophobic acts', including attacks by Cossack patrols. According to data from the Moscow-based SOVA centre, between January and the end of November 2015 nine people were killed and 65 injured as a result of ethnically motivated violence – a reduction from 2014, however, when 27 people were killed and 123 people injured. Attacks have continued to target predominantly persons of 'non-Slavic appearance': Roma and people originating from the Caucasus, Central Asia and Africa.

Migration law continued to be hostile to migrants: complex regulations for registration and for obtaining work permits, and often the absence of a permanent address, tend to force migrants into a precarious position of illegality or semi-illegality. Problems with registration have affected even those who benefit from a visa-free regime with Russia, such as migrants from Kyrgyzstan, who make up the majority of Russia's migrants. Due to regulations introduced in 2014, migrants from these countries could not remain in Russia for more than 90 days in each 180-day period; many then resorted to crossing the border with a neighbouring country and then re-entering Russia. Violations of migration law were followed by periods in detention centres in extremely poor conditions, then deportation. There were instances of foreign children being deported from Russia without their parents, after they were separated from them during police raids.

Law enforcement officials have also undertaken ethnic profiling, resulting in persons of 'non-Slavic appearance' being disproportionately affected by identity checks, extortion of bribes, as well as harassment, arrests and physical violence. From January 2015, migrants wishing to obtain

a work permit have been required to pass an extensive test on Russian language, history and civic rights (including questions on Crimea's 'unification' with Russia), as well as paying higher fees for permits and other documents. The bureaucratic and complex procedures of migration and refugee law have also contributed to the precarious living conditions of the numerous Ukrainian refugees fleeing the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The right to freedom of religion of some minorities in Russia is at times restricted, through arbitrary application of legislation and discrimination by the government, judges and the police. Among others, those most affected are some Protestant and 'non-traditional' religious groups (such as Jehovah's Witnesses), given that their teachings are often regarded as a possible threat to stability. There have been instances of harassment of Muslim communities practising non-traditional forms of Islam, particularly in the North Caucasus. Some Muslims and members of other religious communities have been detained and tried on criminal charges of extremism.

The authorities continue to maintain tight control over the publication of any materials that are thought to contradict the government's official stance. In 2015 the federal authorities continued to update the Federal List of Extremist Materials: according to SOVA centre, it was updated 26 times in the first six months of 2015, with the addition of 305 items (from 2,562 to 2,867), at twice the rate of the first half of 2014. The banned materials were linked to subversion even when they did not seem to pose a threat to public order, as there is a lack of clear criteria on the classification of documents as extremist. The banned materials included religious texts, such as Islamic and Jehovah's Witnesses' literature.

Another way that the state exerts considerable control over civil society is through restrictions on the funding of Russian NGOs by foreign organizations, including those protecting minority and indigenous rights. Law No. 129-FZ (known as the law on 'undesirable' foreign organizations) was adopted on 23 May 2015: it targets foreign or international NGOs implementing 'undesirable' activities (representing a threat to the country's 'constitutional order, its defence potential or national security').

The law foresees the banning of organizations engaging in such activities and the prosecution of Russian activists or organizations involved with them, including those in receipt of their funding. The provisions thus threaten the funds of minority and indigenous organizations from foreign entities. Obstacles to international funding continue the trend of 2012 provisions that require Russian NGOs to register as 'foreign agents' when they receive funds from abroad and implement 'political activities'. For example, the organization Nuori Karjala (Young Karelia), which promoted the languages and cultures of the Finno-Ugric indigenous communities of the Republic of Karelia, was included by the Ministry of Justice in the register of 'foreign agents'.

As a result the organization decided to cease activities in August 2015. The only non-Russian institution from which the organization had received funding was the UN, which had given a grant of US\$10,000 for an education project.

Russia's indigenous communities continue to be marginalized and remain vulnerable to land rights violations due to the state's failure to designate specific 'territories of traditional nature use' (as foreseen by Russian law). There was limited consultation with indigenous peoples on matters of interest to their communities during the year and insufficient access to effective remedies in case of rights violations. In some cases, the judiciary has seemingly persecuted indigenous human rights defenders. For example, Evenk leader Sergey Nikiforov, who opposed gold mining in Evenk ancestral territories, was sentenced in September 2015 to five years in a penal colony for allegedly accepting a bribe. He had led the protests of the reindeer-herding Evenk community against gold mining in the Amur region, denouncing its effect on environmental conditions and the health of the local population.

Indigenous sacred sites, such as lakes and mountains associated with religious practices, have been violated for activities such as resource extraction and construction. For example, one such case led to damage, through mining activities, to the mountain of Karagai-Nash (Russian: Lysaya Gora) – a place of worship of the indigenous Shor people, located near the village of Kazas, in Kemerovo Oblast, in south-

west Siberia. The mining operations started in 2012 around the village, forcing most of the village's residents to relocate by 2014, leaving some missing or homeless. They were further denied access to a cemetery where their ancestors were buried, while the village was ultimately completely demolished.

Turkey

The year 2015 saw some signs of progress for minorities in Turkey, reflected in the election of a number of new members of parliament (MPs) from minority backgrounds, including the country's Armenian, Roma, Syriac and Yezidi communities, in general elections in June and November. However, significant challenges remain in terms of minority rights, as highlighted during the year in a report by Minority Rights Group International and the History Foundation of Turkey documenting the continued discrimination against minorities in education. Among other challenges, minority students face exclusionary curricula and the absence of mother-tongue instruction for many communities. Only children of Jewish and Christian families may apply to opt out of compulsory classes in Sunni Islam, but the process can be cumbersome and in many schools alternatives are not provided for them. They can still find themselves having to remain in religious instruction classes or, alternatively, having to wander around the school premises – making them vulnerable to taunts from pupils and even teachers.

In July, after a two-year ceasefire, the conflict that has lasted for decades and claimed over 40,000 lives between Turkey's security forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) resumed, bringing significant attacks and casualties on both sides. Responding to the renewed hostilities, the government banned Kurdish demonstrations and restricted access to related websites. Turkish authorities have launched a heavy security crackdown since the outbreak of the conflict, including the imposition of an extended curfew to allegedly contain PKK fighters in the predominantly Kurdish city of Cizre in September that left residents without electricity and with limited access to food, water and medical treatment.

Kurdish organizations, businesses and

Right: Kurds at a mosque in Diyarbakir, Turkey. *Carpetblogger.*

individuals have also reportedly been targeted by nationalists. Reacting against deadly attacks by the PKK on 6 and 8 September, offices belonging to the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Ankara and the southern city of Alanya were torched. Elsewhere, too, the conflict reignited inter-communal tensions and led to a spate of attacks against Kurds. In Muğla, a Kurdish farmer was physically assaulted by locals and forced to kiss a statue of Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish state and an important nationalist figurehead, while in Istanbul a 21-year-old Kurdish man was reportedly stabbed to death by a gang who had overheard him speaking Kurdish on the phone.

In November, Tahir Elçi, a renowned Kurdish human rights lawyer and peace advocate, was murdered in the south-eastern city of Diyarbakir. An estimated 100,000 people attended his funeral, with his death seen as symbolizing a further setback for efforts to secure a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Elçi was killed while attempting to raise awareness about the cultural damage caused by fighting between Turkish and PKK forces in Sur, a historic district in Diyarbakir. Sur is predominantly home to Kurds and some Armenians, Assyrians and Yezidis, with a wealth of ancient and irreplaceable heritage that has been devastated in the conflict. With the violence intensifying in December, by early 2016 hundreds of shops had been destroyed and more than 30,000 residents forced to flee the area. While the government has promised it will rebuild the district, many locals are suspicious of its intentions as Sur had previously been earmarked for redevelopment, with the state's housing body undertaking demolition work in 2011 that was eventually halted due to strong local opposition. Critics fear that the Turkish authorities will use Sur's reconstruction as an opportunity to reshape the city in line with their economic and security agendas.

Conflict is not the only threat to Turkey's diverse cultural heritage, as development programmes such as the controversial Ilisu dam have undermined the way of life of many communities and resulted in evictions,



displacement and resettlement. According to some reports, the dam could displace as many as 78,000 people, most of whom are Kurdish, and impact directly on another 30,000 nomadic people. One of the main sites to be affected is Hasankeyf, a largely Kurdish city with a rich heritage of ancient ruins and caves.

Another marginalized community in Turkey is its Alevi population, the country's largest religious minority, who subscribe to a distinct form of Islam that differs from that practised by the Sunni majority. An important milestone for the community came with the announcement in December of a range of expanded rights for Alevi, including legal recognition of *cemevis*, their houses of worship – a long-standing area of discrimination. This was preceded some months earlier by the visitation of an Alevi religious leader or *dede* to an Alevi prisoner in May – the first time an Alevi religious leader had been officially allowed to meet with a community member in jail. Despite this progress, however, problems persist, with reports in June of Alevi homes in the provinces of Elazığ and Kocaeli

being daubed with paint. Behzat Hazır, head of the Elazığ Human Rights Association's (İHD) branch, called on people to remain calm as the tagging was intended to create 'an environment of fear and panic, making people anxious and deepening the religious discrimination'.

Land and property rights remain a significant barrier for religious minorities, a situation that has seen many important cultural heritage sites destroyed, appropriated or neglected. In Turkey's assessment for joining the EU, released in March, the European Commission called on the government to protect minority rights, including to 'allow the reopening of the Halki Greek Orthodox Seminary and lift all obstacles to its proper functioning', ensure that property and educational rights of the Greek minorities on Imbros and Tenedos were safeguarded, and resolve 'outstanding issues related to the restitution of land' belonging to Syriacs, a religious minority, including the Mor Gabriel monastery and other sites. In many cases, the appropriation of legal land deeds decades ago has left important minority sites vulnerable

to demolition or redevelopment. In May, for instance, the Kamp Armen orphanage – a site of great importance to the Armenian minority community and once a thriving cultural area before the state annulled the foundation's ownership of the land in 1983 – began to be demolished. However, after extensive protests and vigils brought the demolition to a halt, the landowner agreed to donate the site to the Gedikpaşa Armenian Protestant Church, which plans to rebuild it.

Turkey's Roma continue to suffer the effects of deep-seated social exclusion, commonly having to leave school early and work in the informal sector to help their families survive, leaving them unable to access public services. The community is frequently targeted with hate speech as well as physical violence. In January, for example, in the western city of Denizli, a 10-year-old Roma boy was killed by a landlord who accused him of theft, sparking clashes between locals and Roma. Discrimination also occurs at an official level. In July, an investigation was launched after police officers reportedly chanted discriminatory slogans during a street march in Keşan, in Edirne province. This followed multiple raids by hundreds of anti-riot police officers in a number of Roma neighbourhoods less than a fortnight before, in which 45 people were detained. The raids were criticized by Özcan Purçu, an MP of Roma origin, who accused police of using Roma neighbourhoods as 'training sites' and fuelling ethnic discrimination.

The Turkish authorities have made some efforts to support greater integration and better access to services for the Roma population, including a US\$12 million fund to invest in relevant projects in Roma communities between 2014 and 2016. In February, the governor of the province of Edirne announced the establishment of an Ottoman army band, or *mehter*, made up of Roma musicians and the training of Roma children as *hafiz*, reciters of the *Qur'an* – an announcement welcomed by Roma representatives as an important source of recognition for the community. Nevertheless, far more systematic efforts are needed to address the marginalization of the community, particularly Roma women. Though gender-based violence is an acute problem for women in general in

Turkey, as well as under-age marriage, these issues particularly affect girls and women from marginalized communities such as Roma. Uçan Süpürge, a Turkish women's rights organization, estimates that one in five of the Roma girls in an area north-west of Istanbul were married by the time they had turned 15.

These issues also affect refugee women and girls, who are especially vulnerable to exploitation due to war trauma and their financial dependency. Of the estimated 2.2 million Syrian refugees based in Turkey by the end of 2015, many face added disadvantage due to their belonging to minorities such as Syrian Kurds. Dom refugees, another ethnic minority group linked to the Roma with a distinct language, Domari, face particular discrimination due to entrenched prejudices and hostile media coverage of 'Syrian gypsies'. Refugees from the community have given accounts of harassment by both Turkish soldiers and other Syrian refugees. More generally, there is increased concern about the exploitation faced by the estimated 250,000 Syrian refugees working illegally in order to survive, lacking decent wages, employment rights and access to legal recourse.

Despite Turkey allowing access to its public school system, Human Rights Watch reported in November that over 400,000 Syrian refugee children mostly residing outside refugee camps are unable to attend school due to language barriers, issues with integration and a lack of resources to meet related costs such as travel.

Ukraine

Throughout 2015, Ukraine remained in a situation of protracted conflict, first triggered by the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia in early 2014 and the subsequent military escalation by Russian-supported separatists and Russian troops in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine. Following the Second Minsk Ceasefire Agreement on 11 February 2015, the frontline stabilized and the level of military operations reduced. Nevertheless, despite these negotiations, violence in the east of the country continued throughout the year. Furthermore, the agreement and subsequent talks failed to include essential minority rights protections in the parts of eastern Ukraine that

are controlled by pro-Russian forces, nor address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Crimea.

As a result of the conflict, more than 1.4 million civilians from eastern Ukraine and Crimea are now officially registered as internally displaced persons (IDPs). Around 750,000 IDPs are concentrated in non-occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, meaning they are still in practice residing in the conflict zone but have registered to preserve their legal status and secure state aid. Though more than 100,000 are based in Kyiv city, and a sizeable number in other parts of central and, to a lesser extent, western Ukraine, the majority of the IDPs are based in eastern parts of the country. A large proportion of these IDPs originate from the Russian-speaking urban areas of eastern Ukraine and are now residing in Ukrainian-speaking territory, often in rural areas. For a long period, the Ukrainian government provided minimal assistance to IDPs, many of whom found themselves in an administrative limbo due to their uncertain legal status. However, following a veto by President Petro Poroshenko of proposed IDP legislation in November 2015, a revised law was passed by parliament in December 2015 and approved by Poroshenko in January 2016. Recognizing the long-term reality of internal displacement for these groups, the legislation was intended to provide better access to legal documentation and essential services to those who had fled the fighting.

The Ukrainian authorities tried to negotiate during the year with Russia on the enforcement of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the conflict zone. In August 2015, the government lodged an interstate claim before the European Court on Human Rights (ECtHR) against Russia, alleging systematic violations of the rights of ethnic Ukrainians, minorities and indigenous people to freedom of religion, expression, peaceful assembly and association. According to the submission, there have been cases of disappearances and arbitrary arrests of members of the Crimean Tatar indigenous people as well as opposition activists. The Ukrainian government accuses armed groups controlled by Russia of torture and ill-treatment. This followed two earlier applications concerning

Crimea and eastern Ukraine, lodged before the ECtHR by the Ukrainian government against Russia.

In other Ukrainian regions during the year there was little in the way of substantive change in relation to minority rights. State financing of media for traditional minorities in their own languages was in fact reduced during 2015, while a survey of the implementation of the Strategy of Defence and Integration for the Roma National Minority, adopted in 2013, suggested that there had so far been little in the way of concrete impact for the community. In these circumstances, the problems facing traditional minorities in frontier zones, such as Bulgarians, Gagauzes and Moldovans in Odessa, and Hungarians and Romanians in Transcarpatia, are ongoing. A positive step for minorities nevertheless took place in Transcarpatia, where the Ukrainian Party of Hungarians (UPH) participated successfully in local elections in October 2015. Though no special quota system was in place, UPH took eight seats (12.5 per cent of the total) on the regional council and secured a significant number of deputy places in the region.

Religious relations in Ukraine have also become a hostage of the conflict. After the election of the new Metropolitan in August 2014, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the Moscow Patriarchate is increasingly perceived to be influenced by the Russian government. The other UOC of the Kyiv Patriarchate, as well as the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, support Ukraine in the conflict, but now struggle to operate in the territories controlled by Russia. On the Ukrainian mainland, conflicts in local communities between followers of the different UOC Patriarchates have become more frequent since 2014. Tensions in traditional Muslim communities have also increased after the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Crimea declared its public support in November 2014 for the Russian occupying authorities and against the Crimean Tatar *Mejlis* as well as other activists supporting the anti-Russian blockade.

Crimea

Since the forcible annexation of Crimea by Russian forces in 2014, the region – while legally remaining part of Ukrainian territory – has

been under the *de facto* control of the Russian authorities. The *de facto* authorities have initiated a clampdown on the Crimean Tatar population, which has long struggled for recognition as indigenous people in the region. The *Mejlis*, the representative body of the Crimean Tatars, which denounced the Russian annexation as illegal, has been virtually forced to stop its social and political activities given the pressure placed upon its members, who have faced intimidation, detention and charges of extremism. A variety of pro-Russian 'self-defence' militias have also intimidated Crimean Tatars and other people who tend to hold pro-Ukrainian views. There have been instances of abductions and disappearances, including of Crimean Tatars.

The *de facto* authorities have also cracked down on cultural gatherings by Crimean Tatars, especially commemorative events. This affected events that the *Mejlis* attempted to organize during the year, such as a traditional ceremony commemorating the deportation of Crimean Tatars on 18 May that was denied permission in 2015 on public safety grounds. Instead, the *de facto* authorities held their own event with loyal Crimean Tatar organizations. While other key celebrations were also cancelled, such as Crimean Tatar Flag Day in June, events initiated by Crimean Tatars but with a pro-Russia orientation were authorized.

All seven Ukrainian-medium schools that operated in Crimea at the time of the annexation have been closed; in other schools, Ukrainian classes were generally replaced with Russian language and literature. Some parents have reportedly been too intimidated to request instruction in Ukrainian. Provision has been made for education in Crimean Tatar, yet in practice the right to receive an education in this language has been restricted.

Aspects of Ukrainian cultural and religious identity have also been repressed in Crimea. As is the case with Crimean Tatar flags, the display of Ukrainian flags at events has led to interrogations, fines and prosecution for extremism. Activists of the Ukrainian Cultural Centre have also been arrested, fined and sentenced to community work. In February, the Museum of Ukrainian *Vyshivanka* (traditional Ukrainian embroidery) in Crimea was closed, and in March three people

were fined for celebrating *Vyshivanka* Day, a date honouring traditional Ukrainian embroidery. An event on the 201st birthday of Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, also in March, had to be held in the outskirts of Simferopol as permission for it to be held in the city centre was denied. There were instances of harassment against religious minorities too, such as the UOC, the Greek-Catholic Church and the Muslim community, including the seizure of places of worship. The *de facto* authorities have also targeted pro-Ukraine NGOs and silenced independent human rights organizations.

Since March 2014, Ukrainian channels in Crimea have been jammed and replaced with broadcasts originating from the Russian Federation. The Russia-controlled media has presented a highly skewed portrayal of the events in the peninsula, while websites providing independent information have at times been blocked. All Crimean Tatar media outlets but one – the newspaper *Yeni Dunya* – were forced to close down on 1 April 2015, as they could not re-register under Russian law (as required by the *de facto* authorities in April 2014). While Russian-language media outlets generally received new licences, Crimean Tatar-language media outlets – such as the news agency QHA, the television channel ATR, as well as the children's television channel Lale – were denied re-registration, despite repeated attempts. The denials were routinely linked to technicalities, leaving the media outlets no option but to close down to avoid facing substantial fines and criminal charges. Instances of harassment of minority media in Crimea include a raid on the Crimean Tatar television channel ATR on 26 January 2015 by an armed police unit that confiscated materials, as well as issuing warnings about broadcasting 'extremist' information.

Even before the Russian annexation, Crimean Tatars have long struggled to achieve formal status as an indigenous people. While Russia still does not recognize their claim, in March 2014 the Ukrainian parliament finally adopted a resolution designating Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people. However, Ukraine has subsequently failed to adopt the national legislation on indigenous peoples that was promised to Crimean Tatars. Even a draft

bill, recognizing the non-numerous peoples of the Crimea, such as Crimean Karaites and Krymchaks, as indigenous peoples, fell short of being passed by the Ukrainian parliament in June 2015. ■