Regional Overview: Europe 12-18 January 2020

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Last week, demonstrations picked up in Russia and Ukraine, but remained well below the high levels seen before the holiday period. Demonstrations in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe continued, with most events taking place in Montenegro and Greece.

Serbian Orthodox Christians in **Montenegro** protested for the fourth week against the new Religious Freedom Law. Several dozen protests took place across the country. Several protests in support of the Church were also held in **Serbia** and **Bosnia and Herzegovina.**

Students protested in **Kosovo**, criticizing political parties for failing to form a government, three months after the election (Balkan Insight, 14 January 2020).

In **Bulgaria**, protests spread over an ongoing water crisis, in which low water levels have led to a lack of drinking water in several towns. The government is accused of deliberate mismanagement, allowing water to be siphoned off for industrial use. Emergency measures and the resignation of the Minister of Environment and Water, earlier this month, have not relieved the pressure on the government to act as the situation continues to deteriorate (Balkan Insight, 21 January 2020).

In **Greece**, the overcrowded migrant camps continue to be a source for disorder and violence. The second deadly stabbing between migrants in three weeks took place in the Moria camp, leading to further protests by occupants over camp conditions. In several towns, citizens protested over the bad treatment of migrants, while other citizens protested against housing migrants in their area (Ekathimerini, 18 January 2020).

In **Cyprus**, a large crowd of Turkish-Cypriots protested poor road conditions leading to fatalities and the steep rise of road taxes. Mobilized through a grass-roots social media campaign, protesters voiced general distrust of politicians, labor unions and civil society organizations (LGC News, 16 January 2020).

In **Russia**, President Vladimir Putin proposed a set of major constitutional reforms during his annual state-of-the-nation speech (Meduza, 15 January 2020). Shortly after, Russia's entire ministerial cabinet resigned, including the Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev, who was subsequently replaced by the relatively unknown technocrat Maxim Mishustin. Commentators believe the move is to ensure Putin a place of power after his second presidential term ends in 2024 (Atlantic Council, 15 January 2020, Meduza, 15 January 2020). These developments triggered a series of one-person protests in Moscow (Meduza, 18 January 2020), with further larger protests expected to take place in the coming weeks.

In **Ukraine**, demonstration events picked up after the calm holiday period. More than a dozen demonstrations were held over various issues, including land liberalization and censorship of journalism. In the Donbass region, fighting between Ukrainian government forces and separatist rebels increased to levels from before the calm holiday period, with 97 armed clashes and 142 shelling incidents resulting in five reported fatalities.