

Regional Overview: Europe 9-15 February 2020

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Last week, demonstration events remained high in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe, in particular in Montenegro, Albania and Greece. In Eastern Europe, including in Ukraine and Russia, demonstrations increased in comparison to previous weeks, yet remain relatively low compared to previous months.

In **Montenegro**, the eighth week of mass protests by Serbian Orthodox Church followers over the Religious Freedom Law resulted in a meeting between the Montenegrin Prime Minister and the Serbian Orthodox Church's top bishop in Montenegro. This is the first time that the Montenegrin government has officially talked to a Church representative since protests began last December.

Albania and **North Macedonia**, meanwhile, were hit with labor-related protests. Workers demanded unpaid salaries and more involvement from the government. Also, in North Macedonia, farmers demanded flood relief, which the government had allegedly not provided in years.

In **Greece**, residents continued to demonstrate over the deteriorating situation at migrant reception centers and against the government's decision to requisite land on the islands for building new migrant facilities. In addition, ethnic Greeks from Albania, organized by the Independent Attica Alliance (ASA), demanded that the government reconsider a bill that was disqualifying them from receiving state pensions. Hundreds of students, parents, and union representatives rallied in Athens for more funding for the education sector.

News in **Russia** was mostly dominated by the sentencing of seven anarchists and anti-fascist activists on 10 February to lengthy jail terms on terror charges; these charges are considered to be "trumped up" by many ([BBC, 10 February 2020](#)), leading to a surge of

demonstrations. Additionally, demonstrations over the proposed constitutional amendment, waste management issues, and infrastructure continued across the country.

In **Ukraine**, labor groups staged a number of protests across the country as well. Protesters demanded changes in the tax law and the Labour Code. In the Donbass region, fighting between Ukrainian government forces and separatist rebels continued to decrease with 96 armed clashes and 106 shelling incidents and no fatalities reported last week.



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