

IV. Armed conflict in Europe

IAN DAVIS AND IAN ANTHONY

Two armed conflicts were active in Europe in 2017: in Nagorno-Karabakh (involving Armenia and Azerbaijan) and in Ukraine. At the same time, some unresolved conflicts, although inactive, seemed as intractable as ever. In the background, tensions remained heightened between Russia and the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the West in general, and there were allegations of Russian interference in Western domestic politics.¹ European states also continued to prioritize combating terrorism. This section reviews developments in European counterterrorism, the unresolved conflicts in Europe and in the two active armed conflicts.

Terrorism in Europe

Compared with other regions, Europe is relatively safe from terrorist attacks.² However, while global data on terrorist incidents suggests that the number of incidents and the deaths they cause are falling, Europe has experienced the opposite trend. According to the Global Terrorism Index, fatalities from terrorist attacks in Europe increased from fewer than 20 in 2002 to almost 650 in 2016.³

In 2017 European cities such as Barcelona, Istanbul, Manchester and St Petersburg were targets for terrorist attacks, although the attacks were less lethal than comparable attacks in 2016.⁴ Since 2014 a significant number of the European citizens who travelled as ‘foreign fighters’ to countries in conflict in the Middle East and North Africa have returned to Europe. The number returning has been falling, however, and while only ‘a fairly small number’ of those fighters that are still in the conflict zone are now expected

¹ On the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the USA see Smith, D., ‘International politics and global security’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 10–12; and chapter 1, section II, in this volume. On Russia’s estrangement from the European security architecture see Anthony, I., ‘Conflict or peace in Europe? Increasing uncertainties, rising insecurities’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 119–39. On allegations of Russian interference in Western elections see ‘Russian hacking and influence in the US election’, *New York Times*, [n.d.]; and Mason, R., ‘Theresa May accuses Russia of interfering in elections and fake news’, *The Guardian*, 14 Nov. 2017.

² There is no shared European definition of terrorism, but the Council of Europe is currently discussing the development of one. Council of Europe, ‘Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Committee’, [n.d.].

³ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2017: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism* (Institute for Economics and Peace: Sydney, 2017).

⁴ While the Global Terrorism Index data for 2016 includes Istanbul as a part of Europe, this chapter discusses Turkey in section V.

to return, those that do ‘will be hardened fighters and present a significant threat upon their return’.⁵

The main European security-building institutions all include finding an effective response to terrorist attacks as part of their agenda. In 2017, alongside its work to promote the implementation of existing counterterrorism agreements and guidelines, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) emphasized two issues: (a) dialogue initiatives with youth groups in the Black Sea region, Central Asia and the western Balkans; and (b) inclusion of terrorism risk reduction as one element of creating inclusive, safe and sustainable cities.⁶ The latter was an enhancement to a programme to promote local approaches to global challenges.⁷

An important focus of the Council of Europe in 2017 was the nexus between organized crime and terrorism, with an emphasis on the financing of terrorism.⁸ The European Union (EU) also included counterterrorism as a central component of its Renewed Internal Security Strategy for 2015–20. Two key priorities of the EU in 2017 were countering the use of digital technology by terrorists and strengthening border controls.⁹ In April 2017, for example, a revision to the Schengen Borders Code obliged participating states to carry out systematic checks that include a security risk assessment of everyone entering or exiting at the external border of the Schengen Area (which includes most EU member states and some EU neighbours).¹⁰

Unresolved conflicts in Europe

Although most of Europe has seemed peaceful for about two decades, tensions remain linked to the unresolved conflicts in Cyprus, Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Moldova (Trans-Dniester) and Kosovo. More positively, the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA, Basque Home-

⁵ United Nations, Security Council, ‘Nineteenth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to Resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities’, 30 Dec. 2016, S/2017/35, 13 Jan. 2017.

⁶ OSCE Secretariat, Transnational Threats Department, *Overview of OSCE Counter-Terrorism Related Commitments* (OSCE: Vienna, Feb. 2017); ‘OSCE-wide Counter-terrorism conference 2017: Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism’, Vienna, 23–24 May 2017; and Neumann, P. R., ‘Countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism: Ideas, recommendations, and good practices from the OSCE Region’, OSCE, 28 Sep. 2017.

⁷ OSCE, ‘Security Days—Creating inclusive, safe and sustainable cities: Local approaches to global challenges’, Vienna, 30–31 Mar. 2017.

⁸ Council of Europe, Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER), ‘Abridged report: List of items discussed and decisions taken’, 32nd plenary meeting, 23–24 May 2017, Strasbourg, 24 May 2017.

⁹ Council of the European Union, ‘Renewed European Union internal security strategy and counter terrorism implementation paper: Report of the first half of 2017 and programme for the second half of 2017’, 10827/17, 12 July 2017.

¹⁰ European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on preserving and strengthening Schengen, COM(2017) 570 final, 27 Sep. 2017.

land and Liberty) gave up its weapons to the French authorities in what was seen as a crucial move towards the final closure of an armed conflict with Spain that lasted from 1959 to 2011.¹¹

In Cyprus the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, announced on 7 July that negotiations to reunify the country had collapsed following the ending of talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders in Switzerland.¹² UN diplomats have been trying to broker an agreement to reunify Cyprus for decades. The collapse was attributed to a failure to reach agreement on security guarantees and power-sharing arrangements in a unified government; each side blamed the other.¹³ The exploration of contested gas reserves off the coast of Cyprus is likely to add to tensions.¹⁴

Kosovo made the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office operational, but it remained unclear when its first indictments would be filed.¹⁵ It is a domestic court established in The Hague with an international staff to try serious war crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army during the 1998–99 Kosovo war. Tensions between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians continued, particularly in the north, and the process of normalizing relations with Serbia made limited progress.¹⁶

In Moldova the OSCE has been involved in attempts to resolve the conflict with Trans-Dniester, which has controlled Moldovan territory to the east of the Dniester river since 1992.¹⁷ In November 2017 the OSCE reported 'substantial progress' in talks between the leaders of Moldova and the break-away region. The two sides 'further solidified the agreements on several social and economic issues signed in recent days', including on the reopening of a bridge linking the territories, and committed to swiftly resolve the remaining issues at the beginning of 2018.¹⁸ In early December the OSCE Ministerial Council adopted a statement welcoming these achievements.¹⁹ However, whether these breakthroughs will be sufficient to overcome the

¹¹ 'Eta: Basque separatists begin weapons handover', BBC News, 8 Apr. 2017; and Tremlett, G., 'Eta declares halt to armed conflict', *The Guardian*, 20 Oct. 2011.

¹² United Nations, Secretary-General, 'The Secretary-General remarks at the closure of the Conference on Cyprus', 7 July 2017.

¹³ Smith, H., 'Cyprus reunification talks collapse amid angry scenes', *The Guardian*, 7 July 2017; and 'Cyprus may have missed its last chance for reunification', *The Economist*, 9 July 2017.

¹⁴ Orphanides, S., 'Cyprus ready for all outcomes as drilling programme commences', *Business Mail* (Nicosia), 28 Dec. 2017.

¹⁵ Bytyci, F., 'Kosovo war crimes court ready for first indictments: Chief judge', Reuters, 24 Nov. 2017.

¹⁶ Morina, D. and Zivanovic, M., 'Kosovo–Serbia talks fail to defuse tensions', *Balkan Insight*, 2 Feb. 2017.

¹⁷ Klimenko, E., 'Conflicts in the post-Soviet space: Recent developments', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 140–50.

¹⁸ OSCE, 'Substantial progress in Transdniestrian settlement talks in Vienna, clear commitment to solve remaining issues says OSCE Special Representative', Press release, 28 Nov. 2017.

¹⁹ OSCE, Ministerial Council, 'Ministerial statement on the negotiations on the Transdniestrian settlement process in the "5+2" format', MC.DOC/1/17, 8 Dec. 2017.

deep differences at the root of the 25-year old conflict remained an open question.²⁰

Tensions and uncertainty also surfaced in Northern Ireland, where the protracted conflict was largely settled in 1998 through the Good Friday Agreement and the establishment of the consociational Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. However, the result of the United Kingdom's 2016 referendum on leaving the EU has raised uncertainty about the form of the land border between the UK and Ireland. Demilitarization of the border and ease of passage across it were important components of the Good Friday Agreement. Further, in January 2017 disagreements between the two largest political parties in Northern Ireland led to inconclusive elections in March. As no agreement on the appointment of a new Executive could be made, the Assembly remained idle throughout the year.²¹ There continue to be fears about a possible return to violence if it proves impossible, for whatever reason, to sustain the political and constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland.²²

Armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an interstate confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan over disputed territory, in which two modern armies in trenches confront each other across the line of contact.²³ Following the ceasefire that ended the 1988–94 Nagorno-Karabakh War, the underlying conflict remained unresolved and periodically escalates into violence as it did in April 2016 and in 2017.²⁴ Regular peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group have failed to resolve a conflict that will enter its fourth decade in 2018.²⁵ Both sides have increased their military capabilities in recent years and the risk of another large-scale conflict is steadily growing.²⁶

²⁰ Hill, W. H., 'The Moldova–Transnistria dilemma: Local politics and conflict resolution', Carnegie Moscow Center, 24 Jan. 2018.

²¹ 'Northern Ireland notches up a year without a government', *The Economist*, 24 Jan. 2018.

²² Kennedy, D., 'Growing gap between Irishness and Britishness is most dangerous', *Irish Times*, 20 Dec. 2017; and Lyall, S., 'On Irish border, worries that "Brexit" will undo a hard-won peace', *New York Times*, 5 Aug. 2017.

²³ Although the conflict was previously treated as an internationalized intrastate conflict, it is now generally accepted that it has evolved into an interstate conflict. See e.g. de Waal, T., 'The Karabakh conflict as "project minimum"', Carnegie Moscow Center, 20 Feb. 2018.

²⁴ On the ceasefire negotiations see Dehdashti-Rasmussen, R., 'The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh: Causes, the status of negotiations, and prospects', Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), *OSCE Yearbook 2006* (Nomos: Baden-Baden, 2007), pp. 189–210.

²⁵ For a brief description and list of members of the OSCE Minsk Group see annex B, section II, in this volume.

²⁶ See Klimenko (note 17), pp. 143–46; and de Waal (note 23).

Exchanges of fire between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces around Nagorno-Karabakh intensified in 2017.²⁷ In December the foreign ministers of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs—France, Russia and the United States—issued a joint statement supporting resumed and intensified diplomacy, called for agreement on the expansion of the special representatives’ office and urged both sides to ‘focus their efforts on finding compromise solutions to the substantive issues of political settlement’.²⁸ Amid the intensified diplomacy, there were fewer incidents and casualties in December.²⁹

Armed conflict in Ukraine

Since gaining independence after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has sought to balance closer integration with Western Europe and cooperation with Russia. Russia, which sees its interests as threatened by a Western-leaning Ukraine, annexed Crimea in March 2014, following the fall of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. It was also instrumental in provoking a rebellion in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts in the industrialized Donbas region in eastern Ukraine (see figure 2.1).³⁰ After three years of war and around 10 000 deaths, Russia’s military intervention dominates most aspects of political life in Ukraine.³¹ According to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), the peace deal and ceasefire reached in the Minsk II Agreement in February 2015 were violated almost daily in 2017.³²

Fighting intensified in eastern Ukraine at the end of January. In a press statement, the UN Security Council expressed ‘grave concern about the dangerous deterioration of the situation in eastern Ukraine and its severe impact on the local civilian population’.³³ Most of the fighting was carried out from a distance, using artillery. In March 2017 Ukraine imposed an economic

²⁷ See e.g. Sanamyan, E., ‘Fighting in Karabakh flares as Azerbaijan marks memorial’, Eurasianet, 27 Feb. 2017; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Nagorno-Karabakh’s Gathering War Clouds*, Europe Report no. 244 (ICG: Brussels, 1 June 2017).

²⁸ OSCE, ‘Joint statement by the heads of delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries’, Press release, 7 Dec. 2017.

²⁹ International Crisis Group, ‘CrisisWatch: Tracking conflict worldwide’, Dec. 2017.

³⁰ The initial causes of the conflict in Ukraine, and the extent to which it represents a civil war with primarily domestic sources or a foreign intervention by Russia, are hotly contested. See Wilson, A., ‘External intervention in the Ukraine conflict: Towards a frozen conflict in the Donbas’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 143–57.

³¹ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘Conflict in Ukraine enters its fourth year with no end in sight—UN report’, 13 June 2017.

³² The SMM makes weekly and ad hoc reports on the crisis in Ukraine. See OSCE, Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, [n.d.], ‘Daily and spot reports from the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine’. On the conflict and crisis management in Ukraine see Anthony (note 1), pp. 137–38; Klimenko (note 17), pp. 146–49; Wilson (note 30), pp. 143–58; and ‘The Ukraine conflict and its implications’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2015*, pp. 55–98.

³³ United Nations, Security Council, ‘Security Council press statement on deterioration of situation in Donetsk region, Ukraine’, SC/12700, 31 Jan. 2017; United Nations, Security Council, ‘Thousands of civilians risk losing access to basic necessities as fighting escalates in eastern Ukraine,



Figure 2.1. The conflict zone in eastern Ukraine, January 2018

Credit: Hugo Ahlenius, Nordpil.

Source: ‘Ukraine’, Live Universal Awareness Map (Liveuamap), 1 Jan. 2018.

blockade on territory held by the separatists. The Ukrainian central bank expected this to reduce Ukraine’s economic growth to 1.9 per cent in 2017 from an earlier estimate of 2.8 per cent.³⁴

Throughout the year, the conflict continued to grow in strength and intensity along the 400-kilometre front line. By the end of October 2017

Security Council told’, SC/12704, 2 Feb. 2017; and Grono, M., ‘Ukraine flare-up lays bare fears in Europe’s east’, Commentary, International Crisis Group, 3 Feb. 2017.

³⁴ Polityuk, P., ‘Ukrainian economy to feel the squeeze of economic blockade’, Reuters, 21 Mar. 2017.

the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had identified 1.8 million internally displaced or conflict-affected persons in Ukraine, including 22 000 from Crimea. As a result of the fighting, many moved west, mostly to neighbouring areas within Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts and to Kharkiv oblast. Others moved to Kiev. In addition, nearly 430 000 people had moved east to seek refuge in Russia.³⁵ Humanitarian agencies reported that 4.4 million people had been directly affected by the conflict, while 3.8 million needed urgent assistance.³⁶ The SMM reported 411 confirmed civilian fatalities in the first 10 months of 2017.³⁷

In September Russia circulated a draft UN Security Council resolution proposing a UN peacekeeping operation in eastern Ukraine, and shortly afterwards Ukraine put forward an alternative proposal.³⁸ However, further escalation and ceasefire violations occurred in mid-December. By the end of the year, the number of ceasefire violations recorded by the OSCE in 2017 reached almost 400 000 with almost 4000 instances of proscribed weapons being deployed in violation of the agreed withdrawal lines.³⁹ At the same time, none of the key provisions of the Minsk II Agreement—a ceasefire and special constitutional status for the separatist-held territories of the Donbas region, which would then be reintegrated into Ukraine and hold elections—had taken effect.

³⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Ukraine', Fact sheet, Oct. 2017; UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Ukraine, 01–31 Oct. 2017', Operational update; and Bonenberger, A., 'The war no one notices in Ukraine', *New York Times*, 20 June 2017.

³⁶ Coman, J., 'On the frontline of Europe's forgotten war in Ukraine', *The Observer*, 12 Nov. 2017.

³⁷ OSCE, Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, 'Status report as of 01 November 2017', 1 Nov. 2017.

³⁸ Arbatov, A., 'A UN peacekeeping operation is the only way forward in Ukraine', War on the Rocks, University of Texas, 28 Sep. 2017; 'Canada making diplomatic push For Ukraine's UN peacekeeping plan', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 Nov. 2017; and International Crisis Group (ICG), *Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?*, Europe Report no. 246 (ICG: Brussels, 15 Dec. 2017).

³⁹ 'OSCE SMM: Over 400,000 ceasefire violations recorded in eastern Ukraine this year', Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 22 Dec. 2017. For SMM reports on ceasefire violations see OSCE (note 32).