

IV. Armed conflict and peace processes in Europe

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One armed conflict was active in Europe in 2018: in Ukraine. The initial causes of this conflict and the extent to which it represents a civil war, with primarily domestic origins, or a foreign intervention by Russia are hotly contested. Given the status of the conflict in 2018, here it is defined as a low-intensity internationalized, subnational armed conflict.¹ Some unresolved conflicts in Europe, although inactive, seemed as intractable as ever. This section reviews key developments in the region and the active armed conflict in Ukraine.

Key general developments

Although most of Europe has seemed peaceful for about two decades, various tensions remained linked to unresolved conflicts—especially in the post-Soviet space and in highly militarized and contested security contexts, such as the Black Sea region.² Political tensions also remained in parts of South Eastern Europe, although the name dispute between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Greece was close to resolution by the end of the year (see below). Meanwhile, the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA, Basque Homeland and Liberty) formally disbanded in 2018, having declared an indefinite ceasefire in 2011 and handed over weapons in 2017.³

Tensions remained heightened between Russia and the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the West in general. Military exercises—such as Trident Juncture by NATO and Vostok by Russia—were held on a scale not seen since the cold war, and there were continuing

¹ For conflict definitions and typologies, see section I in this chapter. For a discussion on the initial causes of the conflict in Ukraine, and the extent to which it represented a civil war (now downgraded to a subnational armed conflict), with primarily domestic origins, or a foreign intervention by Russia, see Wilson, A., 'External intervention in the Ukraine conflict: Towards a frozen conflict in the Donbas', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 143–57; and Clem, R. S., 'Clearing the fog of war: Public versus official sources and geopolitical storylines in the Russia–Ukraine conflict', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 58, no. 6 (2017), pp. 592–612. For an analysis of identity, opportunity and costs as driving factors for the Russian intervention in Ukraine, see Freire, M. R. and Heller, R., 'Russia's power politics in Ukraine and Syria: Status-seeking between identity, opportunity and costs', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 70, no. 8 (2018), pp. 1185–1212.

² Melvin, N. J., *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 50 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2018).

³ *The Economist*, 'Spain's ETA Basque terrorists disband', 10 May 2018; and Jones, S., 'Spanish PM says Eta's crimes will not go unpunished', *The Guardian*, 4 May 2018.



Figure 2.1. Contested territory in the post-Soviet space, 2018

Credit: Ahlenius, H., Nordpil, 2018.

allegations of Russian interference in Western domestic politics.⁴ The attempted assassination of a Russian exile in the United Kingdom in March using a toxic chemical (with the subsequent death of a British citizen), and the West's attribution of that incident to Russia, further exacerbated tensions between Russia and the West.⁵

The protracted conflict in Northern Ireland was largely settled in 1998 through the Good Friday Agreement. However, the Brexit negotiations to implement the result of the UK's 2016 referendum on leaving the European Union (EU) continued to raise uncertainty about the nature of the land border

⁴ On the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the USA, see Smith, D., 'International tensions and shifting dynamics of power', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 11–12; chapter 1 in this volume; and Grono, M., 'Mirror images: The standoff between Moscow and Western capitals', Commentary, International Crisis Group, 4 May 2018. On the conflicts in the post-Soviet space, see Klimenko, E., 'Protracted armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space and their impact on Black Sea security', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/8, Dec. 2018. On the military exercises, see Johnson, D., 'VOSTOCK 2018: Ten years of Russian strategic exercises and warfare preparation', *NATO Review*, 20 Dec. 2018; and NATO, 'Trident Juncture 2018', 29 Oct. 2018. On allegations of Russian interference in Western elections, see *New York Times*, 'Russian hacking and influence in the US election'.

⁵ On the attempted poisoning in the UK, see chapter 8, section II, in this volume.

between the UK and Ireland. Ease of passage across the border along with its demilitarization were important components of the Good Friday Agreement. Fears remain about a potential return to violence if it proves impossible, for whatever reason, to sustain the political and constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland.⁶

While the influx of refugees and migrants into Europe in 2018 decreased sharply from its 2015–16 peak to around 140 000 (compared to over 1 million in 2015), deaths among people crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa remained high at an estimated 2275 (compared to 3139 in 2017 and 5096 in 2016).⁷

Inactive armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space

In 2018, three armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space were more or less inactive—Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia and Azerbaijan), Ossetia and Abkhazia (Georgia) and Trans-Dniester (Moldova)—although tensions remained high in each (see figure 2.1). While remaining a stalemate at the military level, the conflicts continued to evolve at the socio-economic and political levels.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—an interstate confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan over disputed territory—periodically escalated into violence in 2016 and 2017, but was relatively calm in 2018.⁸ Regular peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, mediated by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, have failed to resolve a conflict that entered its fourth decade in 2018.⁹ Both sides have increased their military capabilities in recent years, and the risk of another large-scale conflict remains.¹⁰ In 2018, the largest military confrontation along the line of contact occurred in and around the abandoned village of Gyunnyut in May. Although details are sketchy, the clashes reportedly ended

⁶ Watson, T., 'Brexit could "re-ignite conflict" in Northern Ireland', BBC News, 14 Sep. 2018; and Goodman, P. S., 'The border dividing Ireland has long been invisible. Brexit threatens to make it real', *New York Times*, 26 Dec. 2018.

⁷ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Desperate journeys: Refugees and migrants arriving in Europe and at Europe's borders, January–December 2018', 18 Dec. 2018. On the EU's policy response to the refugee crisis, see Grip, L., 'The global refugee crisis and its impact in Europe', *SIPRI Yearbook 2016*, pp. 439–52; and Grip, L., 'United Nations and regional responses to displacement crises', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 280–82.

⁸ See Davis, I. and Anthony, I., 'Armed conflict in Europe', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 62–63.

⁹ For a brief description and list of members of the OSCE Minsk Group, see annex B, section II, in this volume. Other peace proposals have included the peace initiative of Kazakhstan and Russia, the mediation efforts of Iran and Turkey, and the resolutions of the UN Security Council. On recent research about the Iranian peace efforts, see Mahmudlu, C. and Abilov, S., 'The peace-making process in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: Why did Iran fail in its mediation effort?', *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2018), pp. 33–49.

¹⁰ See Klimentko (note 4).

with Azerbaijan regaining several occupied villages and strategic positions; at least one soldier was killed.¹¹

Discussions between the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in October 2017 and January 2018, mediated by the Minsk Group, led to progress in the monitoring of the ceasefire—namely an agreement in principle to increase the number of OSCE monitors along the line of contact from 6 to 13.¹² At the end of the year, however, it was unclear whether or not this limited step had been taken.

The change of government in Armenia in May 2018, following mass protests and a ‘velvet revolution’ in April, raised additional uncertainty, not least because the position of the new Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, on the conflict and the peace process remained unclear.¹³ Meetings in July and September of the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan with the Minsk Group co-chairs, in Brussels and New York respectively, appeared to bring little clarity or breakthrough in negotiations.¹⁴ However, both sides agreed to establish a new communication channel to manage incidents on their border and in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. On 5 December, the foreign ministers held their fourth meeting of the year, and talks between the leaders could follow in 2019.¹⁵

The Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts in Georgia remained unresolved in 2018, with no sign of a political breakthrough—despite a new peace initiative by Georgia in April.¹⁶ Increased trade between Georgia and the two breakaway territories, and between Abkhazia and countries outside the region, also provided a potential bridge between the divided communities.¹⁷ However, the main OSCE negotiation forum for tackling practical problems in the conflict zones, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, remained deadlocked and close to collapse.¹⁸

¹¹ Gurbanov, I., ‘Aggravated situation around Azerbaijan’s Nakhchivan exclave’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 4 June 2018.

¹² *Massis Post*, ‘OSCE to deploy seven more ceasefire monitors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone’, 26 Jan. 2018.

¹³ *The Economist*, ‘Armenia’s revolution continues, as its opposition leader nears power’, 3 May 2018; De Waal, T., ‘Armenia’s revolution and the Karabakh conflict’, *Carnegie Europe*, 22 May 2018; and Shiriyev, Z., ‘For Azerbaijan, Armenia’s political upheaval is a double-edged sword’, *Commentary*, International Crisis Group, 25 May 2018.

¹⁴ CivilNet, ‘Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers meet in Brussels’, 12 July 2018; and Tert.am, ‘Armenian, Azerbaijani foreign ministers meet in New York’, 27 Sep. 2018.

¹⁵ Vartanyan, O., ‘Armenia elections boost hopes for peace with Azerbaijan’, *Commentary*, International Crisis Group, 10 Dec. 2018.

¹⁶ Anshba, R., ‘Georgia’s overtures to Abkhazia and South Ossetia are flawed’, *Chatham House*, 26 Nov. 2018; and Menabde, G., ‘Abkhazia and South Ossetia reject Georgia’s peace plan’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 18 Apr. 2018.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Time to Talk Trade*, Europe Report no. 249 (ICG: Brussels, 24 May 2018).

¹⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), ‘The 89th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meeting takes place in Ergneti’, Press release, 14 Sep. 2018; and Guthrie, S. and Morrison, T., ‘Russia blames Georgia for politicizing IPRM’, *Georgia Today*, 20 Sep. 2018.

In Moldova, the OSCE has been involved in attempts to resolve the conflict with the breakaway region of Trans-Dniester, which has controlled Moldovan territory to the east of the Dniester River since 1992.¹⁹ At the end of 2017, the OSCE reported ‘substantial progress’ in talks between the leaders of Moldova and the breakaway region.²⁰ However, there were no major breakthroughs in the OSCE process in 2018. In June 2018, after a debate requested by Moldova, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution urging Russia to withdraw its troops from Trans-Dniester.²¹

South Eastern Europe

The situation remains fluid in many parts of South Eastern Europe. In Kosovo, tensions between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians continued, particularly in the north. An EU-sponsored dialogue on normalizing relations between Kosovo and Serbia suffered several setbacks, including the murder of a Serbian politician, Oliver Ivanovic, in Mitrovica on 16 January and the detention of another Serbian politician visiting the city in March.²² In September, it was reported that the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo were considering a proposition to redraw Kosovo’s borders along ethnic lines. The talks between Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovan President Hashim Thaci had been going on for more than a year, with suggestions that Serbia would take the north of Kosovo in exchange for giving up part of the Presevo Valley. However, no agreement seemed imminent and the idea, while supported by the United States, is widely opposed in its current form within the EU.²³

In October, Kosovo announced moves to transform its security force into a national army, raising tensions with Serbia and drawing condemnation from the EU and NATO. Nonetheless, in December, the Kosovan Parliament approved the government’s plan to transform the 3000-strong, lightly armed Kosovo Security Force into an army and expand it to 5000 active troops and 3000 reservists in the next 10 years—a decision supported by the USA.²⁴ The introduction of a 100 per cent tariff on imports to Kosovo from Bosnia

¹⁹ Klimenko, E., ‘Conflicts in the post-Soviet space: Recent developments’, *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 140–50; and Klimenko (note 4) pp. 11–15.

²⁰ See Davis and Anthony (note 8).

²¹ United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 72/282, ‘Complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova’, 13 June 2018.

²² *The Economist*, ‘A decade since independence, Kosovo is still violent’, 15 Feb. 2018; and MacDowall, A., ‘Kosovo detains Serbian politician after “illegal entry” into region’, *The Guardian*, 26 Mar. 2018.

²³ Santora, M., ‘Talk of ethnic partition of Kosovo revives old Balkan ghosts’, *New York Times*, 19 Sep. 2018; and Walker, S. and MacDowall, A., ‘US-backed Kosovo land-swap border plan under fire from all sides’, *The Guardian*, 3 Sep. 2018.

²⁴ Surk, B., ‘Kosovo Parliament votes to create an army, defying Serbia and NATO’, *New York Times*, 14 Dec. 2018.

and Serbia then raised tensions further, both within Kosovo and with its neighbours.²⁵

On 12 June, FYROM reached agreement with Greece to change its name to the Republic of North Macedonia, effectively ending a 27-year disagreement between the two countries—although the agreement still needed to be ratified by both countries' parliaments and a referendum in FYROM.²⁶ The name dispute between the two dates back to 1991, when FYROM declared its independence from Yugoslavia under the name the Republic of Macedonia. Greece objected to the name Macedonia, saying it implied territorial claims on the northern Greek region with the same name, and in response blocked the country's bid to join the EU and NATO.

The agreement won overwhelming support (around 91 per cent of the vote) in a referendum in FYROM on 30 September, but the referendum failed to achieve the 50 per cent turnout required to be valid (the turnout was only 36.9 per cent, which some analysts attributed to a Russian disinformation campaign).²⁷ However, the Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev, vowed to continue with the proposed ratification process and a vote was scheduled in the Macedonian Parliament for 9 January 2019. A Greek parliamentary vote on the agreement was also due to take place early in 2019.

Armed conflict in Ukraine

On gaining independence after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine sought to balance closer integration with Western Europe on the one hand and cooperation with Russia on the other. Russia, which saw its interests threatened by a Western-leaning Ukraine, annexed Crimea in March 2014 and was instrumental in provoking a rebellion in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine.²⁸ From 14 April 2014 to 15 February 2019, the war between Ukrainian Government forces and Russian-backed separatists led to 12 800–13 000 deaths (at least 3321 civilians and approximately 9500 combatants). Claims that separatist casualties also

²⁵ Bytyci, F., 'Amid recognition row, Kosovo hits Serbia with more customs tariffs', Reuters, 28 Dec. 2018.

²⁶ Kitsantonis, N., 'Macedonia agrees to change its name to resolve dispute with Greece', *New York Times*, 12 June 2018.

²⁷ BBC News, 'Macedonia referendum: Name change vote fails to reach threshold', 1 Oct. 2018; Metodieva, A., 'How disinformation harmed the referendum in Macedonia', Blog post, German Marshall Fund, 2 Oct. 2018; and Tisdall, S., 'Result of Macedonia's referendum is another victory for Russia', *The Guardian*, 1 Oct. 2018.

²⁸ For a discussion on the initial and contested causes of the conflict in Ukraine, see Wilson (note 1) and Clem (note 1). An oblast is an administrative division similar to a state or province.

include Russian mercenaries and/or regular Russian military personnel have been difficult to verify.²⁹

Although battle-related deaths and civilian casualties in the Donbas region were much lower in 2018 than in earlier years—civilian casualties (55 killed and 224 injured) were less than half those of 2017—at least 5.2 million people continued to be caught up in the humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine. About 1 million people were food insecure, 1.5 million were internally displaced and many more faced poverty and repression.³⁰ Eastern Ukraine also has some of the world’s worst landmine contamination.³¹

A wider confrontation

The conflict in Ukraine is both driven by and helps drive the wider geopolitical confrontation between Russia and Western powers, as exemplified by the supply of arms and military assistance to the two sides. Ukraine estimates that Russian-backed separatist forces in the Donbas region have about 35 000 troops, including between 3600 and 4200 regular Russian troops and additional mercenaries, equipped with around 1400 armoured vehicles and tanks along with heavy mortars and other artillery.³² Ukraine also accuses Russia of continuing to supply military equipment to separatists, especially electronic warfare equipment; this has been confirmed by OSCE observers.³³

The Ukrainian Government in turn is receiving arms and training from the USA and some other NATO member states. In December 2017, for example, the USA announced a \$47 million sale of 210 Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine—but with some reported restrictions on their use on the line of contact in Donbas—and reportedly supplied sniper rifles.³⁴ In February 2018, President Petro Poroshenko announced the imminent delivery of anti-sniper

²⁹ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, ‘Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine: 16 November 2018 to 15 February 2019’, 12 Mar. 2019. See Dorosh, S., [How many Russians died in the Donbas?], BBC Ukraine, 15 June 2017 (in Russian).

³⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), ‘*Nobody Wants Us*’: *The Alienated Civilians of Eastern Ukraine*, Europe Report no. 252 (ICG: Brussels, 1 Oct. 2018); and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Ukraine Humanitarian Bulletin*, no. 28 (1 Sep.–31 Oct. 2018).

³¹ United Nations Ukraine, ‘Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine on the tragic death of three children in eastern Ukraine’, 1 Oct. 2018.

³² Gould, J., ‘US, Ukraine in “close discussion” for new lethal arms’, *Defense News*, 18 Nov. 2018; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Ukraine (Radio Svoboda), [Arsenal ‘LDPR’. What does the ‘army’ of militants look like during the fifth year of the war?], 6 Aug. 2018 (in Russian); and Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘10 facts you should know about Russian military aggression against Ukraine’, [n.d.].

³³ See e.g. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), ‘Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 10 August 2018’, 11 Aug. 2018.

³⁴ Lederman, J., ‘US agrees to send lethal weapons to Ukraine, angering Russia’, *Military Times*, 23 Dec. 2017; Rogin, J., ‘Trump administration approves lethal arms sales to Ukraine’, *Washington Post*, 20 Dec. 2017; and, UAWire, ‘US forbids Ukraine from using Javelin missile systems in Donbas’, 7 May 2018.

Table 2.3. Multilateral and bilateral military exercises hosted or co-hosted by Ukraine, 2018

Exercise	Dates	Forces	Participants
Sea Breeze 2018	9–21 July	Air, land, sea and amphibious	Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, UK and USA (co-host)
Rapid Trident 2018	3–15 Sep.	Land	Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Turkey, UK and USA
Riverian 2018	4–7 Sep.	Sea	Romania
Clear Sky 2018	8–19 Oct.	Air	Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, UK and USA

Sources: Justinger, L., ‘Exercise Rapid Trident 2018 enables relationships to cross borders’, US Army, 14 Sep. 2018; US Department of Defense, ‘Exercise Sea Breeze 2018 concludes in Ukraine’, 19 July 2018; 112.UA News Agency, ‘Ukrainian-Romanian drills Riverine-2018 begins in Odesa region’, 5 Sep. 2018; and Unian, ‘“Clear Sky-2018”: Ukraine launches exercise with participation of US aircraft’, 8 Oct. 2018.

weaponry, including tools for electronic warfare and air defence.³⁵ In November, it was reported that the USA and Ukraine were close to agreeing on another delivery of unspecified US weapons.³⁶

Three training missions for the Ukrainian security forces have been operating since 2015: the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (Canada, Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, UK and USA); Operation Orbital (UK); and Operation Unifier (Canada).³⁷ In addition, after Ukraine passed a law in January 2018 allowing up to 3000 foreign troops to enter the country for exercises and training, a series of multilateral and bilateral military exercises took place (see table 2.3).³⁸ Although routine, these exercises help to increase interoperability between NATO and Ukrainian military forces and send a message of solidarity with Ukraine.

In November, a new dimension in the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine opened in the Sea of Azov, a sizeable north-eastern extension of the Black Sea and host to the key Donbas ports of Mariupol and Berdiansk (see figure 2.1).

³⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, ‘Poroshenko expects sophisticated US weapons “within weeks”’, 28 Feb. 2018.

³⁶ Gould (note 32).

³⁷ Egnash, M., ‘US, allies give Ukrainians a boost in building modern army’, *Stars and Stripes*, 6 July 2017; British Ministry of Defence, ‘UK extending training of Ukrainian armed forces’, News release, 17 July 2017; and Government of Canada, ‘Operation UNIFIER’, [n.d].

³⁸ Interfax-Ukraine, ‘Poroshenko signs law allowing foreign troops into Ukraine for drills in 2018’, 29 Jan. 2018.

The naval clashes resulted in the Russian capture of 3 Ukrainian vessels and 24 crew members. From a Western perspective, this was an overt use of force by Russia against Ukraine, the first since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.³⁹ Each side accused the other of provocation. According to Ukraine, the incident was the culmination of Russian efforts over several months to restrict access from Ukraine's eastern ports to the Black Sea—in violation of a 2003 bilateral agreement between the two countries that established joint control of the Sea of Azov.⁴⁰ Russia claimed that the vessels had entered its coastal waters and that Ukrainian President Poroshenko provoked the confrontation to fortify both his domestic base (ahead of presidential elections in March 2019) and Western support. In response, the Ukrainian Parliament approved President Poroshenko's proposal to impose martial law in the country for 30 days.⁴¹

During this period of heightened tension between the two countries, Ukrainian officials also warned that Russia was amassing troops and equipment along the countries' shared border in preparation for a possible invasion.⁴²

The peace process

According to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, the peace deal and ceasefire reached in February 2015, known as the Minsk II Agreement, was violated almost daily in 2018.⁴³ Russia is unwilling to withdraw its troops and supplies from separatist-held areas of Donbas, and Ukraine is seemingly uninterested in assigning special status to the Russian-speaking majority districts in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. President Poroshenko has made some moves towards devolving power to Donbas, but the most critical legislation has been stalled in parliament and is unlikely to see progress until after the 2019 elections.⁴⁴ Proposals for peacekeeping missions obtained little

³⁹ *The Economist*, 'Explaining the naval clash between Russia and Ukraine', 1 Dec. 2018; and BBC News, 'Russia-Ukraine tensions rise after Kerch Strait ship capture', 26 Nov. 2018.

⁴⁰ Wilson, A., 'Strait to war? Russia and Ukraine clash in the Sea of Azov', European Council of Foreign Relations, Commentary, 2 Oct. 2018.

⁴¹ Gobert, S., 'Ukraine's impractical martial law', Commentary, Royal United Services Institute, 19 Dec. 2018; and Ferris-Rotman, A., 'Ukraine to impose martial law as standoff with Russia in Black Sea intensifies', *Washington Post*, 26 Nov. 2018.

⁴² Kramer, A. E., 'Ukraine asserts major Russian military buildup on eastern border', *New York Times*, 15 Dec. 2018.

⁴³ The Special Monitoring Mission makes weekly and ad hoc reports on the crisis in Ukraine; see <<https://www.osce.org/ukrainecrisis>>. On the conflict and crisis management in Ukraine see Anthony, I., 'European security', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017*, pp. 137–38, 146–49; Wilson (note 1); and Anthony, I., Perlo-Freeman, S. and Wezeman, S., 'The Ukraine conflict and its implications', *SIPRI Yearbook 2015*, pp. 55–98.

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group (note 30).

traction throughout the year.⁴⁵ In short, the Minsk II Agreement remained unfulfilled and stalled.

Two main diplomatic processes address the conflict in the Donbas region: the Normandy Four (France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine), and the Trilateral Contact Group (Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE), which has four working groups (economic, humanitarian, political and security). In June 2018, the foreign ministers of the Normandy Four met to discuss the situation in Ukraine for the first time since February 2017. They addressed several aspects of the conflict, including prisoner exchanges, the potential for a peace operation, the security environment and political reforms, but without any discernible breakthrough.⁴⁶ A further meeting in Berlin in November also failed to make progress.⁴⁷

The Trilateral Contact Group met regularly in 2018. However, aside from a number of temporary ceasefires, which contributed to a reduction in casualties, very little progress was made. At the group's December meeting, the OSCE's Special Representative, Ambassador Martin Sajdik, expressed deep concern over the situation: 'Instead of looking for a peaceful solution to the conflict, the sides seem to be moving in the opposite direction'.⁴⁸ At the end of 2018, an end to the conflict in the Donbas region remained a distant prospect.

⁴⁵ On peacekeeping proposals, see chapter 3, section II, in this volume. See also Lawson, E., 'Considering a UN peacekeeping mission in the Donbas', Conference report, Royal United Services Institute, Feb. 2019.

⁴⁶ Sputnik, 'Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on Normandy Four talks: "meeting was useful"', 12 June 2018.

⁴⁷ Tass, 'Russia satisfied with Normandy Four political directors' meeting in Berlin—Lavrov', 27 Nov. 2018.

⁴⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), 'Press statement of special representative of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Sajdik after meeting of Trilateral Contact Group on 4 Dec. 2018', Press release, 5 Dec. 2018.