

# NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2023

War Deepens a Regional Divide



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This booklet is a summary of findings for the 2023 edition of *Nations in Transit*. The complete analysis, including detailed reports on all countries, can be found on our website at [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

### ON THE COVER

Volunteers clean up rubble from a destroyed residential building in Borodyanka, Ukraine, in April 2022. (Photo credit: Alex Chan Tsz Yuk/SOPA Images/Sipa USA)

## Key Findings

### **For the 19th consecutive year, democratic governance suffered an overall decline in the region stretching from Central Europe to Central Asia.**

As Moscow pursued its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, autocrats persisted in their domestic assault on the remaining vestiges of institutional independence in the media, local governance, and especially civil society. Democracy Scores declined in 11 out of the 29 countries in the report, and 7 countries earned improvements. Yet civic activists and democratic leaders continued to strive for better governance across the diverse region.

### **Democratic institutions stood strong in Ukraine but collapsed further in Russia.**

Ukraine's government and people confirmed their commitment to liberal democracy in the face of unimaginable violence, while the Russian government intensified its repression of dissent at home. *Nations in Transit 2023* documents the largest single-year drop in Russia's score in the history of the report: there were declines on five out of seven thematic indicators, and the country's overall Democracy Score—an average of the seven indicators—fell from 1.32 to 1.11 on a scale of 1 to 7.

### **On illiberal populism, European Union member states pursued diverging paths.**

Hungary's ongoing autocratization—which drove an annual decline second only to Russia's—and Poland's updated illiberal agenda continued to challenge democratic standards in Europe. However, there were signs that the deterioration in Poland may be slowing, and voters' repudiation of populist, illiberal leaders in Slovenia in 2022 and Czechia in 2023 served as a reminder of democracy's inherent potential for self-correction.

### **EU hopefuls made democratic progress but still face daunting obstacles.**

The 10 non-EU countries that are rated as Hybrid Regimes—positioned in the grey zone between democracy and autocracy—received more Democracy Score improvements than declines in 2022. At the same time, drawn-out EU accession processes in the Western Balkans reinforced disillusionment with the union and sapped its power to stoke reform. The challenges associated with accession only increased with the addition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Ukraine as formal candidates for EU membership.

### **Autocracies remained trapped in a vicious circle of repression and instability.**

Of the eight countries classified as Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes, six suffered further declines in their already abysmal Democracy Scores. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, an Azerbaijani incursion into Armenia, and the violent suppression of protests in Central Asia illustrated the deadly consequences of authoritarian misrule.



Police officers detain an activist during a rally held to support women's rights and to protest against violence towards women on International Women's Day in Baku, Azerbaijan. (Photo credit: REUTERS/Aziz Karimov)

# War Deepens a Regional Divide

By Mike Smeltzer

Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine represents the gravest challenge to peace, freedom, and democracy in Europe since the end of the Cold War. While Ukrainians continue to fight for their country's very existence against an authoritarian regime with imperial ambitions and genocidal intent, the impact of the war was felt last year across all of the 29 countries covered by the *Nations in Transit* report, which stretch from Central Europe to Central Asia.

Rather than bringing the region closer together, however, the heightened security threats, historic refugee crisis, and economic disruption associated with the conflict have deepened the gulf between autocracies and democracies, and triggered divisive shifts in the foreign policies of individual governments. Although some countries made clear choices in favor of a more democratic future during 2022, the net result was the 19th consecutive year of declining democratic performance in the area under study.

The eight countries in the region that are designated as Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes accounted for more than half of all the score declines in this year's report. Their governments have abandoned the core obligation of any state to protect the population's physical security, instead posing a direct threat to many citizens' lives and safety. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all saw a significant tightening of the civic space, with authorities using lethal violence against protesters in some cases and torture against detainees in others. Citizens in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan continued to endure the ruling elite's nepotism and cronyism, and a dramatic wave of repression aimed at antiwar speech in Russia led that country to suffer its largest single-year score decline in the nearly 30-year history of the report.

Such brutal tactics were less common in the countries of Europe and the Caucasus that the report identifies as Hybrid Regimes, where illiberal leaders found subtler ways to protect their interests. The ruling parties in Georgia, Serbia, and Hungary, for example, sought to manipulate their electorates, undermine checks and balances, and hide their fundamentally antidemocratic actions behind a pro forma adherence to constitutional and legal procedure. Even in Poland, which

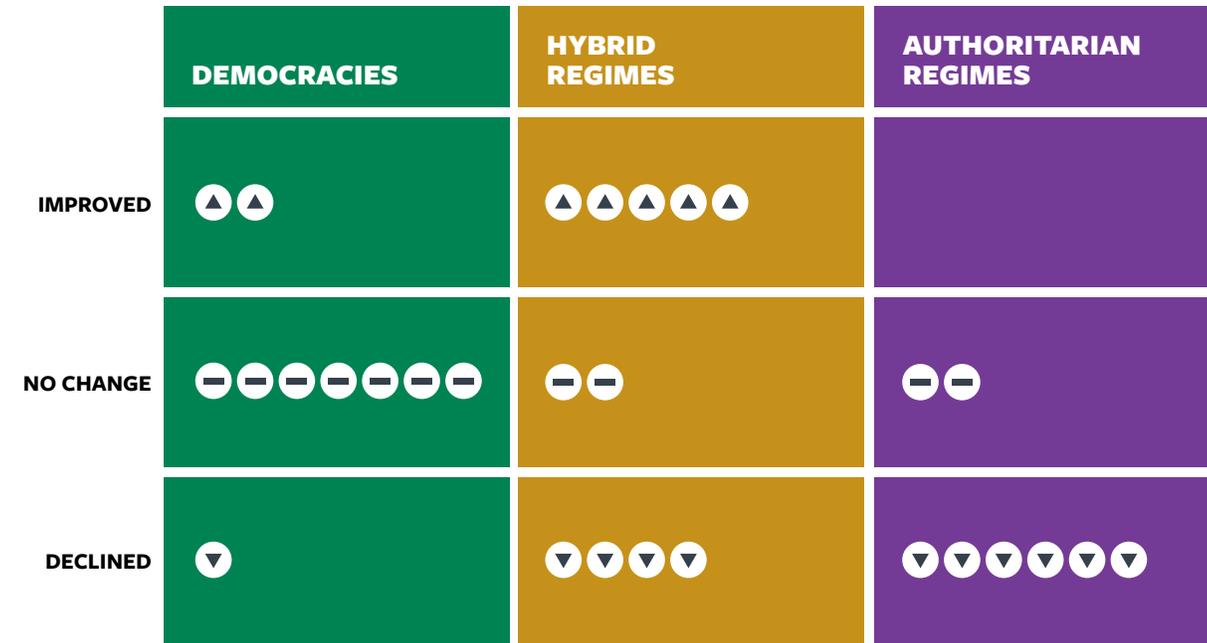
still ranks as a democracy in this year's report, the political leadership evinced greater alignment with Brussels on matters related to regional security and independence from Russian energy supplies, but it remained committed to undermining the rule of law at home.

Not all the news is bad. A total of seven countries earned score improvements for the events of 2022, compared with 11 that experienced overall declines, and all seven were in the Consolidated Democracy, Semi-Consolidated Democracy, or Hybrid Regime categories—highlighting once again the region's divisions. Slovenia successfully staged a series of elections and referendums, with voters firmly repudiating the leadership of the illiberal ruling party. Citizens in Czechia followed suit in January 2023, electing a pro-European president over a populist candidate who threatened to reduce support for Ukraine. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) drove positive legislative changes in Lithuania and Kosovo, as the impact and sustainability of civil society improved. And the European Union (EU) demonstrated its continued value as a regional backstop for democratic reform. The EU member states assessed in *Nations in Transit* registered their smallest aggregate decline in more than a decade, and EU leaders granted candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Ukraine.

The Russian regime's vicious campaign in Ukraine—with its indiscriminate destruction of Ukrainian cities, abduction of tens of thousands of Ukrainian children, and wanton murders of Ukrainian civilians—seriously endangers the democratic gains that at least part of the region has achieved and defended since this report's first edition in 1996. For democracy to flourish in the *Nations in Transit* region and throughout the world, Ukraine must prevail in its more than nine-year struggle against authoritarian aggression. But Ukraine's victory will not be sufficient on its own. Governments and citizens across the region must recognize that their freedom and security are contingent on their solidarity, and their solidarity is based on shared adherence to democratic principles. So long as they remain divided over the institutional underpinnings of free self-government, they will remain vulnerable to exploitation and attack.

## STABILITY, CHURN, AND DECLINE

In 2022, a country’s Democracy Score change (or lack thereof) was closely correlated with its regime type in *Nations in Transit*.



### A time to choose between divergent paths in the European Union

Overall, the 11 EU member states in this report experienced an aggregate decline in democratic governance, though it was the least they had fallen in a single year since 2010. A year is a short time in the trajectory of such a large subregion. After more than a decade in which their rights and institutions have been under attack by illiberal and antidemocratic actors, it remains unclear whether these countries have begun a democratic revival or a mere pause in their long-term deterioration.

#### An emerging rift between Hungary and Poland

The most notable change in the group of EU member states over the past year has been the split in the Democracy Score trends of the decade’s two most precipitous decliners: Hungary and Poland. Since the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party came to power in 2015, Poland’s democratic performance has worsened in tandem with that of Hungary under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his illiberal Fidesz party. In 2022, however, Poland’s slide was interrupted, while Hungary’s continued apace.

Events in Hungary put Fidesz’s antidemocratic machinations in full view. The March parliamentary elections were rife with irregularities, abuses of administrative resources, and media distortions, resulting in another supermajority for the Fidesz-led coalition. Government-backed smear campaigns against critical NGOs and members of the National Judicial Council—considered to be Hungary’s last reservoir of judicial independence—demonstrated the Orbán regime’s deepening intolerance of dissenting voices.

In Poland, meanwhile, abuses of power and actions that betrayed contempt for liberal democracy continued on several fronts. For example, the Ministry of Education and Science’s decision to award grants to foundations with close ties to PiS and no track record of educational activities underscored the ruling elite’s self-dealing tendencies. But PiS still has far less control over electoral outcomes than its counterpart in Hungary, and Polish voters will have an opportunity to choose a new direction in parliamentary elections scheduled for later this year.

Another important point of difference between these two countries is their respective responses to the invasion of Ukraine. Warsaw has remained one of Kyiv’s most ardent



Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy (center) is joined by Lithuanian president Gitanas Nausėda (left) and Polish president Andrzej Duda in Lviv in January 2023. (Photo credit: Office of the President of Ukraine/Flickr)

supporters, welcoming millions of Ukrainian refugees—despite its record of blocking asylum seekers from other regions—and championing the EU’s international campaign to impose penalties on Russia. Orbán has eschewed solidarity with Ukraine, only signing on to the EU’s sanctions after raising vociferous objections and causing extended delays.

In essence, Orbán is cynically attempting to reap the contradictory benefits of good relations with the Russian aggressor—including cheap energy supplies—and membership in the EU. Poland’s PiS government, by contrast, is aligning with or even leading the EU on issues of security, but using that stance to distract from or excuse its continued resistance to the enforcement of EU norms on the rule of law and other democratic principles. Like many more repressive regimes around the world, the Polish government is effectively asking its democratic partners to ignore its domestic abuses—the political capture of the Constitutional Tribunal, for example, or the legal harassment of journalists—in exchange for cooperation on security matters. The fact that the Ukraine conflict is explicitly a defense of democracy against authoritarian aggression, as opposed to a faraway struggle against terrorism or insurgency, may make this strategy untenable in the long run.

The rift on Ukraine policy should not obscure the serious damage done to democratic institutions and human rights in both countries during the current governments’ tenures. Under the guise of unconstrained majoritarianism and a selective adherence to constitutional and legal procedures,

or what Kim Lane Scheppele calls “autocratic legalism,” the ruling parties in Budapest and Warsaw have systematically co-opted the judiciary, sidelined the independent media, and funneled public resources to progovernment, illiberal civic organizations.

If it is to maintain meaningful cohesion grounded in shared democratic standards, the EU must not hesitate to enforce its rules in Poland and Hungary. Trading them away for short-term concessions on sanctions or security matters would only strengthen the centrifugal forces that threaten to pull the union apart.

### ***Stable instability in the EU’s southeast***

The Russian invasion did little to shake many of the EU’s democracies from their patterns of partisan turmoil, and in some cases it added fuel to the fire of political dysfunction. In Romania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria in particular, a propensity for stable instability remained in evidence.

In Bulgaria, where anticorruption protests in 2021 led to the ouster of then prime minister Boyko Borisov’s conservative Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) party, a durable government proved elusive. A four-party coalition led by Kiril Petkov took office in December 2021, but ongoing disagreements over policy issues, such as the withdrawal of Bulgaria’s objections to North Macedonia’s EU accession bid, prompted a vote of no confidence in June 2022. Parallel disagreements voiced by President Rumen Radev over Bulgaria’s provision of military aid to Ukraine had notably

compelled Petkov to use covert means to deliver supplies for Kyiv. With no new coalition deal on the horizon, voters recently returned to the polls in April 2023 for their fifth round of parliamentary elections in two years.

Similarly, political disputes over unpopular policy decisions led to a successful no-confidence vote against Prime Minister Eduard Heger’s government in Slovakia in December. The country’s political instability was coupled with dysfunction in the courts and prosecutorial service, which have long failed to address hate crimes against minority groups. In October, just a week after the brutal murder of two people at an LGBT+ bar in Bratislava, the parliament voted against a proposal to provide same-sex couples with the same rights to inheritance and medical records as heterosexual couples.

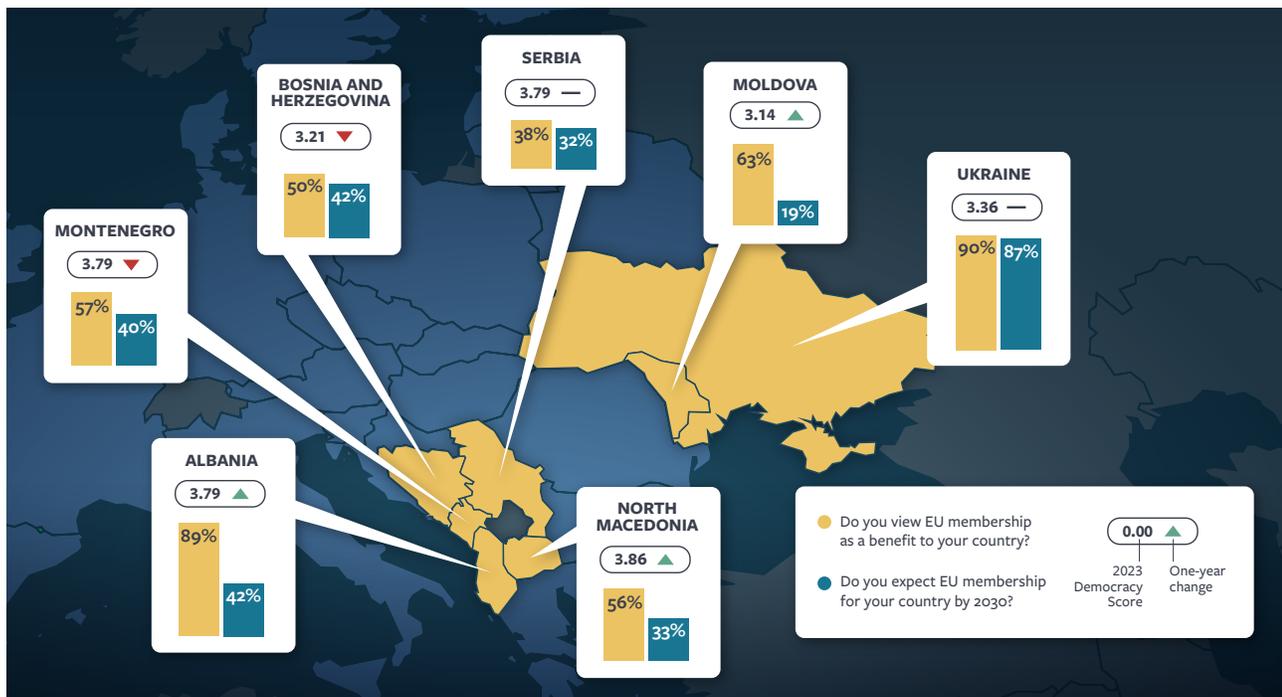
Romania proved more capable of stable governance in 2022, a welcome development given the country’s extensive history of rule by fragile minority coalitions. Despite the

current government’s broad base of support in the country, however, Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă’s cabinet was not free of controversy. Multiple plagiarism scandals and tendentious statements about the war in Ukraine prompted several ministers to resign.

It is important to note that these countries’ political travails had no significant impact on their democratic institutions or *Nations in Transit* scores during the year, aside from a small National Democratic Governance decline in Slovakia. Partisan and policy disputes were worked out according to parliamentary procedures, and voters were called on to resolve major impasses. Nevertheless, in the absence of more lasting systemic remedies, there is a risk that the influence of pro-Russian factions in Bulgaria, a violent culture of intolerance in Slovakia, and chronic ethical breaches in Romania will gradually weaken the public’s trust in democracy itself.

## EU ACCESSION: DESIRES VERSUS EXPECTATIONS

In 2022, citizens in EU candidate countries generally remained supportive of EU membership but were doubtful that full membership would come anytime soon. Serbians were a clear exception with their skepticism about the benefits of EU membership.



Sources:  
 Council, R. C. (2022). Balkan Barometer 2022. February–March 2022.  
 International Republican Institute. (2022). Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Moldova. October–November 2022.  
 National Democratic Institute. (2022). Opportunities and Challenges Facing Ukraine’s Democratic Transition. May 2022.

## The EU's power to influence its periphery

Whereas the region's democracies were relatively resilient and the Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes almost uniformly deteriorated, the Hybrid Regimes in *Nations in Transit 2023* exhibited—as might be expected—a mixture of progress and setbacks. Of the 10 countries classified as Hybrid Regimes that are not EU member states, five earned improvements and three suffered declines in their Democracy Scores, with incremental democratic reforms partly offset by endemic corruption and challenges to media independence.

Nevertheless, a common throughline connects this large and institutionally diverse group of countries: Moscow's renewed invasion of its neighbor made clear that the EU is their only viable option for political and economic solidarity.

All critiques of the union notwithstanding, membership has yielded material benefits for states that have joined. In part due to redistribution and investment under the EU's Cohesion Policy, even Bulgaria, the poorest country in the bloc, fares better in both socioeconomic terms and the democratic indicators of *Nations in Transit* than all the aspirant countries of the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus.

Closer relations with the EU therefore appear to be the sole path forward for states in the region that want peace and prosperity. Polling data bear this out, showing that a majority of citizens in the EU aspirant countries have a strong desire to achieve formal membership. But they are also aware that the accession process has been complicated by a number of factors, both internal and external to each candidate.

Whether these problems can be resolved in a way that strengthens rather than weakens the EU's democratizing influence is a crucial question for the entire region.

### **Democracy's front line**

Ukraine, Moldova, and Armenia have steadily improved their democratic institutions in recent years, driven forward by civic activism and consequential elections. Even as authoritarian aggression and skullduggery have threatened their basic security, the people and their freely elected leaders have fought to improve governance through close collaboration with local NGOs and professionals.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine was designed in part to scuttle this progress and reassert the Kremlin's influence over such states, but instead it broke an EU deadlock on the issue of accession. The union was forced to recognize these countries' democratic momentum, and the fact that closer relations were an imperative for its own security.

Moldova and Ukraine were both granted full EU candidate status in 2022. Moldova's political leaders demonstrated their governance credentials amid a national security crisis on the border with Ukraine, a tense relationship with the opposition, and an entrenched corruption problem. In Ukraine itself, the war has undoubtedly and understandably challenged the government's adherence to democratic principles. For instance, the authorities restricted the reach of opposition media channels, presumably to present the public with a unified message of national defense. Nonetheless, Ukrainians and their elected officials, held in check by a robust civil society sector, generally rejected the notion that political rights and civil liberties

## Authoritarian aggression in the Caucasus

The Russian invasion of Ukraine alerted the entire world to the existential threat that a hardening dictatorship can pose to neighboring states with democratic aspirations. But a similar scenario is unfolding in the Caucasus, and receiving far less attention. In 2020, Azerbaijan's military recaptured parts of Nagorno-Karabakh, a region of the country held by local ethnic Armenian forces since they defeated Azerbaijani troops in 1994. After its 2020 victory, the regime of President Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan continued to pursue its territorial ambitions by military means. It launched a major incursion into the Republic of Armenia in 2022, and in early 2023 it further isolated the ethnic Armenians who remained in Nagorno-Karabakh

by blocking a crucial road link under the guise of "environmental protests." Moscow's seizure of Ukrainian territory in 2014 and 2022 resulted in a dramatic loss of rights and physical safety for residents, and there are abundant indications that an expansion of Baku's control over Nagorno-Karabakh and parts of Armenia would eliminate the freedoms and security of local people in much the same way. Democratic governments must not ignore the danger. They should take every possible step to bolster Armenia's democracy and ensure the protection of all those living under or fleeing Azerbaijani rule or occupation.



A woman walks near a roadblock in the northern part of the ethnically divided town of Mitrovica, Kosovo in December 2022. (Photo credit: REUTERS/Florion Goga)

could be cast aside during wartime, indicating the country’s democratic strength and its remarkable distance from Moscow’s understanding of security as the opposite of freedom.

Armenia has yet to apply for EU candidacy, but it continued to make democratic gains in 2022, becoming the only country in *Nations in Transit 2023* with improvements on more than one indicator. The NGO and independent media sectors made strides, particularly as their objections persuaded the government to backtrack on controversial 2021 legislation that had criminalized defamation. The potential for deterioration remains, however, as evidenced by arrests of opposition candidates before local elections last August. With its dependence on authoritarian Russia for military protection against Azerbaijan, its openly hostile and equally authoritarian neighbor, Armenia’s democratic project faces uniquely powerful headwinds.

The poor performance of Georgia’s government stands in contrast to the progress of its fellow Hybrid Regimes in Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The country’s toxic political polarization—a problem that is listed as the first “key priority” in the EU’s opinion on its qualified candidate status—has seeped into every public institution. The media ecosystem is diverse only in the sense that it is thoroughly politicized and outlets are reliably biased in favor of the ruling party or the opposition. In early 2023, the government proposed a Russian-style “foreign agents” law, which would have forced local NGOs and media outlets that receive more than 20

percent of their funding from abroad to register as “agents of foreign influence.” The move triggered angry protests and police violence before the legislation was withdrawn.

### ***Disillusionment in the Western Balkans***

As with the other Hybrid Regimes in *Nations in Transit*, people living in the non-EU countries of the Western Balkans maintain strong support for accession to the bloc. In 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina was granted EU candidate status, while Kosovo officially submitted its application for consideration. Yet despite these important markers of progress, citizens in the Western Balkans have felt abandoned by domestic elites who resist democratic reforms that would weaken their grip on power, and by international elites who lack the resolve to follow through on the accession process.

Unlike in Ukraine, where the public’s expectations for accession by 2030 are high, years or even decades of waiting in the Western Balkans have left residents disillusioned about the possibility of membership in the short term. Even their long-term hopes are comparatively modest: for many in the area, the attraction of EU accession is more about individual prosperity and the right to travel, work, and study abroad—in other words, to leave—than it is about the prospect of democratic progress at home. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “about one-fifth of the population born in the Western Balkan Six region lives abroad, mostly in a handful of OECD member countries.”

Given the crisis of confidence that this exodus represents, it is perhaps unsurprising that democratic institutions in the Western Balkans continued to falter in 2022. Modest improvements in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia were balanced by declines in Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia's score remained unchanged.

North Macedonia and Montenegro both experienced acute political dysfunction during the year, but their Democracy Scores moved in opposite directions. Political polarization in Montenegro, largely over issues of national identity, led to the collapse of two governments. In addition, lawmakers pushed through legislation that undermined citizens' basic rights, while the Constitutional Court lacked a quorum to review the controversial measures. Still, the recent defeat of Milo Đukanović, who has ruled the country's political class for more than three decades, in the April 2023 presidential election raised hopes for generational change. In North Macedonia, similarly strong political polarization and parliamentary blockades hampered the passage of legislation at the national level, but local governments' steady improvements in transparency, civic participation, and intermunicipal cooperation had a noticeably positive impact on democracy and the delivery of public services.

Although Albania's scores in *Nations in Transit* place it close to North Macedonia and Montenegro in terms of democratic development, polling suggests that Albanians are more optimistic about the potential of EU membership to provide not only economic prosperity but also improved democratic standards. Albania's democratic institutions are challenged by clientelistic party politics, a lagging judicial vetting process, and rampant corruption. The country's special anticorruption courts made small strides in addressing graft during 2022, resulting in a modest score improvement in the Corruption indicator, but there was little opportunity for further reforms before local elections set for May 2023.

Long-strained relations between Serbia and Kosovo have continued to undermine democratic progress in both countries, though in differing respects. Remarkable efforts by Kosovo's civil society to effect positive policy changes on gender-based violence and ethnic divisions were overshadowed during the year by an uptick in violence in the Serb-majority north, where the Serbian government's influence and activities continue to subvert Kosovo's full authority over its territory. Within Serbia, the opposition returned to the political playing field after a 2020 electoral boycott, but the 2022 presidential and parliamentary elections were once again marred by irregularities, resulting in victories

for incumbent president Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party. Vučić has maintained his grip on power in part by positioning himself as the key to both domestic stability and regional security, using various self-serving crises to distract from his government's ongoing capture of the media and silencing of critical voices in civil society. Negotiations between Vučić and Kosovo prime minister Albin Kurti have been plodding, despite frantic attempts by US and European envoys to resolve the countries' protracted dispute over Kosovo's sovereignty.

Across the Western Balkans, elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens, allowing antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders to control their countries' future. As local civic actors push for change, international partners must bring them into the decision-making fold. Allowing these countries to languish—or worse, appeasing and granting concessions to recalcitrant politicians—would create fresh openings for external authoritarian powers to sow disorder and gain influence, as demonstrated by Moscow's ongoing disinformation and political networking in the neighborhood. The EU must reassess its approach and reengage in good faith, but it is incumbent upon national leaders to deliver the democratic progress for which so many of their citizens yearn.

## Sinking to new depths of authoritarian violence

Unrestrained state violence has become a distinguishing feature of the region's Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes. The Kremlin's all-out war to destroy Ukraine, coupled with its brutal campaign to smother domestic dissent, is the primary example. But from the South Caucasus to Central Asia, authoritarian leaders in 2022 upended the fundamental purpose of the state—the provision of physical security and other public goods—and used lethal force to increase their own power.

Of the eight countries classified as Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes in *Nations in Transit 2023*, six registered declines in their overall Democracy Scores. None earned improvements. The state institutions of Turkmenistan, with a score of 1 on a scale of 1 to 7, and Azerbaijan, with a score of 1.07, are virtually devoid of any democratic qualities.

### **Consolidation or bust**

For the second year in a row, the Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime category, once the second largest

in *Nations in Transit*, has been left empty. The region’s autocracies have steadily abandoned or crushed the various features—a degree of autonomy for local governments, a tiny corps of independent journalists or civic activists, a genuine if hemmed-in opposition party, or space for limited dissent within the ruling elite—that had previously mitigated the excesses of absolute power. The result, of course, has been a series of disastrous policy decisions that have taken citizens’ lives and threatened some of these countries’ survival.

Vladimir Putin’s horrific attempt to conquer Ukraine has not only devastated that country’s physical infrastructure and killed tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians and soldiers. It has also led to the slaughter of ill-equipped and poorly led Russian troops, and a dramatic loss of civil liberties within Russia itself. Russian authorities have adopted oppressive new laws, forced the few remaining independent media outlets and NGOs to close down or go into exile, and imposed heavy prison sentences on prominent dissidents as well as ordinary citizens who dared to express opposition to the war. Russia’s regional and local governments have been dragooned into the war effort, ordered by the Kremlin to deliver reservists, conscripts, supplies, and financial resources to support the

violent and chaotic occupation of southeastern Ukraine. The country’s Democracy Score for 2022 consequently fell from 1.32 to 1.11, marking its steepest annual drop in the history of the report and moving it closer to the lowest possible score of 1.

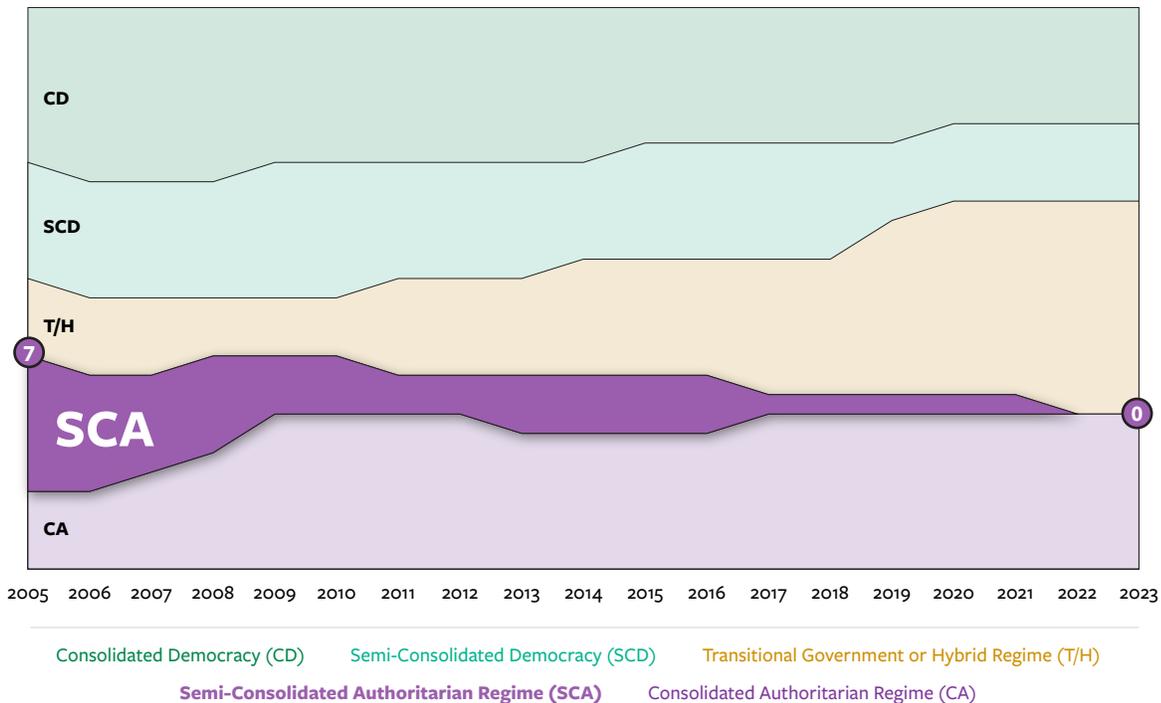
Moscow’s war has had a separate but significant impact on Belarus, which is quickly becoming a colony of Putin’s imperial project. The Russian military used Belarusian territory to launch its initial attacks on northern Ukraine, and Belarus has since been under extreme pressure to yield more of its sovereignty and participate more directly in the invasion. Meanwhile, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who owes his grip on power to Russian support in the wake of his fraudulent reelection in 2020, has adopted many of the same methods of domestic repression as in Russia. He has also tested out new tactics, such as appropriating “solidarity funds” donated by citizens to the Belarusian prodemocracy movement and diverting them to state-owned charities.

**Autocracy’s vicious circle**

In the authoritarian states of Central Asia, internal developments rather than regional conflict proved to be the

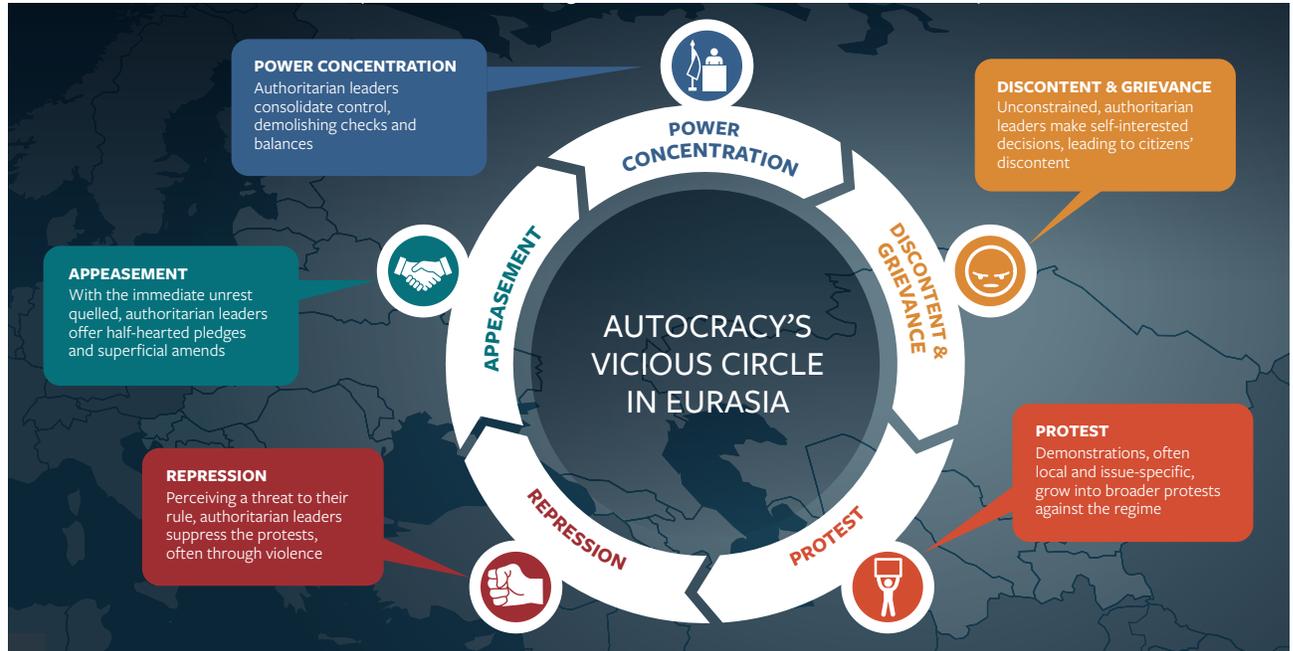
**A GROWING DIVIDE BETWEEN REGIME TYPES**

The gulf between Transitional Governments/Hybrid Regimes and Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes was increasingly clear, as security forces in several of the latter countries engaged in violent repression during 2022.



## AUTOCRACY’S VICIOUS CIRCLE IN EURASIA

Rather than addressing the people’s grievances, autocrats repress protests, often through violence, and further consolidate their power.



key drivers in a vicious circle of power concentration, dissent, and violent repression. The ruling elites in these countries have spent decades amassing wealth and power, leading to widespread societal dissatisfaction. Citizens’ grievances, often localized in origin, fuel protests, which quickly expand across the country and are interpreted as threats to the regime. Rather than addressing the grievances directly, authorities attempt to stamp out the protests with mass detention, torture, and even murder. Once the most vocal protesters are subdued, the regime offers overtures of reconciliation and superficial concessions to signal an end to the crisis. But the sources of discontent remain, setting the stage for the process to repeat.

The pattern was visible throughout the subregion in 2022. In the southwestern Kazakhstani city of Zhanaozen, protests over rising gas prices escalated into antigovernment demonstrations in multiple cities and towns. Acting on orders from President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, authorities responded to the unrest with gunfire, resulting in more than 238 deaths. After the violence had ebbed, Tokayev promised a more democratic “New Kazakhstan,” but developments since then point instead to a process of “de-Nazarbayevification”—the elimination of former president Nursultan Nazarbayev

and his family from the commanding heights of the country’s government and economy. The tightly controlled elections for the presidency in November 2022 and the legislature in March 2023 showed no meaningful improvements to Kazakhstan’s democratic institutions.

In Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, protests were triggered by the regimes’ attempts to further centralize power over the nominally autonomous regions of Gorno-Badakhshan and Karakalpakstan, respectively. Autonomous local governance has historically been Central Asia’s most stable indicator in *Nations in Transit*, as decades-old allowances for self-rule by ethnic minority populations survived in some modest form while other checks and balances were obliterated. But authoritarian rulers inevitably seek complete control over their territories and cannot tolerate local leaders who are not fully enmeshed in the regime’s patron-client network.

The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, home to Tajikistan’s ethnic Pamiri minority and a relatively developed and active civil society, has been a target for repression by President Emomali Rahmon’s government since at least 2012. After police killed a local resident, Gulbiddin Ziyobekov, in late 2021, protests erupted and continued

into 2022. The authorities exacerbated the situation by cracking down violently on protesters, killing dozens of people. Protests broke out in Karakalpakstan in response to draft constitutional amendments proposed by Uzbekistani president Shavkat Mirziyoyev that would have eliminated the republic's autonomous status and right to secede. The uprising met a similar response, with more than a dozen ethnic Karakalpak protesters killed and hundreds of others wounded, though the government dropped its planned amendments.

In all three of these cases, investigations into the violence have been quashed, authorities have weaponized the judicial system to prosecute and silence those who have spoken out, and inadequate reforms have been introduced to mollify the public's anger, laying the groundwork for fresh unrest. Already in April 2023, protesters from Zhanaozen staged new demonstrations over unemployment, and security forces again answered them not with aid but with repression, arresting dozens of people.

## The immeasurable value of Ukraine's sacrifices

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine represents the final step in the demolition of democracy in Russia, and a sobering moment for the entire *Nations in Transit* region. It has dispelled any remaining illusion among democracies that the threat posed by authoritarian neighbors can be dampened through close economic ties and muted criticism on

human rights matters. Such policies of “engagement” with autocracies are futile in the absence of democratic reform, and economic interdependence is outright dangerous.

The invasion has also shattered Moscow's already faltering efforts to build an alternative regional bloc in Eurasia, leaving the EU as the only game in town for states seeking solidarity without imperial domination. If it is to make good on its promise of a Europe “whole, free, and at peace,” the EU must shake off its sclerotic approach to addressing illiberal and autocratic challenges within its borders, and reinvigorate its commitment to aspiring EU members and freedom-loving people across the region. The sort of neglect and half-measures that have characterized EU relations with the Western Balkans in the past cannot be repeated in Ukraine, which will need a monumental amount of support to build a prosperous democracy after its victory.

But even with the war still raging, the daily work of democracy continues. Whether through increased citizen participation in local decision-making or the successful investigation and prosecution of high-level government corruption, the people of the *Nations in Transit* region are taking steps to improve their societies. In the most closed autocracies, citizens are striving to recover basic freedoms and demanding justice for state abuses, sometimes carrying on with their activism from places of exile or imprisonment. Democratic governments must not forget or give up on these allies in the broader struggle for freedom. No democracy will be fully secure until such movements achieve their goals.



After Russia retreated its troops from around Kyiv region, some Ukrainian refugees are beginning their trips to return home. (Photo Credit: WikiCommons/Pakkin Leung)

Just as the future of freedom and democracy in Europe and Eurasia depends on Ukraine's victory, so too does the future of global freedom depend on the defeat of autocracy and the revitalization of democracy in this region. Should the Kremlin succeed in its naked attempt to conquer and absorb Ukraine, it would threaten all that has been achieved since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and other oppressive regimes

could resort to military aggression to advance their interests. Ukrainians are making immense sacrifices to ensure that their children can live in a Europe and a world that do not fear the wrath of dictators, the theft of oligarchs, or the lies of propagandists. It is up to Ukraine's democratic partners to ensure that these sacrifices are not squandered. ■

## Rebuffing Russian Pressure, Ukraine's People Go Their Own Way

By Mike Smeltzer

At its inception in 1996, the *Nations in Transit* report proceeded on the assumption that the region's democratic trajectory would largely be determined by the governments and citizens of each country, and that any foreign involvement in a given country's domestic affairs would be limited by the norm of respect for national sovereignty. The recent histories of Ukraine and Russia demonstrate how the first part of that assumption has held true, even as the second part has been steadily displaced by a much more troubling reality.

For decades now, democratic progress in Ukraine has been stymied by a combination of homegrown obstacles and malign interference from the authoritarian regime in Russia, whose leaders see any democratic success in a neighboring state as a threat to their rule. Like in most countries, prodemocracy reformers in Ukraine have had to struggle against entrenched local networks of corruption and clientelism. But they must do so while also fending off tentacles of Russian support for those networks, an onslaught of Russian propaganda and disinformation, and successive Russian military invasions.

Despite these powerful headwinds, Ukrainians have remained committed to a democratic future. The incremental, quotidian work of democracy—of governing, legislating, and managing elections; of journalism, activism, and community involvement—has resulted in a freer and more just society. Although Ukraine does not yet meet the criteria of a Consolidated Democracy in this report's methodology, its people are clearly engaged in a collective project of democratization.

Since Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea and military occupation of parts of the Donbas in 2014, Ukraine's overall

Democracy Score has actually improved, rising from 3.07 to 3.39 on a scale of 1 to 7. The victories underlying this improvement range from the return of free and fair national elections after the 2014 ouster of authoritarian president Viktor Yanukovich to the implementation of reforms that shifted power from the central government to the country's regions and municipalities in 2021.

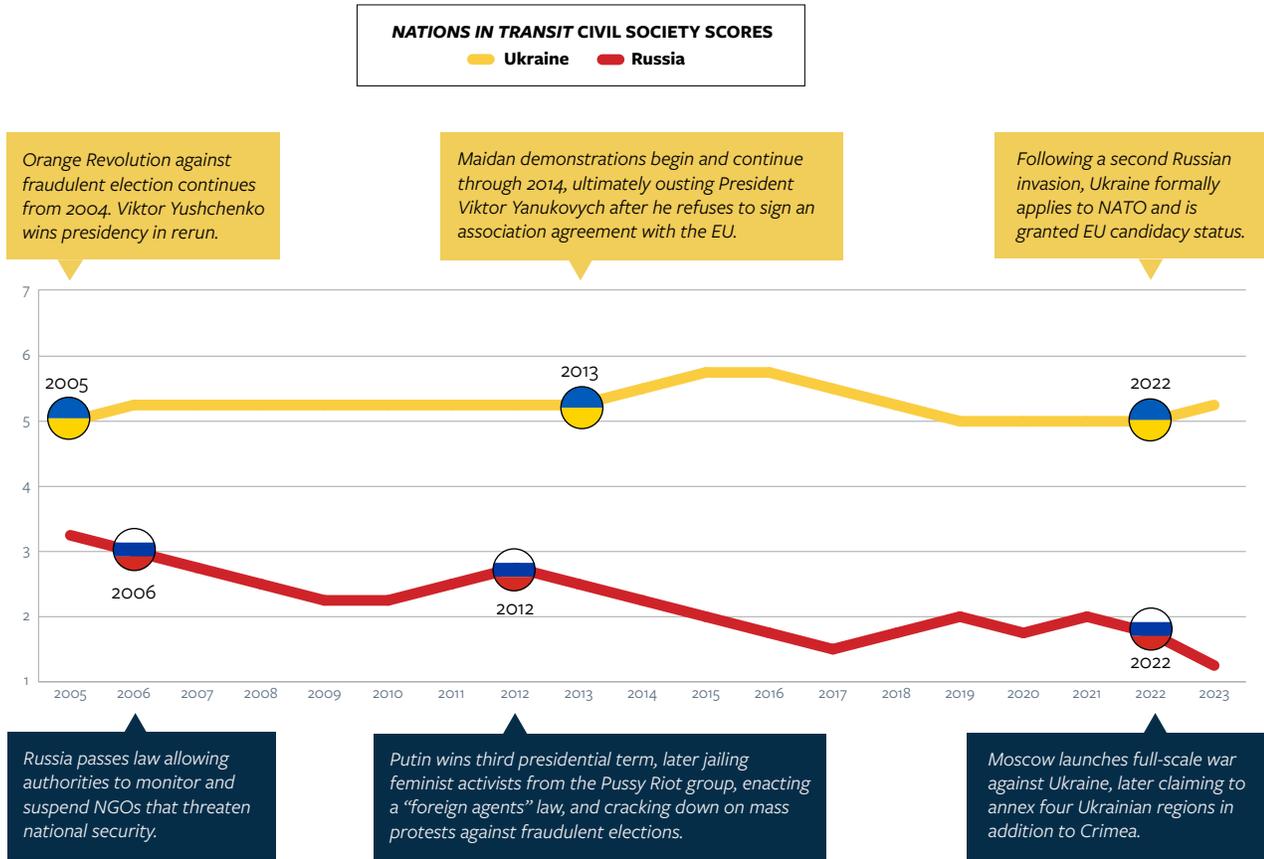
After the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine's democratic state institutions withstood the pressure and organized a stunningly successful national defense. At the same time, Ukrainian civil society—a long-standing bright spot in the *Nations in Transit* report—demonstrated its remarkable capacity to support the war effort and provide crucial services to citizens, all without ceasing to hold the government accountable for any unnecessary infringements on democratic principles.

Ukraine's slow but steady democratic improvement makes for a stark contrast with Russia's rapid decline into the abyss of consolidated authoritarianism. Since 2005, Russia's Democracy Score has improved only once, in 2018, and only due to the impressive resilience of Russian civil society in the face of state repression. Unfortunately, democratic activists were later overwhelmed.

By 2022, Vladimir Putin's regime was on the hunt for even the slightest signs of dissent, with the invasion providing justification for curtailment of the limited rights and freedoms to which Russians still clung. Wartime censorship, the criminalization of "false information" about the conflict, and an intensified campaign of harassment and criminal cases

## TWO DISTINCT COUNTRIES, TWO DISTINCT TRAJECTORIES

Despite Vladimir Putin’s imperialist claims that Ukraine is an inseparable part of Russia, the two countries have followed quite different paths when it comes to democracy in general, and respect for civil society in particular.



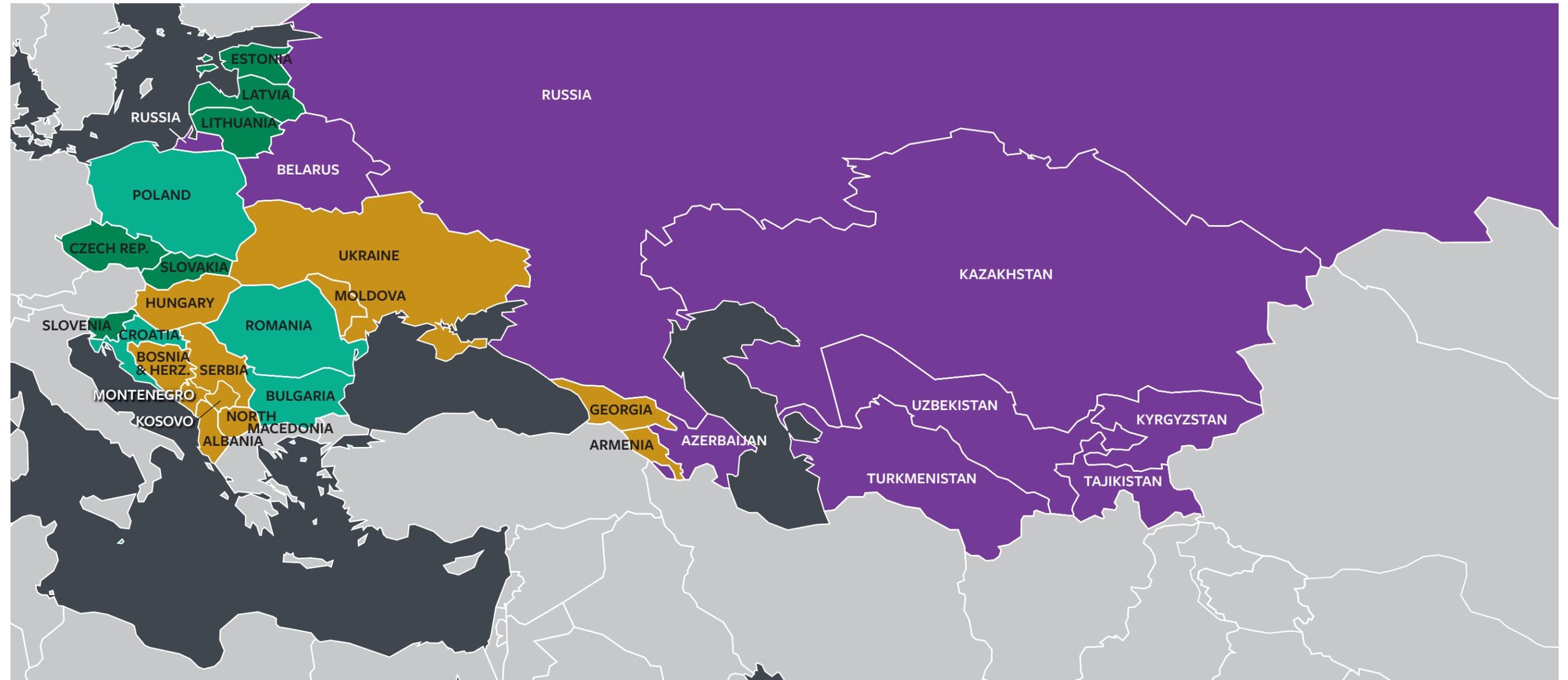
against independent journalists led to the effective demolition of Russia’s domestic independent media sector. While some Russian outlets have relocated abroad, determined to provide their country with credible reporting from across the border, the Kremlin’s media watchdog has blocked nearly 250,000 online resources, and the state-controlled media continue to churn out propaganda at breakneck speed.

The judiciary and the parliament have long been extensions of the executive branch’s repressive apparatus, but they have carried out this function with renewed zeal over the past year. Among other steps, the Russian State Duma expanded “foreign agents” legislation to make almost anyone vulnerable to that designation and to strip designated individuals of basic political rights and civil liberties. The Constitutional Court swiftly recognized and approved the government’s illegal claims to have annexed additional Ukrainian territory. And the joint efforts of judges and lawmakers to punish peaceful and even private acts of antiwar expression demonstrated their complete

subordination to the executive’s tyrannical agenda. According to OVD-Info, a Russian human rights monitoring agency, nearly 20,000 protesters have been detained since the February 2022 invasion began. Even the most venerable civic organizations, such as the Moscow Helsinki Group and Memorial, were targeted for liquidation by the Ministry of Justice.

Perhaps nothing so fully illustrates the divergent paths of Ukraine and Russia as the fate of their civil societies. Whereas Russia’s course is currently being charted by its authoritarian government alone, with the people and their advocates entirely excluded from the public arena, Ukraine is forging ahead through the mutually reinforcing efforts of a freely elected government and a vibrant, outspoken, and deeply respected civic sector. Whether these two countries will continue in their different directions may soon be determined on the battlefield, but the evidence suggests that Ukrainians will never give up on the democratic goals they have been working toward for the past 30 years. ■

NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2023



SURVEY FINDINGS

Regime Type	Number of Countries
Consolidated Democracy (CD)	6
Semi-Consolidated Democracy (SCD)	4
Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime (T/H)	11
Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime (SCA)	0
Consolidated Authoritarian Regime (CA)	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>

The map reflects the findings of Freedom House's *Nations in Transit 2023* survey, which assessed the status of democratic development in 29 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia during 2022. Freedom House introduced a Democracy Score—an average of each country's ratings on all of the indicators covered by *Nations in Transit*—beginning with the 2004 edition. The Democracy Score is designed to simplify analysis of the countries' overall progress or deterioration from year to year. Based on the Democracy Score and its scale of 1 to 7, Freedom House has defined the following regime types: **Consolidated Authoritarian Regime (1.00–2.00)**, **Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime (2.01–3.00)**, **Transitional/Hybrid Regime (3.01–4.00)**, **Semi-Consolidated Democracy (4.01–5.00)**, **Consolidated Democracy (5.01–7.00)**.

# After Populists' Defeat, Damage Must Be Repaired

By Alexandra Karppi

The Russian regime's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 presented voters in Central and Eastern Europe with a Manichaean choice: cast aside populist leaders who challenged democratic institutions and strengthen ties with the collective resistance against authoritarian aggression, or embrace those leaders, ignore democratic erosion, and risk alienation from the European Union (EU) and the broader transatlantic community.

While citizens in some countries—most notably Poland—have not yet had a chance to cast their ballots, the people of Slovenia and Czechia made a clear decision in favor of democratic values by ushering populists out of office. Nevertheless, the public discontent that fueled the rise of such politicians persists just below the surface, and the institutional damage they wrought cannot be repaired overnight.

## Checks and balances under pressure

Populism, as *Nations in Transit* defines it, is an ideology that pits a mystically unified nation against corrupt “elites” and external

enemies, and claims for a charismatic leader the power to voice the will of the nation. It thrives on public discontent and feelings of social, economic, and political disenfranchisement. Populism can be dangerous for democratic institutions because it rejects the basic constitutional notion that democracy requires space for political pluralism, protections for individual rights, and constraints on the will of the majority or any single leader.

Slovenia's Janez Janša and Czechia's Andrej Babiš have been characterized as populists due to their use of anti-elitist rhetoric while serving as their respective countries' prime ministers. More concerningly, they employed such rhetoric to facilitate attacks on democratic checks and balances. Janša, for example, not only smeared journalists on Twitter and vowed to protect the Slovene nation from “presstitutes,” but also sought to assert political control over Slovenia's independent public broadcaster. Babiš, meanwhile, decried economic inequality, promoted nationalist xenophobia, and used his privately owned media outlets to dominate public discourse,



Slovakia's President Zuzana Čaputová (left) congratulates Czech presidential candidate Petr Pavel at Pavel's headquarters in Prague after the results of the country's presidential election were announced on January 28, 2023. (Photo credit: REUTERS/David W Cerny)

deflecting attention from his conflicts of interest and defiance of anticorruption safeguards.

While the invasion of Ukraine was likely a clarifying event for voters in both countries, years of civic mobilization in Slovenia and Czechia laid the groundwork for Janša and Babiš's defeat at the polls. In June 2019, a year and a half after Babiš took office as prime minister, the Czech civic movement "A Million Moments for Democracy" organized the largest demonstration in Prague since 1989, demanding his resignation over allegations that he had fraudulently enriched himself with EU subsidies. In Slovenia, a coalition of over 100 civil society organizations known as "Voice of the People" staged weekly protests throughout 2021 and 2022 and engaged citizens in public debates about government policies.

When Slovenians finally cast ballots in the April 2022 parliamentary elections, the turnout was the highest in the country's history, and Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) was sidelined by a new liberal party, the Freedom Movement. In Czechia, Babiš and his Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) party had already been driven into opposition in the 2021 parliamentary elections, but he attempted a comeback in the January 2023 presidential vote, warning citizens that support for Ukraine could drag the country into war with Russia. Voters firmly rejected his candidacy, also with record-high turnout, and instead endorsed the independent Petr Pavel, a former general who ran on a platform of strong backing for Ukraine and closer ties to both the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

## Lingering threats

These election results, while encouraging, also demonstrated the enduring appeal of antiestablishment politics. The Freedom Movement was only six months old when it won the greatest share of parliament seats for a single party in Slovenian history. Its victory came at the expense of older parties, including liberal opposition groups as well as SDS's coalition partners. The results signaled that Slovenes were unhappy with the political status quo as a whole, despite Freedom Movement leader Robert Golob's promise of a return to normalcy.

Similarly in Czechia, it is tempting to read Pavel's presidential victory as evidence that populist sentiment has abated, but many Czechs have been shaken by the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine, and the country remains subject to prolific disinformation, political polarization, and regular demonstrations on issues such as rising inflation.

Moreover, defeating populist leaders in elections does not guarantee institutional recovery. Four months after he left office as prime minister in 2021, Babiš was finally sent to trial for alleged EU subsidy fraud, ending numerous delays by Czech prosecutors. But his subsequent acquittal just days before the presidential election underscored the legal system's apparent inability to secure corruption convictions against high-level officials, a chronic deficiency that caused Czechia's *Nations in Transit* scores for Judicial Framework and Independence and Corruption to decline last year.

Slovenia, one of the few countries to see a score change in this year's edition, quickly restored its Electoral Process score after suffering a decline due to flaws in the administration of a 2021 referendum under Janša's government. It successfully held parliamentary, local, and presidential elections in 2022, as well as three popular referendums. However, the public broadcaster, RTV Slovenija, has yet to regain its independence. Journalists connected to the former government continue to obtain employment at RTV, and its leadership has intimidated staff who call attention to ongoing threats to journalistic integrity. Funding for the broadcaster is still subject to political disputes, and a planned restructuring remains incomplete. As a result, a decline in Slovenia's Independent Media score dating to *Nations in Transit 2021* has not been reversed.

## Restoring accountability and public trust

Given that the scores of many Central and Eastern European countries remained static in *Nations in Transit 2023*, the improvements associated with the defeat of populist leaders in Slovenia and Czechia were a welcome sign of progress. But if the region is to stay on the democratic path amid shifting political winds and the threat of an economic recession, civil society must continue to be vocal in assessing the performance of new governments and demanding accountability when they fall into error. The United States and the EU should do everything possible to support such watchdog efforts.

For their part, the new leaders of Slovenia and Czech should demonstrate to citizens that democracy can deliver better social outcomes. By rebuilding democratic institutions and cultivating public trust in them, these governments could stimulate a virtuous circle in which citizens work to protect the institutions that serve their interests. While this will take time to achieve, the events of the past year have provided Slovenia and Czechia with an excellent opportunity to get started. ■

# Decades Later, Bosnians Are Still Waiting for Reform

By Alexandra Karppi

Bosnian democracy has been held hostage by a failure to reform the political system imposed by the Dayton Peace Accords. Diminishing resolve among the American and European leaders who were instrumental in designing this system has empowered domestic elites to exploit Dayton's complexities for their own gain. As a result, Bosnian citizens lack accountable government, and in many cases protection of their basic rights.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is the lowest-scored country in the Western Balkans, and among *Nations in Transit's* Hybrid Regimes. Without reengagement from the transatlantic alliance, corrupt elites will continue using state institutions to empower themselves at the expense of Bosnian citizens' fundamental freedoms.

## Setting a course for dysfunction

The Dayton Accords ended the 1992–95 Bosnian War and formed a multiethnic BiH on paper. But in doing so, they created a unique political system that prioritized protections for Bosnia's three main ethnic groups—Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Bosnian Croats, and Bosnian Serbs, deemed “constituent peoples”—over checks and balances. This power-sharing agreement guaranteed the three groups representation in each branch of government and allowed them veto power in national and local parliaments and within the presidency.

But by virtually guaranteeing postwar elites seats in key institutions, Dayton inadvertently presented them with the opportunity to cement wartime patronage networks into the functions of the state. Moreover, significant and at times overlapping powers were granted to local, rather than federal, administrations—in effect granting outsized influence to local power brokers.

The result has been a decentralized, bloated governance system that presents vast opportunities for corruption, reinforces ethnic divisions in public life, and allows elites to sow dysfunction rather than seek compromise. It became clear as early as 1996—when hard-line Bosnian Serb lawmakers

refused to convene the state parliament, paralyzing political life for months—that domestic officials could harness Dayton's mechanisms to block reform. Bosnian Serb leaders leveraged Dayton's power-sharing mechanisms to sit in parliament and disrupt basic governance to avoid making the meaningful changes that the agreement required, believing that reforms—such as returning Bosnian citizens to their prewar homes—would hamper their consolidation of power.

In response to abuses of Dayton, the international community in 1997 expanded the powers of the Office of the High Representative (OHR)—an office established by the accords that operates under the auspices of the United Nations—granting it authority to remove elected officials and enforce other decisions if political actors were deemed to threaten the peace process. In the early 2000s, the United States and European Union (EU) worked in tandem through the OHR to render key reforms, such as the centralization of law enforcement and the establishment of a vetting mechanism for prosecutors and judges. In 2005, Bosnian officials began work on a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU—a hopeful step toward continued democratic reform and European integration.

But foreign policy leaders in the United States, then the EU, turned their attention elsewhere, and oversight of constitutional reforms was left to entrenched nationalist elites in the name of “local ownership.” Rather than continuing work to streamline government and install tools for accountability, Bosnia's elected representatives undermined previously agreed-upon reforms to maintain the patronage networks that kept them in power. In the years since, a vibrant civil society, periodic popular mobilizations, and civic political parties have yet to meaningfully upend these networks.

Incremental declines in BiH's scores have made it one of the longest-running Transitional/Hybrid Regimes in the *Nations in Transit* region. It has languished in this category for over 15 years. Most startlingly, BiH's National Democratic Governance score declined to “Consolidated Authoritarian” levels last year, an unfortunate feat that no other Transitional/Hybrid Regime



Serbian president Milorad Dodik attends a Day of the Republic event in East Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on January 9, 2023. (Photo credit: REUTERS/Dado Ruvic)

has achieved, reflecting the constant dysfunction across Bosnian institutions.

Today's Bosnia is as fractured along ethnic lines as it was in 1996–97. Republika Srpska (RS) leaders remain the most egregious spoilers by continuing to threaten outright secession, pairing these threats with genocide denial and militant ethnic nationalism. At the end of 2021, RS president Milorad Dodik made moves to pull out of the national armed forces, judiciary, and tax system—provocations that drew tepid warnings from the United States and EU. In 2023, Dodik tried to enact a controversial law that would transfer federal property to the RS (and was also deemed illegal by the Constitutional Court). He claims to have severed diplomatic relations with the United States and United Kingdom—both of which eventually sanctioned him for corruption.

## Stability, at what cost?

In 2023, the international community remains disinterested in BiH, while at the same time easily distracted by its intermittent, elite-manufactured crises. Scholars have described BiH as a “[stabilotocracy](#),” a “[peace cartel](#),” and an “[elastic autocracy](#)”—monikers that capture how local elites can sidestep democratic reforms by presenting themselves as guarantors of basic security to audiences abroad. The United States and EU have, at best, appeased them. At worst, they have rewarded illiberal behavior, as when the OHR succumbed to lobbying by Bosnian Croat officials to change election laws in their favor last year. Meanwhile, Bosnia's young people are emigrating in droves.

Prioritizing “stability” over institutional reform is not working for Bosnian democracy. The United States and EU need to recognize that transforming BiH's political system from a precarious peace agreement to one that can support a robust, representative democracy is a unique challenge that requires sustained attention and targeted action. To empower domestic democratic reformers and give young Bosnians a reason to stay, the United States and EU must work alongside Bosnian civil society to change the incentives in Dayton's political system and hold elites accountable for failing the country's people.

The EU's acceptance in December of BiH's candidacy status is an opportunity to reengage. In doing so, the United States and EU should not wait for the latest political debacle to formulate a coherent vision for joint engagement. Incentives aimed at reversing the capture of Bosnian institutions by corrupt elites—anticorruption initiatives and renewed support for rule-of-law mechanisms, for example—would be a good starting point. These should be deployed alongside coordinated sanctions for persistent abuses and more explicit naming and shaming.

Perhaps most importantly, a combined effort to boost Bosnia's reformers and reverse its democratic decline would serve as tangible proof that integration remains the way forward for struggling Hybrid Regimes, and it would bolster the credibility of the European project at a pivotal time for democracy and freedom. ■

# Nations in Transit 2023: Policy Recommendations

To counter the spread of antidemocratic practices in Europe and Eurasia, democratic countries—especially the United States and European Union (EU) member states—should consider pursuing the following policy priorities.

## HELP UKRAINE WIN.

Defeating authoritarian aggression in Ukraine, on Ukraine's terms, is an imperative for the freedom and security of Ukraine, of Europe, and of the world. The Kremlin's military offensive is a direct attack not just on Ukrainian civilians and their physical infrastructure, but also on their collective effort to build a robust democracy. The Russian leadership was emboldened in part by weak international responses to its previous invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. It is now vital for Ukraine to receive the financial and technical assistance it needs to achieve victory.

Anything less than outright victory in Ukraine would perpetuate the security threat from Russia, discourage or undermine democratization efforts in neighboring countries that remain exposed to escalatory coercion by the Kremlin, and encourage other authoritarian rulers in the region and around the world to use force in their own efforts to suppress democracy and human rights.

In addition to providing direct aid to Ukraine's war effort, democratic governments should:

- **Defer to Ukrainians regarding the terms of victory and peace.** According to a recent [opinion poll](#), 97 percent of Ukrainians believe they will win the war, and 74 percent envision the restoration of Ukraine's internationally recognized borders as defined in 1991. Policymakers should exercise great caution when considering any cease-fire or peace negotiation intended to give the Kremlin an "off-ramp," particularly if initiated by the current regime in Russia given its repeated violations of past agreements.
- **Recommit to respecting the territorial integrity of all countries and condemn the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty.** A failure to endorse this basic principle of international law by any state in the region would legitimize authoritarian aggression and raise the risk of additional attempts to redraw borders through violent conflict.
- **Respond swiftly to requests for assistance from Ukraine's government and civil society.** Many European countries, the United States, and other democracies outside the region deserve considerable credit for their solidarity with Ukraine to date, but assistance must be delivered with greater speed as Kyiv prepares to reclaim more of its territory, seeks accountability for Russian war crimes, and undertakes massive reconstruction efforts. Visit [freedomhouse.org](https://www.freedomhouse.org) to learn more about necessary assistance.
- **Support the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute Russian leaders for the crime of aggression.** States that endorse this effort should dedicate diplomatic resources to win the necessary votes at the UN General Assembly. Democratic governments should also assist the existing investigation at the International Criminal Court (ICC) into other war crimes in Ukraine. The US government should give its full support to the ICC process. In December 2022 Congress [loosened](#) the laws that have long limited US engagement with the court, but more robust support from the United States would strengthen the ICC's effectiveness.
- **Crack down on efforts to evade sanctions against Russian entities.** The sanctions are designed to increase the economic cost of the invasion and constrain Moscow's ability to sustain and resupply its military. Any effort to evade them, whether by foreign governments or individual companies, harms that crucial goal and carries global implications.



A woman holds a Ukrainian flag while looking over a row of destroyed Russian military vehicles on display at Maidan Square in Kyiv, Ukraine, in August 2022. (Photo credit: AP/David Goldman)

## RENEW COMMITMENTS TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM.

An important finding from this year's *Nations in Transit* report is that many countries' solidarity with Ukraine and prodemocracy foreign policies were not matched by meaningful efforts to reverse democratic backsliding at home. The protection of rights, freedoms, and lasting security in the region will depend on a shared adherence to democratic principles, which must not be neglected even in wartime.

Democratic leaders should take the following steps to reinforce regional and international standards of governance and repair the damage caused by 19 consecutive years of overall decline.

### Reinvigorate the EU accession process and related democratic benchmarks in the Western Balkans.

Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were granted EU candidate status in 2022, but existing aspirant countries in the Western Balkans have long been in a holding pattern, with domestic elites resisting democratic reforms and EU officials failing to move the process forward. The resulting stagnation is dampening citizens' hope for improvement and creating opportunities for authoritarian meddling. To address this problem and strengthen accession procedures for all new candidates, the EU and interested national governments should:

- **Expand accession-related reporting and consultation.** Given the apparent lack of progress toward implementing requisite EU accession reforms among some Western Balkans states, and the region's integration being perceived as a lower priority by Brussels, regional governments and the EU should adjust reporting requirements to include greater input by nongovernmental actors; facilitate greater participation by and feedback from citizens in the Western Balkans on the state of reforms; and increase public-facing communication from the EU on any progress or setbacks in the region.
- **Prioritize greater economic integration and investment in candidate countries.** The EU process should deliver tangible benefits to citizens, including [visa-free travel](#), as a reward for democratic improvements and an incentive for further progress. Simultaneous investments in areas like energy diversification can reinforce the connection between stronger democratic institutions and economic prosperity. Where appropriate, donors should place conditions on their assistance, provided they are clearly articulated, and ensure that citizens have an opportunity to participate in planning and implementation.
- **Caution against alternative trade agreements that undercut the EU process.** The long delays in

EU integration for the Western Balkans have given rise to separate projects aimed at increasing trade and cooperation among states in the subregion. These have the potential to damage the feasibility and credibility of the EU-backed [Berlin Process](#) for regional integration, which was initiated in 2014.

- **Fund initiatives that address institutional problems with an impact on daily life.** For example, effective programs focused on improving the rule of law, combating systemic corruption, and developing national anticorruption strategies can demonstrate to citizens that the reform process is addressing their concerns and holding local officials accountable if they fall short of democratic standards.
- **Foster nongovernmental and subnational initiatives that support democracy and human rights.** Priorities could include increasing the resilience and effectiveness of civil society, encouraging sustainable independent media and investigative journalism, funding projects that counter disinformation of domestic and foreign origin, promoting transparent and accountable governance at the local level, and increasing political and civic participation by young people. Creating opportunities for nongovernmental exchanges of knowledge and experience among Western Balkan states and with EU member states would strengthen the sense that these societies belong to a wider European community based on democratic principles.
- **Improve coordination on sanctions designations.** Individual governments should work closely with the EU on sanctions policy to demonstrate a clear and unified dedication to upholding democratic values in the Western Balkans.

**Take decisive action to end attacks on democracy and the rule of law within the EU.** Despite their differing stances on the war in Ukraine, the governments of Poland and Hungary remain the two [worst offenders](#) when it comes to rule-of-law violations among the *Nations in Transit* region's EU member states. The EU should continue efforts to condition financial assistance to these countries on their compliance with European standards for the rule of law and human rights. For example, it should remain committed to Article 7 proceedings, which aim to punish member states that violate the common values of the EU by suspending

certain rights guaranteed by the Treaty on the European Union. It should also impose fines where necessary for noncompliance with rulings by the European Court of Justice. Diplomats based in Hungary should continue to engage with independent organizations, activists, journalists, lawyers, and political opposition leaders, demonstrating support for their democratic rights and amplifying their legitimate concerns. And the United States and EU members should explore, as needed, additional sanctions against Hungarian nationals or residents who may be assisting Moscow's war effort, as with the US sanctions imposed in April 2023 against senior officials at the Russian-owned, Budapest-based International Investment Bank.

### **Seize opportunities to push for reform in Central**

**Asia.** Following Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, some Central Asian governments began to reevaluate their economic and security dependence on Russia, especially in light of the Kremlin's hostile rhetoric regarding its responsibility for Russian-speaking minorities in these countries. This presents democratic governments with a window of opportunity to help shape—with broad civil society engagement—this subregion's future direction. To advance the cause of democracy in Central Asia, democracies should:

- **Increase diplomatic engagement with Central Asian governments.** The US State Department has already intensified its participation in the [C5+1 Diplomatic Platform](#), for example, and democracies should work together to undertake further initiatives of this kind in the coming years.
- **Increase the use of conditioned aid and trade to reduce the region's dependence on Moscow and Beijing.** Democratic states should encourage foreign investment and increase direct budget support as appropriate in Central Asia, tying their aid to anticorruption initiatives and other requirements that encourage reform and protect human rights. This will help to globalize Central Asian economies and support further engagement beyond Russia and China. All Central Asian countries but Kazakhstan are heavily [indebted to Beijing](#), and many economic migrants from the subregion rely on the Russian labor market for poverty alleviation. The EU's [Development Cooperation Instrument](#) is one existing vehicle for this kind of economic assistance.

- **Increase funding for programs that support nongovernmental democratic actors.** Such projects could encourage greater political pluralism, particularly at the local level; expand respect for basic human rights; facilitate collaborative efforts by civic groups to address public concerns; strengthen civil society resilience against physical and digital threats; and foster independent journalism and cross-border partnerships between investigative journalists. Foreign assistance should also enable educational and cultural exchanges like the US Peace Corps, and provide training to young people on civic and political participation.

## SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.

Across the *Nations in Transit* region, but especially in more repressive environments, human rights defenders are often the standard-bearers of democracy, advocating for a better future despite the risk of reprisal or punishment by authoritarian governments. Democracies should adopt the measures below to assist these local actors as they work to uphold fundamental freedoms in their countries.

**Provide financial support and protection to front-line activists and journalists.** Democratic governments must take additional action to support activists and independent journalists working in undemocratic settings, where they may be subject to violent political persecution, torture, and arrest. It is crucially important to empower civic initiatives in authoritarian countries and strive to position such movements for success, rather than stepping in only when activists are in great danger. Nevertheless, ongoing crackdowns on the freedoms of expression and association in the region underscore a persistent need for diplomatic and financial assistance for at-risk activists and independent journalists, whether they remain in their home countries or have been forced to work from abroad. Specific steps might include the following:

- **Provide direct services and care to activists under duress.** Governments and partner organizations could supply emergency assistance, for example through reputable funds such as the [Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund](#); temporary relocation opportunities; psychosocial and psycho-emotional support; medical assistance; digital security installation, support, and training; and legal advice.
- **Create a special visa category for human rights defenders facing imminent danger.** There are [efforts](#) underway in the US Congress to endorse such a mechanism. A visa category for democratic activists should allow multiple entries and have a lengthy duration, providing those in need with the option of a swift temporary relocation. Even without a new visa program, democratic states could increase the transparency and consistency of their procedures for issuing humanitarian visas to civic activists.
- **Limit the unintended impact on activists of sanctions against their home countries.** For example, following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a number of Freedom House partners noted an increase in denials of service by banking institutions due to their nationality. Governments should proactively work with the private sector to ensure that human rights defenders and democratic activists are not improperly penalized as companies seek to avoid violating sanctions.
- **Assist independent media serving citizens in authoritarian countries.** This could include financial aid, technical support, skills training, mentoring, and logistical support for outlets operating from exile. Freedom House commends [recent global initiatives](#), launched at the first and second Summits for Democracy, that were dedicated to strengthening independent media worldwide, such as the Media Viability Accelerator, which helps independent media outlets become financially self-sufficient; Reporters Shield, which provides investigative journalists with insurance coverage against defamation lawsuits aimed at silencing their reporting; and the International Fund for Public Interest Media, which provides financial assistance to independent outlets. Democratic governments with donor capacity should continue to contribute to these efforts.

**Seek accountability for human rights abuses in the region.** Democratic governments, in partnership with regional and local civil society organizations, should continue to pursue accountability for human rights abuses and justice for victims of state repression and political persecution in Europe and Eurasia. Major violations from 2022 include the deadly crackdowns on protests in [Kazakhstan](#), in [Uzbekistan's](#) autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, and in [Tajikistan's](#) Gorno-Badakhshan



People hold a rally in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on February 13, 2022, in memory of the victims of countrywide unrest triggered by fuel price increases. (Photo credit: REUTERS/Pavel Mikheyev)

Autonomous Oblast. In addition to the atrocities associated with its invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin forcibly suppressed antiwar protests within Russia, and authorities have continued to persecute the LGBT+ community, most severely in the North Caucasus republic of Chechnya. In Belarus, the illegitimate regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been detaining and mistreating civic leaders, peaceful protesters, their family members, and their lawyers since the [fraudulent](#) presidential election of 2020. To ensure that perpetrators do not enjoy impunity for such crimes, democratic governments should:

- **Use targeted sanctions as part of a comprehensive strategy of accountability for human rights abusers and corrupt officials.** Democracies should impose sanctions in a coordinated manner for maximum impact. States that do not yet have laws allowing targeted sanctions for human rights abuses and acts of corruption should enact them, and those with laws already on the books should provide the resources necessary for full enforcement.
- **Leverage multilateral institutions to support collective responses and documentation.** Examples include the repeated invocation of the Moscow Mechanism at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to officially document rights abuses committed by Russian and

Belarusian authorities, and the UN Human Rights Council's October 2022 decision to appoint a special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Russia.

**Advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners.**

Democratic governments, in coordination with human rights organizations, must keep a public spotlight on the staggering number of detained human rights defenders, journalists, and democracy activists in the *Nations in Transit* region and seek their unconditional and immediate release. Democratic governments should routinely and proactively raise the cases of political prisoners—citing specific names wherever feasible—and other human rights concerns during bilateral and multilateral engagements with perpetrator governments. Democratic governments should also step up requests for information or for specific actions related to prisoners' medical condition and treatment. Finally, UN member states should officially recognize October 30 as the International Day of Political Prisoners. Additional practices that democratic governments may adopt to advocate for the release of political prisoners can be found at [freedomhouse.org](https://www.freedomhouse.org).

**Combat the proliferation of transnational repression in Eurasia.**

According to Freedom House's [latest public data](#) on instances of transnational repression through 2022, five out of the top 10 global perpetrators of transnational repression are states in Eurasia. The governments of

Belarus, Russia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have committed 212 of the 854 known incidents of direct, physical transnational repression since 2014, and 233 of the 854 took place in the broader *Nations in Transit* region. Many of these cases involved close cooperation between the state security services of different countries. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine contributed to the phenomenon, as some of the hundreds of thousands of Russians who fled their country to avoid mobilization, conscription, or persecution for antiwar views have been targeted by the Kremlin while living abroad. Separately, the government of Tajikistan accounted for 27 percent of the global instances of transnational repression in 2022, and the diaspora of the Pamiri ethnic minority, whose homeland is the Gorno-Badakhshan region, bore the brunt of this cross-border intimidation. For more information about policy responses to transnational repression, visit [freedomhouse.org](https://freedomhouse.org). Among other steps, governments should:

- **Endorse Freedom House’s [Declaration of Principles to Combat Transnational Repression](#).** The document provides a working definition of transnational repression and outlines preliminary measures governments may take to address the problem.
  - **Establish a mechanism to track domestic incidents of transnational repression.** Without a tailored system for collecting such data, governments will be ill-equipped to identify and respond to cases, and many attacks may go undetected.
  - **Develop a plan to spread awareness of transnational repression across state agencies.** An effective policy response will require informed participation by law enforcement bodies, intelligence services, and officials working with refugees and asylum seekers. These agencies must be prepared to assist potential victims and avoid becoming unwitting enablers of transnational repression.
  - **Apply added vetting to arrest and extradition requests from authoritarian states.** A country’s designation as a Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
- in *Nations in Transit*, or as Not Free in Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World* report, should prompt extra scrutiny of its official requests. Democratic governments should use their votes and influence within the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) to limit the ability of repressive member states to target dissidents abroad. States should uphold their responsibilities under international law, as well as under the European Convention on Human Rights where applicable, to refrain from returning individuals to countries where they are likely to face ill-treatment.
  - **Use sanctions and diplomatic tools to hold individual perpetrators accountable.** Foreign officials who engage in or enable transnational repression should face penalties including visa bans and asset freezes, and diplomats who do so—for example by intimidating exiles in the country where they are stationed—should be declared *persona non gratae* and promptly expelled.
  - **Strictly regulate technology that could enable transnational repression.** Governments should curb the use of and trade in advanced surveillance tools, including commercial spyware products, which have been employed by perpetrator states to track dissidents abroad. Democracies should also protect communications platforms that offer end-to-end encryption, which helps to prevent improper monitoring by state actors.
  - **Support efforts to document incidents inside the authoritarian states of Eurasia.** While democracies need to improve tracking of transnational repression in their own territories, they should also sponsor civil society initiatives aimed at documenting incidents in countries where authorities have little interest in addressing the problem. It is especially important to do so for states, including Belarus and Russia, that do not or no longer participate in multilateral accountability mechanisms like the European Court of Human Rights. ■

## NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2023: OVERVIEW OF SCORE CHANGES

▼ Decline ▲ Improvement □ Unchanged

	Country	Democracy Score	Democracy %	NDG	EP	CS	IM	LDG	JFI	CO
BALKANS	Albania	3.75 TO 3.79	46%							▲
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.29 TO 3.21	37%						▼	▼
	Croatia	4.25	54%							
	Kosovo	3.25 TO 3.29	38%			▲				
	Montenegro	3.82 TO 3.79	46%	▼						
	North Macedonia	3.82 TO 3.86	48%					▲		
	Serbia	3.79	46%							
CENTRAL EUROPE	Bulgaria	4.50	58%							
	Czech Republic	5.54	76%							
	Estonia	6.00	83%							
	Hungary	3.68 TO 3.57	43%		▼	▼			▼	
	Latvia	5.79	80%							
	Lithuania	5.64 TO 5.68	78%			▲				
	Poland	4.54	59%							
	Romania	4.36	56%							
	Slovakia	5.25 TO 5.21	70%	▼						
	Slovenia	5.71 TO 5.75	79%		▲					
EURASIA	Armenia	3.04 TO 3.11	35%			▲	▲			
	Azerbaijan	1.07	1%							
	Belarus	1.18 TO 1.11	2%			▼				▼
	Georgia	3.07 TO 3.04	34%				▼			
	Kazakhstan	1.36 TO 1.32	5%			▼				
	Kyrgyzstan	1.75 TO 1.68	11%			▼	▼			
	Moldova	3.11 TO 3.14	36%	▲						
	Russia	1.32 TO 1.11	2%			▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
	Tajikistan	1.11 TO 1.04	1%			▼		▼		
	Turkmenistan	1.00	0%							
	Ukraine	3.36	39%			▲	▼			
	Uzbekistan	1.25 TO 1.21	4%			▼				

### CATEGORIES:

NDG – National Democratic Governance  
 EP – Electoral Process  
 CS – Civil Society  
 IM – Independent Media

LDG – Local Democratic Governance  
 JFI – Judicial Framework and Independence  
 CO – Corruption

The NIT ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The NIT 2023 ratings reflect the period from January 1 through December 31, 2022.

# Methodology

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*Nations in Transit 2023* evaluates the state of democracy in the region stretching from Central Europe to Central Asia. The 25th edition of this annual study covers events from January 1 through December 31, 2022. In consultation with country report authors, a panel of expert advisers, and a group of regional expert reviewers, Freedom House provides numerical ratings for each country on seven indicators:

- **National Democratic Governance.** Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.
- **Electoral Process.** Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process.
- **Civil Society.** Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups.
- **Independent Media.** Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media.
- **Local Democratic Governance.** Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities.
- **Judicial Framework and Independence.** Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions.
- **Corruption.** Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives.

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the lowest and 7 the highest level of democracy. The **Democracy Score** is a straight average of the seven indicators and is also expressed as a percentage, where 0 represents the lowest and 100 the highest level of democracy. Based on the Democracy Score, Freedom House assigns each country to one of the following regime types:

**Consolidated Democracies (5.01–7.00):** Countries receiving this score embody the best policies and practices of liberal democracy, but may face challenges—often associated with corruption—that contribute to a slightly lower score.

**Semi-Consolidated Democracies (4.01–5.00):** Countries receiving this score are electoral democracies that meet relatively high standards for the selection of national leaders but exhibit weaknesses in their defense of political rights and civil liberties.

**Transitional or Hybrid Regimes (3.01–4.00):** Countries receiving this score are typically electoral democracies where democratic institutions are fragile, and substantial challenges to the protection of political rights and civil liberties exist.

**Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes (2.01–3.00):** Countries receiving this score attempt to mask authoritarianism or rely on informal power structures with limited respect for the institutions and practices of democracy. They typically fail to meet even the minimum standards of electoral democracy.

**Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes (1.00–2.00):** Countries receiving this score are closed societies in which dictators prevent political competition and pluralism and are responsible for widespread violations of basic political, civil, and human rights.

*Nations in Transit* does not rate governments per se, nor does it rate countries based on governmental intentions or legislation alone. Rather, a country's ratings are determined by considering the practical effect of the state and nongovernmental actors on an individual's rights and freedoms. A more detailed description of the methodology, including complete checklist questions for each democracy indicator, can be found at <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/nations-transit/nations-transit-methodology>.

## NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2023: CATEGORY AND DEMOCRACY SCORE SUMMARY

Countries are rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the lowest and 7 the highest level of democratic progress. The average of these ratings is each country's Democracy Score (DS). The Democracy Percentage (D%) is the translation of the Democracy Score to the 0–100 scale.

### CATEGORIES:

NDG – National Democratic Governance  
 EP – Electoral Process  
 CS – Civil Society  
 IM – Independent Media  
 LDG – Local Democratic Governance

JFI – Judicial Framework and Independence  
 CO – Corruption  
 DS – Democracy Score  
 D% – Democracy Percentage

Country	NDG	EP	CS	IM	LDG	JFI	CO	DS	D%
Albania	3.25	4.25	4.75	3.50	4.50	3.25	3.00	<b>3.79</b>	46
Armenia	2.50	3.50	4.75	3.00	2.25	2.75	3.00	<b>3.11</b>	35
Azerbaijan	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.00	<b>1.07</b>	1
Belarus	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.25	<b>1.11</b>	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.75	4.50	4.25	3.25	3.25	2.75	2.75	<b>3.21</b>	37
Bulgaria	4.25	5.50	5.50	3.50	4.75	4.25	3.75	<b>4.50</b>	58
Croatia	4.25	5.00	5.25	3.75	4.50	3.50	3.50	<b>4.25</b>	54
Czech Republic	4.75	6.75	6.25	5.00	6.00	5.75	4.25	<b>5.54</b>	76
Estonia	5.75	6.50	6.25	6.25	5.75	6.50	5.00	<b>6.00</b>	83
Georgia	2.25	3.00	4.00	3.25	2.75	2.50	3.50	<b>3.04</b>	34
Hungary	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.25	4.00	2.75	<b>3.57</b>	43
Kazakhstan	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.75	1.25	1.25	<b>1.32</b>	5
Kosovo	3.00	3.50	4.75	3.25	3.50	2.75	2.25	<b>3.29</b>	38
Kyrgyzstan	1.00	1.75	2.75	1.75	1.75	1.25	1.50	<b>1.68</b>	11
Latvia	6.00	6.25	6.00	6.00	5.75	6.00	4.50	<b>5.79</b>	80
Lithuania	5.50	6.25	6.25	5.75	5.75	5.75	4.50	<b>5.68</b>	78
Moldova	2.75	4.00	4.75	3.00	2.50	2.75	2.25	<b>3.14</b>	36
Montenegro	3.25	4.25	5.25	3.25	4.25	3.25	3.00	<b>3.79</b>	46
North Macedonia	3.50	4.50	4.75	3.50	4.25	3.25	3.25	<b>3.86</b>	48
Poland	3.50	5.75	5.50	4.25	5.50	3.25	4.00	<b>4.54</b>	59
Romania	4.25	4.75	5.50	3.50	4.25	4.25	4.00	<b>4.36</b>	56
Russia	1.00	1.25	1.25	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.00	<b>1.11</b>	2
Serbia	3.25	4.25	5.25	3.00	4.00	3.50	3.25	<b>3.79</b>	46
Slovakia	4.50	6.25	6.00	5.00	5.50	5.25	4.00	<b>5.21</b>	70
Slovenia	5.50	6.50	5.75	5.25	6.50	5.75	5.00	<b>5.75</b>	79
Tajikistan	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.00	<b>1.04</b>	1
Turkmenistan	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	<b>1.00</b>	0
Ukraine	2.50	4.50	5.25	3.25	3.50	2.25	2.25	<b>3.36</b>	39
Uzbekistan	1.00	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	<b>1.21</b>	4
<b>Average</b>	3.02	3.91	4.17	3.20	3.59	3.17	2.86	<b>3.42</b>	40
<b>Median</b>	3.00	4.25	4.75	3.25	4.00	3.25	3.00	<b>3.57</b>	43

## NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2023: DEMOCRACY SCORE HISTORY BY REGION

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
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### Central Europe

Bulgaria	4.82	4.75	4.71	4.75	4.64	4.61	4.61	4.54	4.50	4.50	4.50
Czech Republic	5.86	5.75	5.79	5.79	5.75	5.71	5.71	5.64	5.57	5.54	5.54
Estonia	6.04	6.04	6.04	6.07	6.07	6.18	6.11	6.07	6.04	6.00	6.00
Hungary	5.11	5.04	4.82	4.71	4.46	4.29	4.07	3.96	3.71	3.68	3.57
Latvia	5.93	5.93	5.93	5.93	5.96	5.93	5.86	5.79	5.82	5.79	5.79
Lithuania	5.68	5.64	5.64	5.68	5.68	5.64	5.61	5.64	5.68	5.64	5.68
Poland	5.82	5.82	5.79	5.68	5.43	5.11	5.04	4.93	4.57	4.54	4.54
Romania	4.50	4.54	4.54	4.54	4.61	4.54	4.43	4.43	4.39	4.36	4.36
Slovakia	5.43	5.39	5.36	5.39	5.39	5.39	5.36	5.29	5.32	5.25	5.21
Slovenia	6.11	6.07	6.07	6.00	5.96	5.93	5.93	5.93	5.86	5.71	5.75
<b>Average</b>	5.53	5.50	5.47	5.45	5.40	5.33	5.27	5.22	5.15	5.10	5.09
<b>Median</b>	5.75	5.70	5.71	5.68	5.55	5.52	5.48	5.46	5.45	5.39	5.38

### Balkans

Albania	3.75	3.82	3.86	3.86	3.86	3.89	3.89	3.82	3.75	3.75	3.79
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.61	3.57	3.54	3.50	3.46	3.36	3.32	3.32	3.36	3.29	3.21
Croatia	4.39	4.32	4.32	4.32	4.29	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Kosovo	2.75	2.86	2.86	2.93	3.04	3.07	3.11	3.18	3.14	3.25	3.29
Montenegro	4.18	4.14	4.11	4.07	4.11	4.07	3.93	3.86	3.82	3.82	3.79
North Macedonia	4.07	4.00	3.93	3.71	3.57	3.64	3.68	3.75	3.82	3.82	3.86
Serbia	4.36	4.36	4.32	4.25	4.18	4.04	4.00	3.96	3.89	3.79	3.79
<b>Average</b>	3.87	3.87	3.85	3.81	3.79	3.76	3.74	3.73	3.72	3.71	3.71
<b>Median</b>	4.07	4.00	3.93	3.86	3.86	3.89	3.89	3.82	3.82	3.79	3.79

### Eurasia

Armenia	2.64	2.64	2.64	2.64	2.61	2.57	2.93	3.00	2.96	3.04	3.11
Azerbaijan	1.36	1.32	1.25	1.14	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.14	1.07	1.07	1.07
Belarus	1.29	1.29	1.29	1.36	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.29	1.18	1.11
Georgia	3.25	3.32	3.36	3.39	3.39	3.32	3.29	3.25	3.18	3.07	3.04
Kazakhstan	1.43	1.39	1.39	1.39	1.36	1.29	1.29	1.32	1.32	1.36	1.32
Kyrgyzstan	2.04	2.11	2.07	2.11	2.00	1.93	2.00	1.96	1.86	1.75	1.68
Moldova	3.18	3.14	3.14	3.11	3.07	3.07	3.04	3.11	3.11	3.11	3.14
Russia	1.79	1.71	1.54	1.50	1.43	1.39	1.43	1.39	1.39	1.32	1.11
Tajikistan	1.75	1.68	1.61	1.46	1.36	1.21	1.21	1.18	1.11	1.11	1.04
Turkmenistan	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Ukraine	3.14	3.07	3.25	3.32	3.39	3.36	3.36	3.39	3.36	3.36	3.36
Uzbekistan	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.07	1.04	1.11	1.11	1.14	1.25	1.25	1.21
<b>Average</b>	2.00	1.99	1.97	1.96	1.93	1.90	1.93	1.94	1.91	1.88	1.85
<b>Median</b>	1.77	1.70	1.57	1.48	1.41	1.39	1.41	1.39	1.36	1.34	1.27

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