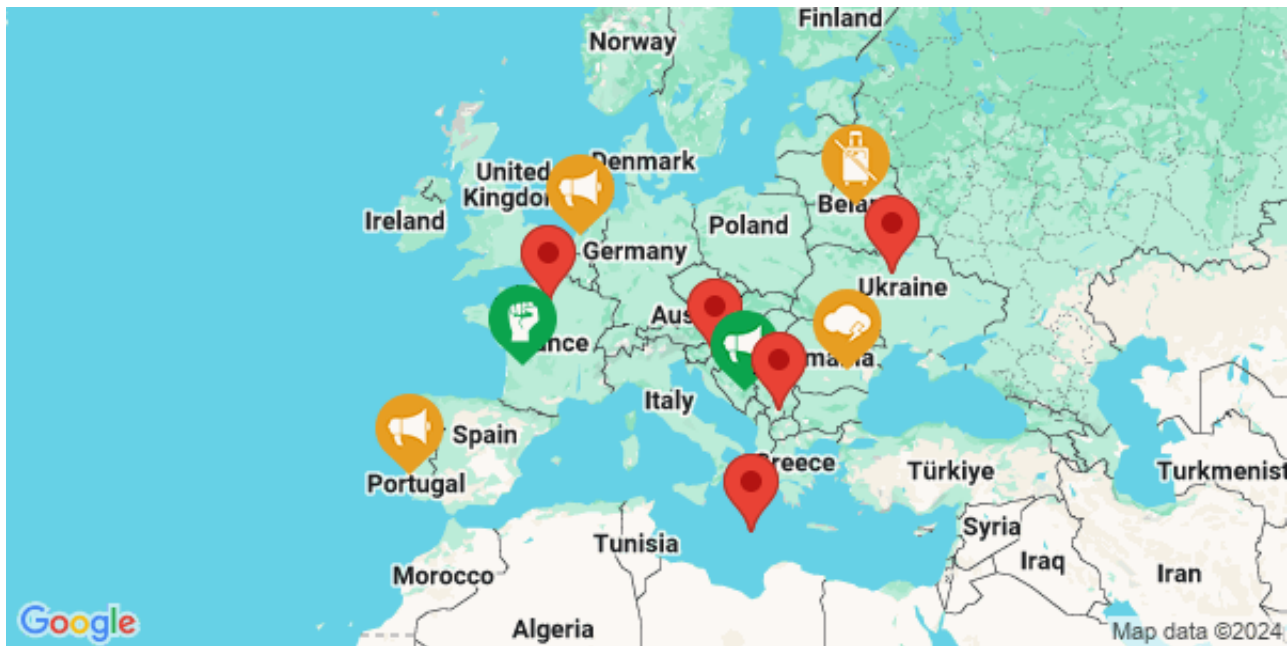




Daily



25
DEC
12:45 UTC

MAX - Europe Region Daily Summary - December 25, 2024

Highlights of the Day

- **Belarus:** US issues highest travel advisory level for Belarus per December 23 report; reflects increased risk to foreigners before elections
- **Europe:** Alerts for adverse weather conditions issued in several countries on December 25-26; remain cognizant of authorities' updates
- **Europe:** Russian cargo ship sinks after explosion in Mediterranean Sea on December 23; Moscow expected to attribute blame to Kyiv
- **France:** President Macron announces new government under PM Bayrou on December 23; marks policy continuation from previous administration

Actionable Items

Bosnia & Herzegovina: Students to protest at Franje Rackog 1 in Sarajevo at 12:00 (local time) on December 26; allot for disruptions

Current Situation - On December 26, the Udruzenje studenata psihologije Sinapsa (SINAPSA) student union is organizing a protest in front of Sarajevo University's Faculty of Philosophy building at Franje Rackog 1 from 12:00 (local time). This protest has been organized to support the anti-government student protests in Serbia.

Assessments & Forecast - Based on social media traction, coupled with the mobilizational capabilities of the organizing group, the protest is expected to draw attendance in the low-to-mid hundreds. Considering the nature of the protest, the stated protest is expected to transpire largely peacefully. Regardless a bolstered security presence is expected near the Faculty of Philosophy to monitor proceedings. Disruptions to pedestrian and vehicular movement should be anticipated along and near Franje Rackog during afternoon hours.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in Bosnia & Herzegovina on December 26 are advised to allot for associated travel disruptions near Franje Rackog 1 during afternoon hours due to the slated protest.

Source: [Facebook](#)

Europe: Alerts for adverse weather conditions issued in several countries on December 25-26; remain cognizant of authorities' updates

Current Situation - Meteoalarm, Europe's regional weather service, has issued orange alerts, the second highest level on a three-tier scale, for winds and snow in northwestern **Bulgaria** through December 26. In **Romania**, orange alerts have also been issued for winds and snow in the central and southeastern regions through December 26. Reports indicate that Constanta Port located on the Black Sea has been closed due to adverse weather conditions. In **Italy**, orange alerts are in effect nationwide due to strong winds through December 26. Red alerts for strong winds are also in effect across **Croatia** through December 26.

Assessments & Forecast - Travel disruptions can be anticipated in the aforementioned countries due to adverse weather conditions. Reduced visibility and slippery roads are likely to increase the danger of road travel. Additionally, disruptions to transportation services, including delays and cancelations of scheduled flights and trains are likely. Moreover, disruptions to logistical services are likely, as evidenced by Constanta's closure, delaying supply chain operations. Disruptions to public utilities, including power supply, are also possible.

Recommendations - Those operating or residing in the aforementioned countries in Europe on December 25-26 are advised to remain cognizant of authorities' updates regarding weather-related risks. Allot for travel-related disruptions arising from adverse weather conditions.

Source: [MeteoAlarm](#)

France: Unionized rail workers strike ongoing in Nouvelle-Aquitaine as of afternoon hours (local time) on December 25; allot for disruptions

Current Situation – An unannounced strike by unionized railway workers employed by Societe Nationale des Chemins de Fer Francais (SNCF) is ongoing as of the afternoon hours (local time) on December 25, affecting the Transport Express Regional (TER) network in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine administrative region. The labor action has led to cancellations of train services, including routes between the cities of Bayonne and Hendaye, Bayonne and Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, Bayonne and Dax, Pau and Dax, and Pau and Tarbes. Replacement buses are operating. The strike is being held to oppose proposed reforms to SNCF freight operations and plans to open TER lines to competition.

Assessments & Forecast – Disruptions to TER rail services are expected to persist in affected areas in the coming hours. These disruptions likely include short-notice train cancelations, delays, and overcrowding on alternative public transport options. Residual disruptions are anticipated to persist, with SNCF indicating that the strike could be extended past December 25. Given that the strike primarily impacts regional TER services in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, disruptions are likely to remain limited to the region.

Recommendations– Those operating or residing in Nouvelle-Aquitaine region, on December 25 are advised to allot for disruptions to rail services due to the ongoing labor action.

Source: [Francebleu](#)

Portugal: Pro-Palestinian vigil to be held at Largo de Camoes, Lisbon at 20:00 (local time) on December 25; maintain heightened vigilance

Current Situation – A pro-Palestinian vigil will be held at Largo de Camoes in Lisbon at 20:00 (local time) on December 25. The vigil is being held by the group “Coletivo pela Libertacao da Palestina” to denounce the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Assessments & Forecast – Based on precedent and the mobilizational capabilities of the organizing group, the protest is likely to attract turnout in the high dozens to low hundreds. Given heightened sentiments surrounding the protest issue, it carries an elevated potential for clashes between protesters and the police. Given this, a bolstered security presence is expected near Largo de Camoes to monitor proceedings. In the case of escalating unrest, police are liable to use forcible dispersal methods, including conducting mass arrests. Disruptions to pedestrian and vehicular movement should be anticipated near the protest location from the late evening hours onwards.

Recommendations – Those operating or residing in Lisbon on December 25 are advised to maintain heightened vigilance near Largo de Camoes due to the elevated potential for unrest at the slated protest. Allot for travel disruptions in the vicinity of the protest location during the evening hours.

Source: [Instagram](#)

Notable Events

Belarus: US issues highest travel advisory level for Belarus per December 23 report; reflects increased risk to foreigners before elections

Current Situation - According to December 23 reports, the US Department of State updated its travel advisory to Belarus to “Level 4: Do Not Travel”, the highest on a four-tier scale. It advises US citizens not to travel to the country due to “Belarusian authorities’ arbitrary enforcement of local laws, the risk of detention, the continued facilitation of Russia’s war against Ukraine, and the potential of civil unrest”.

Assessments & Forecast - The advisory was likely issued due to the increase in the crackdown on dissent in Belarus ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for January 2025. The timing of the advisory, with it being issued a few weeks before the election, supports this. Indeed, on November 7, a human rights group claimed that authorities have increased arrests of dissidents, with over 100 arrested in recent months. Given this, coupled with the anticipated increase in authorities’ surveillance of online platforms ahead of elections, the risk of arbitrary detentions of foreigners, particularly those involved in political or human rights activities, will increase. The limited availability of Western consular services in Belarus exacerbates this risk for foreign nationals.

Source: [U.S. Department of State](#)

Croatia: Two arrested over alleged attack plot targeting PM Plenkovic, per December 24 reports; bolstered security likely ahead of elections

Current Situation - Per December 24 reports, police arrested a couple on December 21 for illegal possession of weapons. Police were alerted of a potential assassination plot against PM Andrej Plenkovic, leading to the residential raid and subsequent arrests. The main suspect, identified as Ivko Maric, has a criminal history and remains in police custody. Media reports indicate that investigators suspect one of the weapons was stolen from the Ministry of the Interior. Details of the case remain undisclosed, including the alleged plot and the weapons seized.

Assessments & Forecast - Maric’s prior criminal involvement, coupled with his possession of weapons, makes this development particularly significant, strengthening police suspicions of an assassination plot. If confirmed, this would indicate an escalation of political violence ahead of the upcoming presidential election. With the first round of the presidential elections scheduled for December 29, authorities are expected to maintain heightened vigilance. Security measures are likely to be intensified, with increased police presence at polling stations, government buildings, and public spaces. Enhanced surveillance, security checkpoints, and vehicle barriers are also expected to be

implemented.

Source: [Serbian Times](#)

Europe: Russian cargo ship sinks after explosion in Mediterranean Sea on December 23; Moscow expected to attribute blame to Kyiv

Current Situation - On December 23, a Russian state-owned cargo ship, the Ursa Major, sank in the Mediterranean Sea after an explosion in the engine room. Two crew members remain missing. The ship is owned by the shipping company Oboronlogistika, which belongs to the Russian Defense Ministry. Media reports indicate the ship was headed to Vladivostok and was carrying cranes and hatch covers for nuclear ice breakers. The cause of the explosion has not been confirmed.

Assessments & Forecast - Although the cause of the explosion remains unconfirmed, given precedent, it is anticipated that Russia will attribute the incident to covert involvement by Ukrainian actors. If the explosion is confirmed to be linked to sabotage after investigations, the development will reiterate increased security risks posed to maritime assets in Europe, with sabotage incidents previously recorded in the Baltic Sea and North Sea. Meanwhile, if the explosion is confirmed to be linked to technical failures instead, the incident will raise concerns about the impact of sanctions on maritime safety of sanctioned Russian vessels, with the lack of access to foreign-made components having caused systemic maintenance issues on such vessels.

Source: [Reuters](#)

France: President Macron announces new government under PM Bayrou on December 23; marks policy continuation from previous administration

Current Situation - On December 23, President Emmanuel Macron announced a new government under PM Francois Bayrou. Bayrou assumed office after his predecessor Michel Barnier was forced to resign following an opposition-initiated no-confidence motion on December 4. The new cabinet consists mainly of centrist and conservative figures from Macron's Ensemble alliance and the center-right Les Republicains (LR) party, with more than half of the new appointees being part of Barnier's government.

Assessments & Forecast - With Bayrou's appointees composed mainly of members of Barnier's government, a continuation of the previous administration's policy agenda can be expected, including cuts to public spending and an increase in taxes as part of the 2025 budget. The ideological orientation of the new cabinet also indicates Macron's attempts to maintain the tacit support of the far-right Rassemblement National (RN) party considering the government still only has minority support in parliament. However, this is likely to trigger no-confidence motions and protests by the left-wing Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) alliance, with even the alliance's more moderate member, Parti Socialiste (PS), stating that Bayrou "treated PS with contempt when forming his government."

Source: [France 24](#)

Kosovo: Ethnic Serb party banned from contesting in parliamentary elections on December 23; likely to trigger violent protests in north

Current Situation - On December 23, the Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected the ethnic Serb Srpska Lista party's application to participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2025. CEC stated that this was due to the party's reference to the country as "Kosovo and Metohija", which "undermined Kosovo's statehood", as well as the party's close ties with Belgrade.

Assessments & Forecast - Based on CEC's reasoning, the potential for other ethnic Serb parties to also face similar rejections remains. This is likely to escalate tensions in northern Kosovo, a region with a majority ethnic Serb population who are likely to view the decision as suppression of ethnic Serb groups and are likely to oppose candidacies of non-Serb representatives in the elections. This is supported by the violence recorded after the April 2023 local elections, when protests erupted demanding the resignation of Albanian officials in the region. Similarly, ethnic Serbs are likely to boycott the upcoming elections and hold protests which will carry an elevated potential for unrest. Given this, authorities are likely to deploy heightened security measures in northern Kosovo in the coming weeks.

Source: [Euronews](#)

Netherlands: Residents protest tourist influx in Amsterdam per December 23 reports; in line with regionwide trend, further protests likely

Current Situation - According to December 23 reports, residents in Amsterdam staged a peaceful protest outside a newly constructed luxury hotel near Leidseplein on December 21. The demonstration was organized against perceived overtourism, with local residents alleging that the large influx of tourists in the city is increasing real estate prices. Authorities in Amsterdam previously introduced multiple measures as part of the 'Stay Away' campaign to tackle the issue, including increased tourist taxes, a ban on the construction of new hotels in Amsterdam, and limiting river cruise entries.

Assessments & Forecast - The protest reiterates heightened domestic sentiments associated with the tourist influx in Amsterdam. This is also in line with similar protests that have taken place in other tourist hotspots in Europe in 2024, including Greece, Italy, and Spain. With that, authorities are likely to face additional pressure to introduce more stringent measures considering tourist numbers exceeded the proposed limit of 20 million in 2023, with the city witnessing 22 million tourists. Local resident groups are expected to stage additional protests in the city in the coming months, with most protests expected to remain peaceful.

Source: [Independent](#)

Ukraine: Russian airstrikes target energy facilities nationwide on December 24-25; reflects strategy of timing attacks with symbolic dates

Current Situation - According to Ukrainian authorities, Russia launched more than 70 missiles and over 100 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in nationwide airstrikes across Ukraine, including Kyiv, on December 24-25. At least six people were wounded in the Kharkiv region, and one was killed in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Reports indicate that the airstrikes primarily targeted energy infrastructure, damaging thermal power plants and causing power outages in multiple regions.

Assessments & Forecast - This reiterates Moscow's continued targeting of critical infrastructure facilities, with Ukraine's largest private energy provider, Ukrenerg, indicating that this marked the 13th large-scale attack on the Ukrainian energy sector in 2024. Additionally, the development highlights Moscow's strategy of carrying out large-scale airstrikes on symbolic dates such as Christmas in order to lower public morale. Similar airstrikes were also recorded during the holiday period in previous years, as well as in the days prior to and during Ukraine's August 24 Independence Day. With that, the threat of air strikes targeting civilian and energy infrastructure is expected to remain elevated in the coming days, with large-scale attacks likely ahead of the New Year holiday and Orthodox Christmas Day.

Source: [Reuters](#)

Other Developments

- On December 22, an individual sprayed pepper spray at a shopping center in Bologna, **Italy**. One person was hospitalized due to the irritant. This incident underscores ongoing concerns regarding public safety in crowded areas, especially enclosed locations.
- On December 24, five individuals of foreign background were arrested in **Italy** for links to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS). This reiterates the persistent threat of Islamist radicalization and terrorist attacks in Western Europe.
- On December 24, **Russia's** Justice Ministry added a record 65 organizations to its "undesirable" list, bringing the total to 187. This increase in designations reflects ongoing efforts to suppress independent media, opposition figures, and international groups, to crack down on dissent.
- According to December 24 reports, US President Joe Biden is considering imposing new sanctions on **Russia's** energy sector, targeting foreign ships transporting Russian oil and certain Russian exporters. These potential sanctions are likely intended for leverage in future Ukraine negotiations.

Notable Dates

28 Europe Holiday: Ramadan
FEB

1 UK Holiday: St. David's Day in Wales
MAR

1 Moldova & Romania Holiday: Martisor
MAR

1 Bosnia and Herzegovina Holiday: Independence Day
MAR

1 Spain Holiday: Balearic Day
MAR

1 Switzerland Holiday: Republic Day in Neuchatel
MAR
