

## Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

14 January 2019

### **Egypt/Palestinian Autonomous Territories**

#### **Egypt bars entry from Gaza Strip**

Egypt closed its crossing with the Gaza Strip to departures from the Palestinian enclave after the Palestinian Authority based in Ramallah withdrew its officials from the Rafah border crossing. Up to that point, the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority had been carrying out border controls together with Hamas since May 2017. The border crossing is currently once again occupied by Hamas personnel who will only allow people to enter the Gaza Strip.

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Attacks on journalists in 2018**

The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) recorded a total of 121 cases of violence against journalists and media workers in 2018, including cases of murder, injury, threats, temporary detention, abduction, and many more. Seventeen journalists and media workers were killed. Out of 17 cases of murder in 2018, the Taliban and ISIS were responsible for 15 cases. ISIS and the Taliban are responsible for the majority of cases of violence, 50 cases to be precise. Individuals affiliated with the government rank second, as they are responsible for 44 cases of violence. Unidentified individuals come third, as they are responsible for 27 cases of violence. According to this committee, Afghanistan is once again the most dangerous country for journalists. One journalist has already been killed by the Taliban since the beginning of 2019.

#### **Afghanistan to send more guest workers abroad**

Afghanistan plans to dispatch 2,500 workers to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in March 2019. Afghanistan and UAE signed an agreement on the hiring of Afghan workers seven months ago. Afghanistan has also sealed similar agreements with Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. However, economic analysts have said such plans will not have a positive impact on the Afghan labour market, especially as 400,000 new job seekers are added to the workforce each year.

#### **Suicide bombings and attacks**

At least two civilians were killed and 25 were wounded in a bombing in the city of Khost (Khost province in eastern Afghanistan) on 8 January 2019. Several armed men raided a police station in Police District 6 in the city of Herat (western Afghanistan) on 12 January 2019, reportedly killing two police officers and three civilians and wounding four others. A few days previously, on 7 January 2019, security forces had managed to foil an attack on a mosque in the Adraskan district of Herat province.

Fighting intensified last week in northern Afghanistan, particularly in Balkh province where the Taliban carried out a number of attacks above all along the main roads. In return, airstrikes were carried out by the US and Afghan air forces, in which numerous Taliban fighters were killed.

Fighting was also reported in the following provinces: Baghlan, Kunduz (north-eastern Afghanistan), Paktika, Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Uruzgan, Kandahar, Helmand (southern Afghanistan), Faryab, Balkh (northern Afghanistan), Badghis (western Afghanistan), Kunar, Nangarhar, Laghman (eastern Afghanistan), Logar and Kabul (central Afghanistan).

## **Albania**

### **Student protests ongoing**

For weeks students and young people have been protesting against poor study conditions and social hardship. The protests were triggered by the implementation of a government decree which significantly increased the fees for students taking an exam for the second time. The protestors are accusing the government of corruption and having connections with the drug milieu. What began as a small protest has developed into the greatest expression of dissatisfaction the country has witnessed in many years. Although the government has now revoked the decree, the students still want to continue protesting. Young people in the country lack prospects. Four out of every five young Albanians say they want to leave the country.

## **Democratic Republic of the Congo**

### **Preliminary results of the presidential and parliamentary elections**

On 10 January 2019, the Independent National Election Commission CENI announced Felix Tshisekedi, leader of Congo's largest opposition party Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) as the winner of the presidential election held on 20 December 2018. Preliminary results indicate that he garnered 38.6 percent of the votes. Runner-up is Martin Fayulu, leader of the Lamuka coalition who won 34.7 percent of the votes. The ruling coalition's candidate, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary of the pro-Kabila coalition came in third, representing 23.8 percent of the votes cast.

According to the results of the parliamentary elections held on 30 December 2018, around 350 of the 485 seats in the Congolese national assembly went to the government. The opposition alliance Lamuka led by Martin Fayulu won around 80 seat and Tshisekedi's coalition won around 50 seats.

### **Response to the election results**

The result of the presidential election took people by surprise, as Martin Fayulu had led the polls in the run-up to the election. Fayulu spoke of an "electoral coup" and accused Tshisekedi of having struck a deal with Kabila according to which Tshisekedi would be declared the winner of the election. On 11 January 2019, he filed papers at the Constitutional Court with the aim of recounting the votes. Doubts about the authenticity of the results also arise from the fact that the Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CENCO), said that tallies compiled by its 40,000-strong monitoring team show a different winner to those announced by the Electoral Commission. On 13 January 2019, the regional organisation SADC (South African Development Community), to which Congo belongs, called for a recount of the votes and urged the political leaders of the country to form a government of national unity.

## **FYR Macedonia**

### **Parliament approves renaming of Macedonia and adopts amnesty law**

Macedonia's parliament passed an amendment to the constitution on 11 January 2019 to rename the country Republic of North Macedonia with the requisite two-thirds majority. The government was reliant of votes of the opposition - above all the right-wing opposition party VMRO-DPMNE - in order for this to come about. In order to win the votes of the opposition, an amnesty law was passed at the end of December 2018. This law granted amnesty to those who stormed Parliament on 27 April 2017. Only more serious crimes, such as grievous bodily harm, were excluded from the amnesty. Those granted amnesty are mainly relatives and members of the VMRO-DPMNE. The amnesty law has been criticised by human rights experts.

After gaining independence in 1991, the country became a member of the UN under the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Greece has since insisted on a name change because a province in northern Greece also bears the name Macedonia. In June 2018, both countries agreed that the country would be renamed. Nationalists from both countries, however, reject this solution. The Greek parliament must also ratify the move by March 2019 at the latest. In protest, the chairman of right-wing populist Independent Greeks National Patriotic Alliance ANEL declared that he was resigning from the post of Minister of Defence, saying he would leave the government with his deputies. The Greek prime minister will now call a confidence vote. The renaming of the country is a key prerequisite for Macedonia joining NATO and the EU.

## **India**

### **Kashmir: several persons attending a funeral wounded**

At least 11 people were injured after Indian security forces opened fire on mourners who were attending the funeral of two rebels in the federal state of Jammu and Indian-administered Kashmir on 13 January 2019. Thousands of people marched towards the village of Sugan in Shopian district, to offer funeral prayers. Government forces fired bullets and used shotgun pellets and tear gas to stop people from joining the funeral prayers.

### **Assam: protests against bill**

The Indian lower parliament has adopted a bill according to which Hindus and other non-Muslim religious groups entering India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan without papers will be awarded residence and citizenship rights. As a result, the northeast of India was almost brought to a standstill on 8 January 2019 by protests directed against Muslims being exempted from this regulation. However, the bill will only enter into force after it has been approved by the India's upper house of parliament.

## **Iraq**

### **Bombings claim lives**

A total of six persons were killed and at least 25 were wounded in bombings in Anbar province. On 11 January 2019, four persons were killed and at least 25 persons were wounded in the city of al-Qaim, near the Syrian border. A woman and her son were reportedly killed in a mine explosion in the town of Al-Fahimi, some 120 kilometres west of Baghdad.

### **HRW accuses the Kurdish government of torture**

According to a press release issued by the news agency dpa on 8 January 2019, the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) has accused the Kurdish government of torturing children. Children held in detention have been accused of being members of ISIS and have received beatings, inter alia, from security officers, known as Asayish.

However, the Kurdish government had refuted the allegations. Contrary to claims, it says HRW did not visit a prison where children are being detained. The Kurdistan Regional Government Coordinator, Dindar Sibari, has stated that children and young persons who are members of ISIS are not being treated as criminals.

HRW claims to have interviewed more than 20 boys aged between 14 and 17 in November 2018, the majority of whom were being detained.

## **Iran**

### **Accusations of torture**

Workers have been arrested in connection with the week-long strikes launched by employees of the Haft-e Tapeh sugar factory in the province of Khuzestan in southern Iran. One of the women arrested who was subsequently released. Sepideh Ghailan, claimed on Twitter on 9 January 2019 that a colleague called Esmaeil Bakhshi had been tortured and slandered. She said she too had been beaten with a cable. The Iranian judiciary and government have rejected the accusations.

### **Women found dead after reporting sexual abuse**

The lifeless body of an employee of the Iranian MP Salman Khodadadi has been found dead close to her parents' home in East Azerbaijani town of Malekan according to a report issued by the Iranian news portal Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA). Zahra Navidpour was embroiled in a legal dispute with

Salman Khodadadi whom she had accused of sexual abuse. Navidpour was reportedly pressured repeatedly by Khodadadi to retract her complaint. She had published documents and audiotapes, claimed she had filed a complaint against the MP with the Malekan Public Prosecutor's Office, as well as a complaint about him with the Guardian Council and the Supervisory Board of Parliament. and, according to reports by HRANA, had also received death threats.

### **Several environmental activists detained**

According to reports by Kurdistan Human Rights Network, nine environmental activists have been arrested in the Iranian province of Kurdistan in the past two weeks. Another six environmental activists were questioned for several hours in the city of Mahabad before being released. The detainees include members of the Hezb-e Wahdat-e Melli (National Unity Party) which was established two years ago with the consent of Iran's Ministry of the Interior. The party supports environmental protection in Iran, among other things, and has organised information courses in several towns in Kurdistan in the past. Since February 2018, environmental activists have been targeted by security forces in particular. Some have received lengthy prison sentences on charges of espionage.

### **EU accuses Iran of plotting to assassinate opponents in Europa**

The European Parliament is accusing Iran of having planned and, in some cases, actually carried out assassinations in quite a number of European countries. The impression has been gained that Iran is trying, with a certain systematic approach, to physically eliminate representatives of the opposition abroad. Such actions are usually carried out by the Pasdaran (al-Quds-Brigade) elite unit deployed for foreign operations. In connection with the allegations expressed on 8 January 2019, the Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok has levelled serious accusations against Iran. He said he had clear evidence that the government had been involved in the assassination of two Dutch citizens of Iranian origin in December 2015 and November 2017 in the Netherlands, who had been critical of the regime.

### **Critical cleric receives prison sentence**

Because of his activities on Instagram, the Iranian Special Court for Clerics has sentenced the clergyman Hassan Aghamiri to two years imprisonment. In addition, he has been forbidden for life to wear the robe and turban of the Shiite clergy. Aghamiri is therefore no longer authorised to act as an imam. In the clips published on Instagram, he criticised "grievances such as corruption and reprisals against young people" in Iran. He has more than 1.3 million followers, mostly young people.

## **Morocco**

### **King of Morocco pardons 783 prisoners**

Morocco celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the Manifesto of Independence from France on 11 January 2019. King Mohammed VI. pardoned 783 convicted prisoners and reduced their sentences. 13 prisoners serving life sentences had their sentences reduced and one prisoner had the death penalty commuted to a life sentence.

## **Serbia**

### **Anti-government protests continue**

On 11 January 2019, thousands of demonstrators once again took to the streets in Belgrade and other cities to protest against political violence, harassment of dissenters and critical journalists as well as rampant corruption. The demonstration was the sixth time in a row the government had cracked down on protestors (cf. Briefing Notes of 7 January 2019).

Next Wednesday, a memorial rally is due to take place for the Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic, who was murdered in January 2018. He was one of the few Serbian politicians to publicly criticise the policies of the Serbian government.

## **Syria**

### **Israel confirms airstrikes**

According to media reports, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed airstrikes carried out by the Israeli Air Force in Syria on 13 January 2019. He said that in recent days the Israeli Air Force had attacked Iranian warehouses containing Iranian weapons at Damascus International Airport. Israel has seldom commented openly on such attacks in recent years, but has repeatedly stressed that no permanent Iranian military presence in Syria will be tolerated.

### **US begins withdrawing troops**

A good three weeks after announcing that it would withdraw its troops from Syria, the US has begun withdrawing military material from Syria. The US military did not wish to comment on the details for security reasons. Initially only a few logistical measures have been implemented to assist with an orderly withdrawal. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that some armoured vehicles and machines had been withdrawn from the US base in the Eastern Syrian province of Al-Hasaka. US President Donald Trump has also warned Turkey of a possible attack on the Kurdish YPG forces in Northern Syria and has warned the country could face economic devastation.

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration  
Briefing Notes  
[informationsvermittlungsstelle@bamf.bund.de](mailto:informationsvermittlungsstelle@bamf.bund.de)