

Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

01 July 2019

Afghanistan

Fighting and military operations

Successful military operations against the Taliban were led inter alia in the following provinces: Balkh, Faryab (north), Ghazni (south-east), Logar, Paktiya (east), Wardak (centre), Farah, Herat (west), Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan (south). Faryab province is back under government control. Furthermore, there were reports of successful military operations against IS fighters (Islamic State in Korasan Province – ISKP) in Kunar and Nangarhar (east). The ISKP and the Taliban are also fighting each other in Kunar. Several influential criminals and members of notorious criminal gangs were arrested in Kabul. Two US soldiers lost their lives during the reporting week.

Taliban assaults on installations of the security forces

At least 65 people were killed over the weekend by several major Taliban attacks on installations of the Afghan security forces.

Eight soldiers died, others were injured in a Taliban attack on a military base in Farah province (west) on 28 June 2019.

On 29 June 2019 the Taliban destroyed two army check points killing at least 26 members of a government-supported militia in Baghlan province (north). Twelve other people were wounded and two local politicians were captured.

In Kandahar province (south) the Taliban blew up four stolen military vehicles near a police headquarters on 29 June 2019. Eleven soldiers and eight staff members of the Afghan election committee, who were stationed there, died in the attack. Dozens of people were wounded.

At least twelve soldiers died in an attack on a military base in Kunduz province (north east) on 30 June 2019; another 16 people were kidnapped by the Taliban.

Peace talks between the Taliban and the US resumed

The peace talks between the Taliban and the US in Qatar's capital Doha entered their seventh round on 29 June 2019. The US are demanding a guarantee from the Taliban that they will not use their fighters outside the national territory, a permanent ceasefire and a dialogue within Afghanistan. So far, the Taliban have refused direct talks with the Afghan government and insist on the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops.

A US-led military alliance had ousted the Taliban in 2001 for allegedly supporting the attackers of the terrorist acts of 11 September and for supporting the al-Qaeda terrorist network. The Taliban hold the view that the government installed at the time is not legitimate and merely a puppet of the West. In consideration of the date scheduled for the upcoming presidential election on 28 September 2019 the talks are intended to produce their first results by 01 September 2019.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani convened a council meeting with politicians, clan elders and religious leaders in Kabul in May to discuss the status of the Taliban-US talks with them. The deep ideological divides prevented any results here as well.

The Afghan population is losing all hope for peace in their country. A UN report published at the beginning of the year says that the 2018 count of civilian deaths was the highest ever. Against 2017 the number increased by 11% up to 3,804 deaths, including 927 children as well as 7,189 wounded persons, most of

them were victims of bombings and suicide attacks. Recently, Afghanistan replaced Syria in the Global Peace Index as the least peaceful country in the world.

The Taliban are threatening to expand their territorial claims if the talks fail, in order to exert maximum pressure on the government. They will continue to attempt to conquer cities and gain control of major transport links. Terrorist groupings like ISKP or al-Qaeda are thriving in this security vacuum. This situation would have an impact of global concern in combination with the flourishing opium farming and the refugee flows of internally displaced persons and returnees from the neighbouring countries.

Kabul shaken by major explosion

In the early morning of 01 July 2019 the Afghan capital Kabul was shaken by a strong explosion. A large smoke column rose over Kabul's city centre after the detonation that happened in a lively and densely populated part of town not far from the Ministry of Defence. No information is yet available on the type of bomb, the background and the target of the attack. Preliminary assessments put the number of casualties at ten and many injured persons were taken to the hospitals.

Albania

Local election amidst political tensions

The local elections held in an atmosphere of extreme political tensions on 30 June 2019 remained peaceful and unharmed by major incidents. About 12,000 policemen were deployed to guarantee security. The voter turnout was merely 19 per cent.

Shortly before President Ilir Meta had attempted to delay the vote because of the political situation in the country, maintaining that no democratic and representative voting would be possible in these circumstances. However, the government insisted that the elections should be held as planned.

For months Albania has seen regular protests of the opposition (PD) accusing the socialist government of election fraud and corruption. The opposition demands the formation of an interim government which should organize new elections.

Cameroon

SDF leader kidnapped and later released

On 28 June 2019 the chairman of the largest opposition party represented in parliament, John Fru Ndi, was kidnapped from his house in Bamenda (capital of the North West region) by Ambazonia separatists and released again on the next day. In an interview after his release Fru Ndi claimed to have been maltreated by the separatists. They had demanded that he should cause all SDF parliamentarians and senators to withdraw from the national assembly and all SDF officers in local bodies to step down from their offices. The SDF criticizes President Paul Biya's behaviour during the anglophone crisis, but does not support the separatists' demand for an independent state of Ambazonia.

China

Hong Kong: Protests

Hong Kong's celebrations of the 22nd anniversary of the return of the former British Crown Colony to China started against the background of clashes between the police and protesters. On 01 July 2019 police used batons and pepper spray against protesters that started to occupy streets in the government district.

The largest protests in three decades have been held in Hong Kong during recent weeks because of a controversial law on extraditions to China. In the morning of 26 June 2019 hundreds of protesters marched to the consulates of the G20 member states submitting petitions to put the amendment of the extradition regulations of Hong Kong on the agenda at the G20 Summit. In the evening of the same day thousands again rallied against the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019.

Under the extradition law Hong Kong's authorities would be authorized to extradite anyone accused by China to the People's Republic. Critics warned that the judiciary in China is not independent and but supportive of political persecution. Furthermore, there is a risk of torture and abuse they said.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Police takes action against banned protest rallies

The largest opposition alliance, Lamuka, had called for a protest march in Kinshasa on 30 June 2019 that had been banned by the police. About 50 police blocked the progress of the car of presidential candidate Martin Fayulu and former Prime Minister Adolphe Muzito. The police dispersed the rally of several hundred people using tear gas. The police had prohibited the protest march to be held on 30 June 2019, the anniversary of Congo's independence, but Lamuka had insisted on the date. The protest was directed against the constitutional court's annulment of the election of 21 Lamuka parliamentarians and two senators in mid-June 2019. Their seats were awarded to candidates of the coalition Common Front for Congo (FCC) which supports former President Joseph Kabila.

In another protest march held also on 30 June 2019 despite a police ban in Goma (North Kivu province) one protester was shot dead by the police when dispersing the rally. On 29 June 2019 President Felix Tshisekedi said in an interview for French media that "we are under the impression that there are some who confuse democracy and anarchy".

Egypt

Anniversary of the revolution

On 30 June 2019 Egypt celebrated the takeover of power by the military as the anniversary of the revolution. The celebrations included free admission to all public theme parks. Official statements called the seizure of power the beginning of a stable government. Although the coup against elected president Morsi did not take place until 03 July 2013, 30 June 2013 is considered the decisive day because it was then that the nationwide protests against former president Morsi culminated.

Fighting on Sinai

The Army and Islamic State (IS) fighters exchanged fire on Sinai on 24 June 2019. The Interior Ministry announced that seven policemen and four IS fighters were killed.

Arrest of several opposition members

Zyad Elelaimy, a leading member of the social democratic opposition party, and seven other party members were arrested on 24 June 2019, allegedly for promoting a plan to commit terrorist acts funded by the Muslim Brotherhood. The party denied the allegations. Observers assume that the objective is to prevent the party and the coalition of parties it belongs to from preparing for next year's parliamentary elections.

Ethiopia

Dozens of arrests after coup attempt in Ethiopia

A government appointed special task force announced that it arrested more than 250 suspects after a coup attempt in the regional state of Amhara in which leading figures of the regional government, including its president, Ambachew Mekonnen were killed (see BN of 24 June 2019). Official sources stated on 27 June 2019 that in the northern region of Amhara 212 arrests had been made and 43 in the capital Addis Ababa.

Allegedly dozens of members of the National Movement of the Amhara (NaMA) are among the detainees. The ethno-nationalist NaMA was established in 2018 and is competing with the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), the governing party in Amhara and member of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that has been in power in Ethiopia since 1991. NaMa spokesman Christian Tadele denied

any involvement in the coup attempt accusing the security forces of intentionally targeting the Amhara, the country's second largest ethnic group.

According to the government the alleged mastermind behind the coup, General Asaminew Tsige, was killed on 24 June 2019 in a confrontation near the city of Bahir Dar. Until released by an amnesty in 2018 Asaminew had already been in prison for another alleged coup attempt. The background to the events in Amhara remains unclear, just as the actual circumstances of the assassination of the General Chief of Staff of the Ethiopian Armed Forces, Seare Mekonnen, in Addis Ababa on the same day. It has not yet transpired whether these two incidents are directly linked.

India

Kashmir: Families of former independence fighters became stateless

The authorities in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir are refusing to issue passports and documents to the families of former independence fighters who returned from the Pakistani part.

In the early nineties hundreds of men left the Indian part of Kashmir, seeking to be trained with arms in the Pakistani to fight the Indian Armed Forces and win independence for Kashmir. Many of them died in fire exchanges, some later abandoned the fight and settled in the part of Kashmir under Pakistani administration Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

In 2010 the then head of the government of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir announced a rehabilitation programme, which should permit former fighters who had travelled to the Pakistani part of Kashmir between 1989 and 2009 to return subject to certain conditions. The government informed that until 2017 377 former rebels and 864 of their dependants had returned to the Indian part of Kashmir via Nepal and Bangladesh. They were permitted official entry via certain border stations or New Delhi international airport. Most of the families entered via Nepal, allegedly because they were not admitted at the designated border crossings. They are now charged with illegal entry and their documents were seized at the border. Consequently, they now possess neither Pakistani nor Indian passports.

Assaults on Muslims

On 25 June 2019 eleven men were arrested for allegedly torturing a Muslim to death, two policemen were suspended for the way they handled the case. On 18 June 2019 the 24-year-old Muslim had been tied to a pole by villagers in Kharsawan district (north-eastern state of Jharkhand) for allegedly committing a burglary. He was then beaten for twelve hours before police first arrested him and only then took him to a hospital where he died on 22 June 2019. There is a ten minute video of the incident that suggests nationalist Hindu motives.

The US annual report on religious freedoms published on 21 June 2019 finds that violence and intolerance of minorities have been on the rise in India since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya-Janata-Partei (BJP) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014. Muslims are often attacked under the pretext of protecting the cows that are holy for Hindus. On 24 June 2019 the Indian government rejected the findings of the report. Still in June, Modi himself had condemned the increase of nationalist Hindu motivated assaults against Muslims because of the veneration of cows. Protest marches were held in a number of larger cities in response to the crime. The Hindu protesters demanded an end to violence against Muslims and the killings in the name of religion on placards and by chants that were directed against the governing BJP.

Iran

Health care

Deputy Irani health minister Iraj Harirchidas announced on 30 June 2019 that a serious shortage of physician resulted in the country because of the doctors' high emigration rate. According to the ministry's data there are currently 1.6 general practitioners, medical specialists and dentists per 1,000 inhabitants. Compared to 3.5 to 5 physicians per 1,000 inhabitants in the industrial countries. Already in 2016 the media reported that almost 2,000 doctors had left the country over two years. Last year 15,000 trained doctors were not available anymore, because they changed careers or emigrated. The shortage of doctors is even more severe in the villages than in the cities. The emigration rate of nurses is almost as high. Representatives of the health ministry said that more than 1,000 nurses are leaving Iran every year.

Kosovo

German Parliament extends Federal Army's mandate

On 22 May 2019 the Federal cabinet decided to extend the KFOR mandate for another year and on 28 June 2019 the Federal Parliament approved with 493 votes. The maximum troop strength will be halved from currently 800 German soldiers to 400, though. The Federal Army's KFOR deployment in Kosovo was approved by the Parliament on 11 June 1999 for the first time. The main task of the soldiers is to support the development of Kosovo into a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful country. Generally, the deployment does not have a time limit, but since the meeting of the Federal Government's Foreign Policy Committee on 07 June 2000 it comes up for approval again every twelve months. Most recently the German parliament had extended the KFOR mandate on 22 June 2018.

Libya

Gharyan

On 26 June 2019 militias connected with the Government of National Accord (GNA) started a surprise action against the militias of General Haftar in Gharyan by which control over the city changed hands. This had been preceded by intensive fighting at Tripoli international airport which turned out to be merely a deception. So far the counter attacks of Haftar's militias, the Libyan National Army (LNA), were limited mostly to air raids which mainly served to destroy equipment they left behind. The conquest of the city will considerably extend the supply routes for Haftar's troops. The LNA reported that during the conquest LNA prisoners of war had been killed by the GNA militias. This is denied by the GNA.

Conflict Haftar/Turkey

On 28 June 2019 General Haftar announced that he would consider as legitimate targets all Turkish vessels within Libyan waters, Turkish company property and all installations to be attributed to the Turkish state. He accused Turkey of supporting the GNA, e.g. by logistics support and arms shipments. It became known that a militia allied with Haftar is keeping six Turkish nationals prisoner. On 30 June 2019 the Turkish Foreign Ministry published a statement demanding their immediate release. Otherwise all militias and items connected to Haftar would likewise be considered legitimate targets by the Turkish armed forces, the statement said. The LNA announced on the same day that a Turkish Bayraktar BR 2 drone had been destroyed at take-off during an attack on Mitiga airport in Tripoli. Other sources said that there had been an attack and one runway was damaged, but could be repaired soon.

Turkey has considerable economic interests in Libya. Especially Turkish relations to the city of Misrata, that is putting up massive resistance against Haftar's troops, are very strong and long-standing.

Moldova

Pro-Russian and pro-Western parties form coalition government

The pro-Russian Party of the Socialists (PSRM) and the pro-European election alliance Acum surprisingly agreed on a coalition government. Neither of the parties had won the absolute majority in the parliamentary elections of 24 February 2019 (see BN of 25 February 2019).

This unusual alliance elected Maia Sandu as prime minister. Next to her also Andrei Nastase, the chairman of the second opposition party belonging to Acum (Platform Dignity and Truth) became a member of the government as deputy prime minister and interior minister. The foremost objective of the alliance of pro-Russian and pro-European forces is to wrench power from the Democrats (PDM) party, the party of the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc, that had been governing up to now. Under Plahotniuc the country experienced the disintegration of democracy, there were strong anti-liberal and authoritarian trends. While posing as pro-Western the PDM created a corrupt system.

The acting government led by the PDM at first refused to accept the new coalition government and had the constitutional court dissolve parliament and depose the president on 09 June 2019. Then both the old and the new government claimed power simultaneously for a few days. Yielding to pressure from the West and Russia the government of Filip resigned on 14 June 2019. Meanwhile Plahotniuc has left the country. On 26 June 2019 all six of the constitutional judges formally resigned their positions after criticism of being biased.

The new government wants to set aside all ideological controversies at first and announced to fight corruption and clean up the past. Observers, however, fear that ideological differences might soon cause the breakdown of the coalition.

Nigeria

Boko Haram attacks military unit

The military informed that on 26 June 2019 Boko Haram fighters attacked a unit of the 120th Task Force Bataillon near Goniri (Gujba Local Government Area, Bundesstaat Yobe). The soldiers had been warned of the upcoming attack and lay in ambush in which dozens of attackers were allegedly killed.

Boko Haram assaults village

On 24 June 2019 Boko Haram fighters made their way into the village of Ngangam (Mobbar Local Government Area, Borno State) near the border to the Republic of Niger. They then accused the villagers of betraying information about Boko Haram operations to the security forces and went on to kill at least 20 villagers. On the same day another nine people were reportedly killed by Boko Haram in a village near Gudumbali (Guzamala Local Government Area, Borno State).

North Macedonia

First Pride Parade – Skopje Pride

Hundreds demonstrated for equal rights for LGBTI people rallying behind the motto "Pride Parade" in the capital of Skopje on 29 June 2019. Several ministers, deputies and ambassadors joined the march that ended with a concert by pop singer Tamara Todevska from Skopje. Despite an anti-pride prayer of Christian counter-demonstrators along the side-lines of the march the parade remained peaceful without any clashes of the opposing groups. Prior thereto parliament had adopted a new anti-discrimination law at the end of May which for the first time includes the criteria sexual orientation and gender identity.

Pakistan/Afghanistan

Another extension of the right to stay for Afghan refugees

Pakistan extended the right to stay for the 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees for another year until 30 June 2020. The extension was announced during a state visit of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani to the Pakistani capital Islamabad. The Afghans staying in Pakistan without registration will be temporarily tolerated until 31 October 2019. For more background and details on the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan see BN of 17 June 2019.

Sri Lanka

Resumption of the execution of death sentences

For the first time in 43 years death sentences are to be executed in Sri Lanka again. Already in July last year President Maithripala Sirisena had lifted the moratorium for executions and a few days ago he announced on TV that he already signed off the implementation of four executions. However, these need to be reviewed by the Supreme Court again.

The announcement to reinstate executions triggered protests, including in Colombo. The human rights organization Amnesty International (AI) launched a so-called urgent action urging to sign a petition against the scheduled executions.

According to the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch there are almost 1,300 prison inmates on death row in Sri Lanka, this includes 48 sentenced for drug related crimes. Citing the latest official statistics the paper Daily Mirror reported that in 2017 alone over 80,000 people were arrested for drug related crimes.

Sudan

Renewed mass protests

More mass protests were held in Khartoum and other cities on 30 June 2019. Reportedly tens of thousands took to the streets. The opposition Alliance for Freedom and Change had called for the protests. Allegedly police used tear gas against the protesters in Khartoum. Several media report that seven people were killed and more than 180 injured during the protests. These were the first mass protests since the protesters' camp in Khartoum had been violently dispersed on 03 June 2019, leaving more than 100 dead (see BN of 17 June 2019).

Joint proposal by the African Union and Ethiopia

On 27 June 2019 the African Union (AU) and Ethiopia submitted a joint proposal for the formation of an interim government. On 28 June 2019 the Military Council announced that this was a suitable proposal to resume the talks with the opposition. The proposal is slightly different than the earlier Ethiopian plan which the Military Council had rejected on 23 June 2019 (see BN of 24 June 2019). The joint proposal provides for a 15 member Sovereign Council. It is to be composed of seven civilians, seven members of the military and one independent person. The composition of the legislative council shall only be determined once the agreement has been signed.

Syria

96 casualties in fighting in the North West

According to unanimous reports of government and opposition media dozens of fighters died in heavy fighting between government supporters and rebels on 28 June 2019. The battle took place near the villages of Jibeen and Tal Meleh in the north-west of Hama province. The government reports that its supporters intended to destroy posts of the radical Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory documented 51 casualties on the government side and 45 on the side of the rebels.

Since the recent battles for the last rebel strongholds in the north-west on 30 April 2019 more than 2,000 people have reportedly been killed, including 532 civilians.

Turkish observation post in Idlib attacked

On 28 June 2019 shots were fired at an observation post of the Turkish military in Idlib. A Turkish soldier was killed, three others were wounded. According to Turkish government sources the attack was launched from territory under the control of the Syrian regime.

Another Turkish observation post in Idlib came under fire shot at on the next day which did not claim any victims.

Human rights organisation warns against instrumentalization during reconstruction

On 28 June 2019 Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report saying that the Syrian government discriminates against government critics or population groups that are deemed to be close to the opposition when distributing humanitarian aid from abroad.

Both the EU and the US had so far persisted in their joint position to make reconstruction aid for Syria available only after the war had ended and a political transformation process had taken place.

Generally, it can be stated that the number of international relief organisation working in Damascus has increased recently.

Assassination of family members of a government consultant in Damascus

Official Syrian media are reporting a car bomb attack on 27 June 2019 that killed the wife and son of a policy consultant of the Syrian government. The pro-opposition Syrian Human Rights Observatory and Human Rights Watch identified the consultant as one Taleb Ibrahim. So far no grouping has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Fighting in Turkish-controlled Afrin

The Turkish Ministry of Defence reported fighting with the Syrian Kurdish militia YPG on 26 June 2019 in which one Turkish soldier died and five were wounded. The incident occurred in Afrin region that has been under the joint control of Turkey and moderate Islamists since Turkey's military offensive in 2018.

Turkey's president Erdogan stated on 25 June 2019 that the number of returnees to Syria could rise to close to one million soon after the establishment of a security zone in north-eastern Syria. Currently large parts of Syria's North East are governed by the YPG.

The Gambia

Former Gambia president Yahya Jammeh faces allegations of sexual violence

Three women accused Gambia's ex-president to have coerced them to performing sexual acts by exerting moral, financial and physical pressure. On 26 June 2019 the lawyer for the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) Reed Brody said in Senegal: "Yahya Jammeh treated Gambian women like his personal property". Jammeh and his staff had used coercion, fraud and violence to obtain sexual services, the investigation of HRW and the Swiss NGO Trial International revealed. The period of Jammeh's rule (1994 to 2017) was characterized by massive human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture and murders by his security forces. At the end of 2016 he lost the presidential elections and fled to exile in Equatorial Guinea.

Tunisia

Homosexual candidate in Tunisian presidential election

For the first time an openly homosexual candidate will stand as presidential candidate in elections in Tunisia in October. It is Mounir Baatour, the chairman of the Tunisian shams organisation which is working for the rights of homosexual and transgender people. Baatour who works as a lawyer said that he already had more than the 10,000 supporters that are required for standing as candidate. In Tunisia homosexual acts are punishable and homosexuality still remains taboo in society. The incumbent Beji Caid Essebsi (aged 92) will not stand again for the presidential elections.

Suicide bombings in Tunis

Two suicide bombings occurred in the Tunisian capital on 27 June 2019, the first one on Avenue Bourguiba in the city centre near a police car. Shortly thereafter a second bomb was exploded in front of the seat of the anti-terrorism agency. According to different reports there were one or two casualties and at least eight people were wounded. The Islamic State terrorist militia claimed responsibility for the attack.

Turkey

Military service

The media report that the Turkish parliament ratified a new law about the military service reducing the length of the service by one half. The new law shortens the service from 12 to six months with an option to buying an exemption. The law provides that Turkish citizens must undergo one month of military training and can be exempted for the remaining five months against payment of Lira 31,000 (approx. €4,725) . Men currently doing their military service have the opportunity to be released early. According to the new law military conscripts can also extend their military service voluntarily for a monthly salary of Lira 2,000.

Pre-trial detention for Yücel illegal

In a unanimous decision of 28 June 2019 the Turkish Constitutional Court held that the one-year pre-trial detention of the German-Turkish journalist Deniz Yücel ran counter to the laws on the freedom of opinion and of the press . The Court decided that his personal freedom and security as well as the right to freedom of opinion and of the press had been violated. Yücel was awarded an indemnification of Lira 25,000 (approx. € 3,800) in damages.

The trial against Yücel, however, continues. He is charged with terrorist propaganda and incitement to violence because of his publications. The Constitutional Court held that a journalist is not responsible for the statements made by anybody he is interviewing. The charges concern a conversation that Yücel had with the PKK commander Cemil Bayik. The Constitutional Court explained that punishing or charging a journalist

for publishing opinions voiced by someone else during an interview would significantly restrict the contribution of the press to the discussion of matters of public interest. The interview could not be interpreted as terrorist propaganda by Yücel. Although the judges criticized some of Yücel's texts they still considered them to be within the limits of the freedom of the press. Another point of criticism was that the prosecution had used some poor translations of Yücel's texts. His trial will continue on 16 July 2019 in Istanbul.

Long prison sentences

The media reported that on 26 June 2019 that numerous defendants had been sentenced to long prison terms because of the coup attempt of July 2016 again. According to the reports an Ankara court pronounced imprisonment for life for 47 people, of these 19 received aggravated life sentences. Another 113 people received prison terms between seven and 13 years. 94 defendants were acquitted. The majority of the convicts are soldiers. Anadolu news agency said that the trial related to the events in a military academy in the nights of the coup of 15 and 16 July 2016. Only a week ago about 150 soldiers had received life prison sentences, among them high-ranking former military officers such as the former commander of the Turkish air-force, Akin Öztürk (see BN of 24 June 2019).

The sentences are still subject to appeals.

Ukraine

Movement in the Ukraine conflict

At a press conference during the G-20 Summit in Osaka Russian President Putin was optimistic about the conflict in Ukraine. He said that more prisoners had been exchanged recently. The released did, however, not include the 24 detained by the Russian coast guard when attempting to get from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea via the Kerch Strait in November last year who have been in prison in Moscow since. According to the Russians they would have had to register the passage beforehand. Putin is convinced that Ukraine basically admitted that this incident had been a provocation. The Ukrainian side said that there had been indications from Russia that the sailors could be released subject to certain conditions. There are reports that one of these conditions might call for an official admission of Ukraine that the manoeuvre violated Russia's territorial borders. Putin announced to determine the issue of the sailors' release in a calm working manner. Russia did not accept the Hamburg International Maritime Court's order alleging that the UN court did not hold jurisdiction.

Venezuela

Allegations of torture

On 27 June 2019 Venezuela's Maduro government announced the prevention of an attempted coup and the arrest of 13 officers in relation thereto. The announcement said that they had planned a number of acts for 23 and 24 June 2019 including an attempt to take Maduro's life. One of the arrested officers died in prison in the subsequent days. This gave rise to allegations of torture by the officer's family and President Guaido who has the support of the parliament. These allegations are to be investigated. In recent years allegations of torture have been made against the Maduro government several times, including by the United Nations and the Lima Group. Prison conditions are said to be extremely bad, in particular for political prisoners.

Vietnam

Prison sentences for government opponents

On 24 June 2019 a court in Ho-Chi-Minh City sentenced the US citizen Michael Nguyen to twelve years in prison and two Vietnamese nationals to ten and eight years, respectively. They were charged with attempting to overthrow the state and inciting people to attend violent protests in Hanoi and Ho-Chi-Minh City.

