

## Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

7 October 2019

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Casualty figures for minors (2015-2018)**

According to a report by the UN Security Council, the violent conflicts which have been continuing for many years now have claimed the lives of some 3,500 minors in the past four years, with at least 9,000 suffering injuries. A minor was involved in one in three incidents in the period from 2015 to 2018. The majority of incidents were attacks by insurgents (3,450 fatalities, 9,149 injured), in particular by the Taliban and IS, followed by air raids (1,049 casualties, including 464 fatalities). 467 attacks on schools and teaching staff were documented in the period under review.

#### **Taliban leaders freed from prisons**

The Taliban reported on 06.10.19 that several of its leaders and fighters had been freed from Afghan prisons. Those freed allegedly include the shadow governors of the provinces of Kunar (North-East) and Nimroz (South). The Taliban has set up shadow governments in the territories under its control, installing its own judiciaries in some areas. The Afghan government has yet to comment on the matter.

### **Albania/North Macedonia**

#### **Leading EU politicians call for accession talks**

In an appeal on 30.09.19, leading EU politicians called on the European heads of state and government to agree to the initiation of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. The appeal is supported by Donald Tusk, President of the EU Council, David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament, the incumbent President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and his designated successor, Ursula von der Leyen. The appeal describes the decision on this matter as a test of the European Union's ability to fulfil its promises. Both countries having met the required conditions, those behind the appeal are now calling on the EU to demonstrate its capacity to stand by its promises. The member states have already deferred the decision on opening accession negotiations twice since 2018. In particular, France, the Netherlands and Denmark are opposed to beginning such talks. The resolution, which must be approved by all 28 member states, is to be adopted at the meeting of the Council of the European Union in Luxembourg on 15.10.19.

Other candidate countries are Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are considered potential candidates for accession.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

#### **Migration crisis**

On 13.09.19 the Swiss Aargauer Zeitung newspaper reported on inhumane conditions at the makeshift refugee camp in Vucjak, which is situated ten kilometres from the city of Bihac in north-west Bosnia, directly at the border with Croatia. The camp was reportedly set up at short notice on the site of a former

refuse dump in June 2019 using the scant financial resources available to Bihac's city authorities, after international aid organisations closed their overcrowded camps to new arrivals. A spokesperson for the Red Cross in Bihac talks of unhygienic conditions, a shortage of water, inadequate food supplies and limited medical care. International organisations and NGOs are reportedly not active at the camp because it does not comply with international standards. The clinic tent is said to be run by professional volunteers from Germany, Austria, Hungary and Slovenia.

The city of Bihac became a hotspot when Hungary's southern borders were closed in the Autumn of 2015 and the Balkan route shifted to the west (Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia). People without documents then attempted to cross the green border into Croatia. Those illegally crossing the border were allegedly commonly discovered by Croatian police, abused, robbed and returned to Bosnia.

The impending winter could trigger a humanitarian disaster, if camps such as Vucjak are not prepared accordingly, it is argued. In addition, several hundred refugees are claimed to be living in the open outside the overcrowded Bira camp in Bihac and at a site near the Croatian border.

## **Cameroon**

### **Conference on the anglophone crisis ended**

The conference convened by president Paul Biya (cf. BN of 16.09.19) as a major national dialogue to settle the crisis in the country's two anglophone regions was held in the capital, Jaunde, from 30.09.19 to 04.10.19. The leaders of the rebels, who are calling for an independent state of Ambazonia comprising the two regions, boycotted the conference because their conditions (including conducting the dialogue outside Cameroon under the auspices of the UN, withdrawal of the army from the two regions, release of arrested separatists) were not met. The major opposition party, Cameroon Renaissance Movement (CRM) also failed to take part in the event. The party's chairman, Maurice Kamto, is in custody along with numerous party members, some of whom have been held since January 2019, first and foremost for participating in demonstrations against the result of the presidential election in October 2018. Proposals resulting from the conference included giving the two anglophone regions a special status, electing their two governors and re-adopting the former name of the country, "United Republic of ". The results are to be presented to president Paul Biya. Some 3,000 people have been killed and around 500,000 displaced since 2017 against the backdrop of the violent conflict between militant separatists and security forces.

### **Release of Maurice Kamto and around 100 CRM members/supporters**

The chairman of the CRM, Maurice Kamto, was released from custody on 05.09.19. A military court ordered the proceedings against him to be dropped at the behest of president Paul Biya. Some 100 other imprisoned CRM members were released in addition to Kamto. On 04.10.19 president Paul Biya announced on Twitter that he had ordered the proceedings against a number of leaders and members of political parties, in particular the CRM, to be dropped. Kamto was arrested in January 2019 with a large number of supporters after leading a demonstration at which it was claimed that the official result of the presidential election of October 2018 had been falsified. According to the official count of votes cast, Kamto achieved the second-best result behind Paul Biya, claiming 14.2% of the vote, and he sees himself as Cameroon's true president.

### **Release of 333 detainees announced**

On 03.10.19 the president announced that investigations were to be dropped into 333 people who had been arrested against the background of the anglophone crisis and they would be released.

## **China**

### **Hong Kong: Ban on face coverings**

A ban on face coverings at demonstrations was imposed on 04.10.19 and came into effect on 05.10.19, citing an emergency law dating back to the British colonial era. Chief Executive Carrie Lam pointed out that this does not amount to a formal declaration of a state of emergency, however. Anyone who fully or partially conceals their face may now face up to one year's imprisonment and a fine. Demonstrators have frequently worn breathing masks at protests, for example, in order to protect themselves from the tear gas used by the

police, but also to avoid being identified. Representatives of the democracy movement appealed against the ban. On 06.10.19 the court rejected an injunction against the ban, but ordered a judicial review to take place at the end of October. Two persons detained under the ban on 05.10.19 were released on bail on 07.10.19.

### **Hong Kong: Protests**

Tens of thousands of protesters took part in unapproved demonstrations in various districts once again on 05.10.19 and 06.10.19. Despite the ban on face coverings (see above), many wore face masks. The demonstrations were followed by rioting. Dozens of people were arrested.

Serious disturbances occurred on 04.10.19, after the ban on face coverings became public knowledge. All underground transport in Hong Kong was discontinued until the morning of 06.10.19 as a result.

The protests which have been going on in the special administrative region since June 2019 escalated on 01.10.19. On this day, the central government marked the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China with a major military parade in Peking. In Hong Kong, disturbances broke out on the fringes of peaceful demonstrations, despite a ban being in place. Activists, for the most part with their faces masked, blocked roads and threw incendiaries and paving stones while the police deployed water canons, tear gas, rubber bullets and truncheons. For the first time, a demonstrator was shot and seriously injured. He had attacked a policeman with a club or a similar object, prompting the latter to fire in self-defence. In all, some 100 people were injured. 269 people were arrested - the highest number on any single day since the beginning of the protests. Around 2,000 people in total have been arrested to date.

On 03.10.19 demonstrators fought street battles with the police.

It has emerged from diplomatic circles that the central government has raised the number of troops it has stationed in Hong Kong from between 3,000 and 5,000 to between 10,000 and 12,000. As such, a routine exchange of troops in August actually entailed scaling up the troop presence.

### **Côte d'Ivoire**

#### **Custodial sentence for president of the Gbêkê region**

On 03.10.19, the president of the regional council of Gbêkê (centre of Côte d'Ivoire), Jacques Mangoua, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a fine of five million CFA (7,500 euros) for the illegal possession of firearms. The public prosecution department at Bouaké regional court reported that the police had seized a total of 991 7.62 mm weapons, 49 12-calibre rifles and 40 new new machetes at the defendant's home.

Jacques Mangoua is one of the vice-presidents of the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), which became the most important opposition party after leaving the governing coalition at the beginning of the year. As the largest region in Côte d'Ivoire, Gbêkê is of substantial strategic importance to the opposition in view of the forthcoming presidential election in 2020. Opposition allies suspect a plot against Mangoua in the run-up to the presidential election.

### **Ethiopia**

#### **Attacks in Amhara region claim lives**

According to a report on 03.10.19, at least 22 people have been killed to date in fighting between regional special units and members of the Qemant ethnic minority in the northern regional state of Amhara. Ten people were reportedly killed in an attack on a minibus on 27.09.19 and twelve members of the military died when two convoys came under fire on 28.09.19. As one of more than 80 recognised ethnic groups in Ethiopia, the Qemant are demanding greater autonomy. Violence and attacks have repeatedly occurred in Amhara, Ethiopia's second-largest province, in recent months (cf. BN of 06.05.19, 24.06.19, 01.07.19). According to government figures, more than 1,200 people have been killed in ethnic violence in the past twelve months. The number of displaced persons is estimated at 1.2 million.

Ethiopia's constitution allows ethnic groups to demand referendums on founding a state of their own. Increasing numbers of ethnic groups have exercised this right since prime minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in April 2018.

## **Ethiopia/Eritrea/Israel**

### **Netanyahu claims to be in discussion with Ethiopia on return of Eritrean asylum applicants**

Efforts appear to be underway in the Israeli government to reach an accord with Ethiopia on the return of Eritrean refugees. In a recent social media post, prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he had discussed the removal of Eritreans during a visit to Jerusalem by his Ethiopian counterpart, Abiy Ahmed, at the beginning of September 2019. Netanyahu said that innovative projects for returning Eritrean asylum seekers on excellent terms had been put forward, but added that no details could be disclosed. In contrast, the Ethiopian embassy in Tel Aviv stated that the meeting had focused solely on strengthening bilateral relations, and that the return of Eritrean asylum applicants had not been on the agenda.

Some 23,100 Eritrean refugees are currently living in Israel, more than 16,000 of whom have submitted official asylum applications. Only 13 applications have been approved, and 5,500 have been rejected. The remaining applications are still pending.

## **India/Pakistan**

### **Solidarity march for Muslims in Kashmir Valley**

A peaceful protest march to the demarcation line (Line of Control - LoC) between Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) in Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in Indian took place on 05.10.19 and 06.10.19. The march was organised by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). The protest march proceeded as far as the Indian town of Chinari, close to the demarcation line (LoC). By way of precaution, Pakistani security forces had set up barriers to prevent anyone from crossing the LoC. The situation in the Kashmir Valley, which has a predominantly Muslim population, has been tense for some weeks now, especially in and around the provincial capital, Srinagar, since its autonomy rights were removed and Indian troops were stationed there.

## **Iran**

### **Amendment to the law on nationality**

On 02.10.19 the spokesman of the Iranian Council of Guardians, Abbas-Ali Kadkhodaei, reported that the constitutional body had accepted an amendment to the Iranian law on nationality. This now makes it possible for children born out of a marriage between an Iranian woman and a non-Iranian man to obtain Iranian nationality upon application. Parliament passed this amendment by a majority vote four months ago. The Council of Guardians, which is responsible for verifying the compatibility of laws with the constitution and Islamic principles, had previously rejected two amendments to the law on the grounds that they were incompatible with the constitution.

Iranian women who are married to a foreigner now have the possibility of applying for their children to be granted Iranian nationality. A prerequisite for the acquisition of Iranian nationality is that no security reservations are raised by the Iranian secret services or the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC).

The amendment to the law is regarded as an important step to substantially improve access to the healthcare system, university education and the labour market for the children concerned. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), this amendment is to be seen as a response to the fact that more than three million Afghan refugees live in Iran and marriages between Iranian women and non-Iranian men have increased markedly.

### **Planned attack on general Soleimani thwarted**

Iran has reported that it has thwarted an attack on the commander of the units for operations of the Revolutionary Guards abroad, general Ghassem Soleimani. The Revolutionary Guards' website, Sephanews, announced on 03.10.19 that three terrorists had been arrested who were planning to assassinate the commander of the Kuds Force at the behest of the Israeli and Arab secret services. They were allegedly intending to kill the well-known general at a religious ceremony.

According to Sephanews, the three suspects had been sent abroad for training. This indicates that they are Iranians. The website reported that substantial sums of money had been spent on preparing them for the attack, citing the head of the Guards' security service, Hossein Taeb. Soleimani was reportedly to be killed during the Shiite Ashura festival in the city of Kerman in southern Iran.

The general played a key role in recent years in coordinating the fight against IS in Iraq and against the insurgents in Syria. The general is highly esteemed in Iran and regarded as a war hero.

### **Geostrategic presence throughout the Near East**

According to reports by the Iranian news agency, Tasnim, the representative of revolutionary leader Khamenei, Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, has affirmed that Iran's geostrategic interests extend across the entire Near East region. He stated that in geopolitical terms Iran was no longer limited to the Iranian nation state. Alamolhoda asserted that the militias of the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, the National Front in Syria, Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon together constituted the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Alamolhoda warned that in the event of an attack on Iran, Israel would be destroyed in half a day.

## **Iraq**

### **Consequences of the mass protests in various parts of Iraq**

Demonstrations against corruption and unemployment and for improved basic provisions have been taking place in Baghdad, Nasriyah (capital of Dhi Qar province) and other cities since 01.10.19. The demonstrations are said to have been organised via social media, with no leadership known to date. The initially peaceful demonstrations escalated when security forces attempted to break up the crowds. Iraqi security sources denied having shot directly at demonstrators and have launched investigations. Demonstrators blocked main roads and set dozens of public buildings and eight party offices on fire.

On 05.10.19 the Iraqi prime minister, Adel Abd al-Mahdi, announced a social programme allegedly covering advanced vocational, social housing and financial compensation for the families of the dead demonstrators.

At a press conference on 06.10.19, Saed Mann disclosed on behalf of the security forces that 104 people, including eight members of the security forces, had died so far in the protests throughout various parts of the country, and 6,107 people, again including members of the security forces, had been injured. According to the Iraqi Commission for Human Rights, at least 132 demonstrators have been arrested.

A further 15 people are reported to have been killed in clashes between security forces and demonstrators in Sadr City (Baghdad) on 06.10.19.

### **Reporting on protests obstructed**

Against the background of the protests, access to the internet and social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp) was restricted in some instances. The NetBlock organisation reports that around 70 % of Iraq was offline at times.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), journalists belonging to at least 14 different media institutions have been attacked since 01.10.19 while covering the protests. Three journalists were reportedly temporarily detained.

According to local media reports, facilities of satellite broadcasting companies Al-Arabiyya and NRT were damaged or destroyed by unknown masked attackers in Baghdad.

### **Activists killed in Basra**

Activist and cartoonist Hussein Adel Madani and his wife were shot dead by unknown assailants at their home in Basra on 02.10.19. According to local media reports, the two had previously taken part in demonstrations.

## **Kosovo**

### **Change of government following parliamentary election**

According to the Central Electoral Commission, the two opposition parties Vetevendosje (Self-Defence) and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) had claimed around 26 % and 25 % of the vote respectively with 93.7 % of votes counted in the early parliamentary election on 06.10.19.

The ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), which is dominated by state president Hashim Thaci, took third place with 21 % of the vote. The party's leader, Kadri Veseli has stated that the party accepts its defeat and will go into opposition. Prime minister Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) took 11.6 % of the vote. Turnout stood at 44 %, which was 2.5 percentage points higher than in 2017.

The early parliamentary election became necessary after prime minister Haradinaj, who had been in office since 2017, resigned in July 2019 on account of a summons by the Kosovo Special Court in The Hague and parliament was subsequently dissolved on 22.08.19 (cf. BN of 22.07.19, 29.07.19, 12.08.19).

The victorious left-wing party, Vetevendosje, is headed by former student leader Albin Kurti. During the period of international administration, he made his mark with neo-Marxist and nationalistic rhetoric. He endorsed violence against institutions of the international administration and was responsible for a tear gas attack on the parliament. He has recently adopted a substantially more modest tone, however. At an election victory party he said that he would endeavour to form a government quickly. In order to govern the country, Kurti will have to put together a reasonably stable coalition. Despite major ideological differences, the moderately conservative LDK led by the lawyer Vyosa Osmani is seen as the most important potential partner.

The process of forming a government in Kosovo is complicated by the country's electoral law, which was drawn up by the international community before 2008: Only 100 of the total of 120 seats are allocated according to the principle of proportionality. 20 seats are reserved for various ethnic minorities. As the largest minority, the Serbs are entitled to ten seats.

## **Mali**

### **UN soldier killed**

One UN soldier was killed and four soldiers were injured when their vehicle passed over a land mine near to the village of Aguelhok (Kidal region) on 06.10.19. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack to date.

### **Soldiers killed in attacks on two army camps in central Mali**

The Malian government has reported that at least 38 Malian soldiers have been killed in attacks by suspected jihadists on two military bases. It was initially stated that 25 soldiers had been killed and 60 were missing. These are the most serious losses suffered by the Malian armed forces this year. 15 jihadist fighters were allegedly killed in the fighting. The attack on the two military bases in Boulkessi and Mondoro, near to the border with Burkina Faso, took place on the night of 29.09.19.

### **Soldiers killed**

The Malian army has reported that seven soldiers were killed in central Mali when their vehicle was hit by an explosive device on 26.09.19. The military vehicles were escorting a truck convoy between the towns of Douentza and Sévaré (Mopti region) when the lead vehicle was attacked with an explosive device. No-one has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.

## **Rwanda**

### **Attack by FDLR claims lives**

According to official sources, fighters of the rebel organisation Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) killed 14 people in Kinigi (Musanze district, at the border with DR Congo and Uganda) on 04.10.19. Security forces apprehended the attackers close to the border with DR Congo. 19 of the attackers were killed and five arrested.

The Rwandan FDLR operates primarily in DR Congo. Its members include people who participated in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

## **Serbia**

### **Parties threatened with exclusion**

According to local media reports on 30.09.19, a law is to be passed by the end of 2019 providing for parties which have not fielded any candidates in elections or held any statutory meetings for several years to be removed from the party register. 113 political parties are currently registered in Serbia, including only around 30 at national, municipal and local government level and 72 as representatives of national minorities. Serbian news broadcaster N1 expects this measure to drastically reduce the number of parties.

## **Somalia**

### **Hostilities**

Two civilians were killed in Mogadishu on 29.09.19 when Al Shabaab fighters attacked AMISOM troops with a bomb. On the same day, the Somali military supported by units of the African Union reportedly killed 20 rebels in an attack on an Al Shabaab base near to the town of Awdheegle (Lower Shabelle region).

One civilian was killed in two coordinated attacks by Al Shabaab on a US convoy at the Ballidogle airfield in Wanlaweyn (Lower Shabelle region) and on Italian soldiers belonging to an EU mission in Mogadishu. US AFRICOM carried out two air strikes against Al Shabaab on the same day, reportedly killing ten rebels. Six soldiers died when Al Shabaab attacked the special US-trained Somali Daneb units in the Elasha Paul Bihaya region close to Mogadishu on 02.10.19.

### **US embassy reopened**

The USA reopened its embassy in Mogadishu after 28 years on 02.10.19. The diplomatic mission was closed during the overthrow of the country's ruler, Siad Baare, in 1991.

## **Sudan**

### **Border with Libya and the Central African Republic closed**

The Sudanese transitional government ordered the immediate closure of the border with Libya and the Central African Republic on 26.09.19. It stated that this was necessary due to dangers to the country's security and economy, without going into any further detail. Sudan has repeatedly complained about arms trafficking at the borders with Libya and the Central African Republic. A statement published by the government referred to vehicles having crossed the borders with the two countries illegally.

## **Turkey/Syria**

### **Announcement of army offensive in Syria**

According to media reports, a military operation by Turkey in northern Syria is imminent. President Erdoğan announced that the planned offensive would target the region to the east of the Euphrates river in Syria, the majority of which is controlled by Kurds. The USA and Turkey had planned to establish a so-called security zone in this region. On 07.10.19 he stated that Turkey had completed all necessary preparations and the operation could begin today or tomorrow. The White House stated on 06.10.19 that no US forces would be participating in the offensive in northern Syria which had been announced by Turkey. Around 1,000 Americans are still stationed in the north-east of Syria at present. The extent of a possible withdrawal by the US army from the border of Syria's Kurdish territories remains as yet unclear.

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are dominated by Kurdish militias, warned of open warfare in the event of an invasion by Turkish troops.

## **Turkey**

### **Four Germans released from prison**

Six Germans were arrested in Turkey last week. They are accused of having spread propaganda and of being members of an organisation which has close links to the banned Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK). Four were able to leave prison on 06.10.19, but are required to report to the police on a regular basis and are not allowed to leave Turkey for the time being. A court is to decide what is to happen to the other two arrested Germans in the coming days.

## **Ukraine**

### **Rapprochement between Ukrainian government and separatists**

On 02.10.19 representatives of the Ukrainian government and the pro-Russian separatists of East Ukraine agreed on a special status for the embattled Luhansk und Donezk regions at a meeting of the so-called contact group in Minsk. A further withdrawal of troops was also agreed beginning on 07.10.19, with the aim of demilitarising the area around the towns of Petriwske and Solote. Ukraine's president Selenski stated that this agreement paved the way for a summit in so-called Normandy format, involving France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. The special status agreement concluded on 02.10.19 follows the "Steinmeier formula" named after Germany's foreign minister, which provides for the regions of Luhansk and Donezk to be granted special status on an interim basis. The pro-Russian separatists interpret the formula such that the special status is initially to take effect as a temporary measure, elections monitored by the OSCE are to be held at short notice, disarmament is then to take place and following recognition of the elections by the OSCE a permanent special status is to apply. In contrast, Ukraine's president Selenski has stated that there can be no democratic elections while one side is staring down the barrel of a gun.

### **Mass protests against special status in Kiev**

Around 10,000 people demonstrated in Kiev on 06.10.19 against the planned special status for the embattled territories in the Donbass. Ukrainian media have reported that the demonstrators chanted that this was a capitulation and too great a concession to Russia.

## **Yemen**

### **Houthi rebels release hundreds of prisoners**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva has reported that the Houthis have released 290 prisoners who were being held in camps. In all, the release of 350 prisoners has been announced. The release was overseen by the ICRC and the United Nations and forms part of an agreement brokered by the United Nations in December 2018, under which the Houthi rebels and the government of president Abed Rabbo Mansur Hadi undertook to exchange some 16,000 prisoners. A ceasefire for the key port of Hudaida on the Red Sea also formed part of the talks.

### **Demonstrator killed**

One demonstrator was killed and five injured when pro-government forces fired on the participants in a demonstration organised by separatists in Azzan in the governorate of Shabwah on 03.10.19.