

## Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

28 April 2014

### **Afghanistan**

#### **Security situation**

Four police officers were killed and one injured in an attack by Taliban fighters on a police station in the province of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan on 23.04.14. Three police officers are missing and may have been abducted. On 24.04.14 an Afghan policeman shot dead three American doctors at a hospital run by a US relief organisation in Kabul. The perpetrator was arrested.

#### **Natural disasters**

Heavy rainfall and floods destroyed several villages and killed over 100 people in the northern Afghan provinces of Jowzjan, Faryab, Sar-e-Pul and Badghis on 24.04.14. Over 6,000 people lost their homes in Jowzjan alone.

### **Pakistan**

#### **Attacks by the army in the north-west**

The air force and ground troops attacked insurgents' refuges in the tribal regions close to the Afghan border (Khyber Agency) last week. According to information from the army, 37 suspected militants were killed and 18 wounded. The attack was aimed at the "Lashkar-e-Islam" group, which is known to carry out kidnappings and extortion rackets in the area and is also allegedly responsible for various bomb attacks, including attacks in Islamabad. The Taliban umbrella organisation (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) condemned the attacks but declared its continued willingness to take up peace talks.

#### **Attacks**

At least four people were killed and over 30 injured in a bomb attack close to a mosque in Karachi in 25.04.14.

### **Iraq**

#### **Security situation**

According to Iraq Body Count, 891 civilians have been killed in April to date (as at 27.04.14). The AFP news agency puts the death toll in April to date (as at 27.04.14) at 681, including 59 police officers, 71 soldiers, 12 members of the Sahwa, one member of the Kurdish security forces and 247 extremists.

#### **Bomb attacks on ministers**

The Iraqi education minister, Mohammed Tamim, survived an attack on his convoy of vehicles in the vicinity of the city of Kirkuk on 23.04.14 uninjured. On 24.04.14 the convoy in which the minister of youth, Jassim Mohammed, was travelling came under attack in the region of Tuz Khurmato (province of Salahaddin). He was not injured.

## **Attacks ahead of the parliamentary elections**

According to a dpa report on 27.04.14, increasing numbers of attacks are taking place on polling stations and candidates. At least 28 people were killed at a campaign rally in Baghdad on 25.04.14, for example. At least four people died in an attack in the province of Salahaddin on 24.04.14. An attack on a polling station on 22.04.14 claimed at least ten lives.

## **Syria**

### **First candidates for presidential elections**

On 27.04.14, Syrian parliamentary speaker al-Lahham announced that six candidates had so far registered to run in the planned presidential election: economics expert Hassan Abdullah al-Nuri, communist parliamentarian Maher Hadschar, Mohammed Radschuh, Abdul-Salam Salamah, Sawsan al-Haddad and Samir Mualla. Syrians have until 01.05.14 to register for the presidential election. They require endorsements from 35 parliamentarians, however, each of whom has only one vote. President Bashar al-Assad has also indicated that he intends to run for office again, although there has been no official announcement to this effect as yet. The opposition describes the election as a farce and accuses the government of hiring opposition candidates to make the ballot appear more democratic. Most prominent opposition activists are in exile and are thus excluded from running for election.

### **Iraq attacks convoy in Syrian territory**

At least eight people died in an attack by Iraqi army helicopters on a convoy of jihadi fighters in the east of Syria on 27.04.14 when eight tankers attempted to cross the border into Iraq from Wadi Suwab in Syria. The Iraqi interior ministry stated that Iraq had to "protect its border from both sides".

## **Lebanon**

### **No new president after first round of voting**

Former Christian militia leader Samir Geagea, running for the "14th March" alliance, won the first round of voting to elect a new Lebanese president (the tenure of the current president, Michel Suleiman, ends on 25.05.14). With 48 of the required 86 votes, he failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds parliamentary majority required in the first ballot, however. 16 votes were cast for the candidate Henri Helu, who is backed by a small group of independents and centrists. 52 of the total of 124 parliamentarians present cast blank ballot papers. The Lebanese parliament is split into two blocks – the "14th March" block which is sympathetic to the USA and Saudi Arabia, and the pro-Syrian "8th March" block which is backed by the Shiite Hezbollah militia. A religion-based system of proportional representation applies in Lebanon, under which only a Maronite Christian can become president. Geagea is regarded as an opponent to Hezbollah. Parliament is to reconvene for a second round of voting on 30.04.14. A simple majority will be sufficient in this second round.

## **Palestinian territories**

### **Hamas and Fatah aiming to form joint government**

On 23.04.14, Fatah and Hamas, the Palestinians' two strongest political organisations, agreed to form a unity government within five weeks. Parliamentary and presidential elections could be held in six months' time. Following the final split between the organisations in 2007, there were initial intimations of a joint government back in 2011 and 2012, but these plans failed to come to fruition. In response, the USA is intending to reconsider its aid payments to the Palestine National Authority. On 24.04.14 the Israeli security cabinet resolved to suspend negotiations with the Palestinians until further notice and indicated that sanctions may be imposed.

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **Woman receives sentence for driving a car**

According to reports by various media on 25.04.14, a woman has allegedly been sentenced to 150 lashes and eight months in prison for unlawfully driving a car and obstructing police officers. Several policemen who appeared as joint plaintiffs reportedly testified that the woman hit them and swore at them after they stopped her vehicle. The Islamic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world in which women are not allowed to drive.

## **Egypt**

### **A further 13 Morsi supporters convicted**

A further 13 supporters of the overthrown president were convicted of "agitation, sabotage and breaches of the peace" in Cairo on 26.04.14. They received sentences ranging from five to 88 years. They were found guilty in connection with violent protests in the southern towns of Samalut and Minja against the bloody crushing of the pro-Morsi demonstrations in Cairo in August 2013. The sentences are appealable.

On 27/28.04.14, a court in Minja imposed prison sentences of between three and 15 years and death sentences on 725 Morsi supporters. The defendants were accused of being responsible in part for the violent protests in the summer of 2013.

### **Police general assassinated**

Police general Ahmed Zaki was killed in a bomb attack in the west of Cairo on 23.04.14. The bomb was attached under the car. Another policeman and an Islamist were killed in an operation by security forces against the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (JABM) terrorist group near Alexandria. The Adshnad Misr ("Soldiers of Egypt") group, which was established in January, has since claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on Lebanon Square in Cairo on 18.04.14, in which a policeman died.

## **Morocco/Western Sahara**

### **MINURSO to monitor human rights situation**

In view of the impending extension of the mandate for the MINURSO peace-keeping force stationed in Western Sahara at the end of April, the United Nations (UN) has proposed a broadening of the mandate to monitor the human rights situation. Morocco is the subject of international criticism for suppressing with undue force demonstrations calling for independence for the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara. Western Sahara has been occupied by Morocco since 1975, while the Algeria-backed POLISARIO Front seeks to assert the territory's claim to independence. France supports Morocco, which is planning to grant the territory autonomous status, while POLISARIO is calling for a referendum among the Sahrawi people.

## **Nigeria**

### **Rapist sentenced to death by stoning**

On 23.04.14 a higher Sharia court in the northern Nigerian town of Kano (capital of the federal state of the same name) sentenced a man convicted of raping an underage girl and infecting her with HIV to death by stoning. The court found the married perpetrator, who confessed to his crime, guilty of extra-marital sex. Before the sentence can be executed, it must be endorsed by the governor of Kano. An appeal may also be lodged with the Supreme Court. Sharia criminal law was introduced in twelve northern federal states of Nigeria in 2000/2001. No sentences of death by stoning passed under this law have been executed to date.

## **Central African Republic**

### **Over 1,200 Muslims evacuated from capital**

In the face of continuing tension between Christians and Muslims, peace-keepers have evacuated more than 1,200 Muslims from the capital, Bangui (cf. BN of 22.04.14). According to a former member of the regional government, 22 people were killed, including 15 local leaders, in an attack on an hospital by Seleka rebels on 26.04.14.

According to information from a spokesperson of the Médecins sans frontières aid organisation, three of his colleagues were killed in Nanga Boguila on 25.04.14. This town is located in the north-west, close to the border with Chad.

## **Uganda**

### **Persecution of homosexuals**

According to reports from allAfrica.com, attacks on Uganda's LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersexual) community are on the increase now that human rights groups have ceased being openly active after suffering harassment. There are reports of banishments, arrests and attacks by mobs. One human rights organisation reports that there have been 130 cases throughout Uganda since the law against homosexuality was adopted in February 2014.

## **Kenya**

### **Four killed by car bomb in Nairobi**

A car bomb killed both the occupants of a vehicle and two police officers in the Nairobi district of Pangani on 23.04.14. The bomb exploded after police officers had stopped the suspicious vehicle and directed it to a police station. The background is unclear. Pangani is close to the district of Eastleigh, where a number of attacks thought to be the work of the Somali Al-Shabaab militia have occurred in the past.

## **Somalia**

### **Politician shot dead outside his house**

MP Abdiasis Isak Mursal was shot dead outside his house on 23.04.14. This followed the killing of another MP, Isak Mohamed Ali, by a car bomb on 22.04.14. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the bomb attack. Al-Shabaab spokesman Abdiasis Abu Muscab said they would hunt down MPs and kill them one by one.

## **FYR Macedonia**

### **VMRO wins parliamentary and presidential elections – opposition calls for fresh elections**

The ruling National Conservatives achieved a double victory in the parliamentary and presidential elections on 27.04.14. The Social Democrat opposition refuses to recognise the result, however. It accuses the government of rigging the election and buying votes and is calling for fresh elections.

As expected, the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), which has been in power since 2006, won the election once again. According to initial results, it polled around 43 % of the votes, while the Social Democrats (SDSM) took 25 % and the two parties representing the Albanian minority received just under 27 %. Incumbent Gjorge Ivanov won a run-off in the presidential election (cf. BN from 14.4.14), taking 57 % of the votes against his Social Democrat challenger's 39 %.

Many critics accuse prime minister Nikola Gruevski of exercising an autocratic style of leadership. They claim that he has established a corrupt system, with a bloated public sector to provide jobs for partisans. The media are said to have been tamed and corruption and abuse of power are allegedly widespread.

Macedonia's rapprochement with the EU continues to be obstructed not only as a result of the dispute with Greece over its name. Deficits in the areas of democratisation and constitutionality and restrictions on freedom of the press represent additional hurdles. Macedonia with its population of some two million is one of the poorest countries in Europe. The unemployment rate stands at over 28 %. It is estimated that around 450,000 Macedonians have emigrated in recent years.

## **Serbia**

### **New government, new prime minister**

The new Serbian government was ratified by parliament on 27.04.2014. Aleksandar Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won an absolute majority in the election in March (cf. BN of 17.03.14). The new cabinet also includes ministers from smaller parties with which the SNS is allied. The government now has a good four-fifths majority in parliament.

Designated prime minister Vucic has announced that more than 20 reform proposals will be adopted by the summer. He also affirmed his determination to carry on the dialogue with Kosovo. Recognition of Kosovo continues to be ruled out, however.

## **Kosovo**

### **War crimes tribunal set up**

At the insistence of the European Union, the Kosovar parliament has approved the establishment of a war crimes tribunal to be based in Kosovo. The tribunal is to serve as a judicial authority to consider war crimes by the UÇK liberation army in the Kosovo war. The trials are to take place in The Hague, so as to afford witnesses better protection. The Council of Europe's former special rapporteur, Dick Marty, levelled serious charges against the UÇK in 2010, alleging that the liberation army tortured and murdered prisoners and pursued illegal organ trafficking in 1998/99. Present-day politicians (including prime minister Hashim Thaci) were purportedly also involved. These allegations are being followed up by an international investigative commission, whose report is to be published in the summer and forwarded to the special tribunal for further work.

At the end of the 1990s the UÇK attempted to separate Kosovo from Serbia by force of arms. In response, the Serbian military and paramilitary expelled some 800,000 Albanians. Over 13,000 people were killed in all, primarily Kosovo Albanians. 2,000 of the dead were Serbs, Romanies or members of other minorities.

## **Ukraine**

### **Worsening of the situation in Eastern Ukraine**

The Ukrainian government announced the resumption of anti-terrorism operations in Eastern Ukraine on 22.04.14, after two corpses revealing signs of torture were found close to the Eastern Ukrainian city of Sloviansk, which is under the control of pro-Russian forces. According to reports from Kiev, up to five pro-Russian combatants were killed in a battle in the course of an anti-terrorism operation outside the city of Sloviansk on 24.04.14. The separatists put the number of fatalities at two. On the same day, Russia's defence minister announced military manoeuvres directly on the border with Ukraine. He stated that these manoeuvres were in response to the Ukrainian army's operations against the separatists and the bolstering of NATO's military presence in Poland and the Baltic.

On 25.04.14 a Ukrainian transport helicopter was destroyed by a rocket while on the ground at Kramatorsk, just a few kilometres away from the city of Sloviansk, injuring the pilot. On the same day, Kiev announced that it was sealing off Sloviansk with special units, to prevent pro-Russian forces from deploying reinforcements to the city. On 27.04.14 several hundred pro-Russian activists stormed a television centre in Donetsk. They called for channels in the Ukrainian language to be shut down and demanded that Russian state TV channels, which the government in Kiev had stopped, be broadcast instead.

### **Separatists hold OSCE observers in Sloviansk**

On the afternoon of 18.04.14 a pro-Russian militia seized a bus with eight military observers of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and five Ukrainian soldiers who were escorting them in the separatist stronghold of Sloviansk. The group of military observers consists of three German army officers, a German interpreter, and one military observer from the Czech Republic, Sweden, Denmark and Poland respectively. They were carrying out a routine inspection trip on the basis of the 2011 Vienna Document at the invitation of Ukraine. The militia leader and self-proclaimed mayor of Sloviansk, Vyacheslav Ponomarev, described the military observers as "NATO spies" and "prisoners of war". On the morning of 27.04.14 they were presented to around 60 press representatives in a room of Sloviansk's occupied government building. At the presentation, the German head of the group of inspectors said that there had been no physical abuse and the men were in good health. The militia are only willing to release the military observers and five Ukrainian soldiers in exchange for militia men who are being held by Ukrainian troops. Direct talks between OSCE negotiators and Ponomarev's militia began early in the afternoon of 27.04.14. In the evening, the separatists released the Swedish observer on account of his diabetes.

On the morning of 27.04.14 three men dressed only in underpants and shirts, revealing traces of blood and with their eyes bound with adhesive tape were presented to journalists at Sloviansk's secret service headquarters. Ponomarev claimed that the men were Ukrainian officers on a "spying mission" who were captured by his militia in Sloviansk.

## **Sri Lanka**

### **Special police unit to protect religions**

President Mahinda Rajapaksa announced on 24.04.14 that a new special police unit would be deployed in future to ensure peace between the different religions. At the same time, he warned the radical organisation of Buddhist monks, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), that no-one was above the law, including Buddhist monks. Rajapaksa also announced that he intended to conduct one-to-one talks with the religious leaders to sound out their concerns personally.

Violent actions by the radical militant BBS against minority religions have occurred repeatedly in recent years. The attacks have been aimed at Muslims in particular, as well as Christians. Only a few days ago, the BBS threatened to instigate a putsch against the government if it failed to take decisive action against allegedly extremist Muslim organisations. "Buddhist forces in Sri Lanka could topple the government or create governments if they so wished," warned BBS leader Gnanasara Thera.

## **China**

### **Raid on Uigur communities in Xinjiang**

Radio Free Asia reported on 23.04.14 that in a raid on a mosque in the district of Toksun near to the city of Turpan in the previous week the imam had been dismissed and two people arrested after forbidden recordings with religious content had been found. The raid was extended to a neighbouring Uigurian village. Three men were temporarily detained for wearing beards and women likewise for wearing veils. At least 100 people were targeted. Many men had their beards forcibly shaved off and a number of women had their veils removed.

Various Uigurian sources report that authorities have been stepping up the pressure on the Uigurian population in the recent past by means of public campaigns against the wearing of beards and religiously motivated clothing.