

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

14 March 2016

## Afghanistan

### Military confrontations

In the past week, fighting took place, inter alia, in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar (eastern Afghanistan), Ghazni (south-eastern Afghanistan), Helmand (southern Afghanistan), Kunduz, Baghlan (north-eastern Afghanistan), Balkh (northern Afghanistan), Kapisa (central Afghanistan), Herat (western Afghanistan).

### Suicide bombings and attacks

On 7 March 2016, three civilians were killed in a roadside bomb blast in the Shindand district of Herat province (western Afghanistan). Fighting reportedly took place in this district between rival Taliban factions over several days, killing more than 200 persons.

On 8 March 2016, the Taliban killed two minesweepers in the Maiwand district of Kandahar province (southern Afghanistan).

On 9 March 2016, Taliban insurgents abducted eleven civilians in Sar-i-Pul (northern Afghanistan) who were reportedly supporters of the government. They were released after three days.

On 13 March 2016, unknown gunmen shot down three civilians in the middle of the street in the city of Kandahar, two of whom died.

On 14 March 2016, an employee of the passport office was shot dead in Kandahar.

### Honour killings

On 12 March 2016, a young couple suspected of being involved in an illicit sexual relationship were killed in Khwaja Sabzposh district in Faryab province (northern Afghanistan). They were reportedly killed by relatives with the support of the Taliban.

### Government plans to arm civilians

The Afghan government is planning to establish militia forces in Nangarhar province (eastern Afghanistan). ISIS has been trying to gain a foothold there for quite some time. Nangarhar has been the scene of heavy fighting between ISIS, the Taliban and security forces for several months.

## Syria

### Further peace talks planned

Syrian peace talks between the Syrian government and the opposition are to resume in Geneva on 14 March 2016 with a view to establishing an interim government and drawing up a new constitution for Syria. On 11 March 2016, the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) that has its headquarters in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, said it did not have any preconditions for the talks. United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, wants the election of a new President and Parliament under U.N. supervision within 18 months at the latest to be placed on the agenda. The Syrian government rejected the election plans of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria. Further problems loom large if Russia insists that Kurds be included in the talks. The rebels refuse to include them because even Kurds receiving support from the West are more likely to cooperate with the government. The Arab Gulf monarchies which support the opposition have de-

clared the Lebanese Shia Hezbollah militia who are fighting on the government's side a terrorist organisation, which is rendering inclusion in an arrangement difficult.

The Geneva peace talks had been suspended in early February 2016 and the resumption of the talks has been postponed several times. A ceasefire in Syria was negotiated by the U.S. and Russia two weeks ago and has been, by and large, observed despite regular breaches. Fighting against ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) is exempt from the ceasefire.

## **Yemen**

### **Fighting continues**

At least 57 persons were killed, including 37 rebels, six civilians and fourteen militants loyal to the former president near the city of Yemen's third biggest city of Ta'izz (south-western Yemen) on 11 March 2016. Government troops managed to reconquer the streets with the help of the Saudi air force. In the early hours of 13 March 2016, at least 17 (Al-Qaeda) militants were killed in the port city of Aden. At least 20 civilians and rebels as well as three security advisors were wounded. According to the United Nations, more than 6,100 persons have been killed in the conflict since March 2015. Troops of Sunni President Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi have been fighting in Yemen against Shia Houthi rebels, their allies and ISIS with the support of a military alliance led by Saudi Arabia.

## **Lebanon**

### **Arab League declares Hezbollah a terrorist organisation**

On 11 March 2016, the Arab League declared Hezbollah a terrorist organisation. Lebanon, Algeria and Iraq did not support the declaration. Israel, the U.S. and Canada had already classified the organisation as a terrorist organisation. The EU has only classified the military branch of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. In Germany, Hezbollah is under surveillance by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as an Islamist organisation.

## **Iraq**

### **Violence rages on**

Iraq continues to be wracked by terrorist attacks and acts of violence 13 years after the U.S. military invasion of Iraq. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), at least 670 persons were killed in terrorist attacks, acts of violence and hostilities in the month of February 2016 alone, at least 1,290 persons were wounded.

### **ISIS withdraws from Rutba**

According to Iraqi army sources, ISIS withdrew fully from the desert town of Rutba in Anbar province, western Iraq, on 13 March 2016 and are moving in the direction of al-Qa'im. This ISIS stronghold is located further north in Anbar along the border with Syria.

## **Turkey**

### **Suicide bombing in Ankara**

A car bomb exploded in the centre of the Turkish capital of Ankara in the evening hours of 13 March 2016, killing at least 37 persons and wounding more than 125; several of the injured are still in a critical condition. One or two of the suicide bombers drove their vehicle loaded with explosives close to Kizilay district and blew it up near a bus stop. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far. Interior Minister Efkan Ala said some evidence had already been secured. This is the third terrorist attack to be carried out in Ankara since October 2015.

### **Military offensives terminated**

The Turkish army ended its operations against militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the city of Idil in south-eastern Turkey on 8 March 2016 after just three weeks. The curfew remains in place. Shortly before, twelve PKK militants and six security officers were killed during the clashes. All in all, 114 PKK militants were reportedly killed during the military operation.

On 9 March 2016, the Turkish army announced that it had also ended its operation against the PKK in Diyarbakir which it had launched in November 2015. The curfew is still in place in the district of Sur. According to government sources, 271 insurgents were killed in the clashes. Over 50,000 residents fled the city to escape the violence.

## **Tunisia**

### **Islamist attack**

On 7 March 2016, 28 ISIS militants, ten members of the security forces and seven civilians were killed in the city of Ben Guerdane (close to the Libyan border) according to official sources. The border crossing was closed and a night-time curfew was imposed. According to the Ministry of the Interior, ISIS militants launched coordinated attacks against the barracks in Ben Guerdane and on a National Guard police station at dawn. The troops needed several days to repel the attack. More than 40 militants were killed in gunfire exchanges on 9 March 2016. The government suspects that ISIS was trying to gain a foothold on Tunisian sovereign territory.

## **Niger**

### **Opposition boycotts run-off in presidential election**

The opposition coalition "Coalition Pour une Alternance" announced on 8 March 2016 that it would boycott the run-off in the presidential elections on 20 March 2016. The opposition candidate Hama Amadou will not run and the coalition will withdraw its representatives from the national electoral commission, stating the fact that Amadou is in jail and failure to publish the results of the first round of votes as the reason.

## **Côte d'Ivoire**

### **Many persons killed in attacks on hotels**

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) launched an attack on three hotels in the holiday resort of Grand Bassam, a weekend excursion destination about 40 km from the commercial capital Abidjan. At least 20 persons, including six terrorists, were killed.

Dozens of persons have been killed in similar attacks on luxury hotels in the neighbouring countries of Mali and Burkina Faso in the past few months. Experts warned of Islamist attacks on Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal at the time.

## **Benin**

### **Presidential elections: Run-off necessary**

None of the 33 candidates managed to garner an absolute majority at the presidential elections held on 6 March 2016 so a run-off between the two leading candidates, Prime Minister Lionel Zinsou and businessman Patrice Talon (who garnered 28 percent and 25 percent of the votes respectively) will be held on 20 March 2016. Incumbent President Thomas Boni Yayi is constitutionally barred from running for a third term. The elections which had originally been scheduled for 28 February 2016 had been postponed owing to problems in distributing voter cards. Election observers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) said the election ran smoothly and was conducted in a transparent way.

## **Burundi**

### **Opposition leader detained**

Police officers arrested Hugo Haramategeko for reasons unknown on 9 March 2016. He is president of the small Nadebu party, the New Alliance for the Development of Burundi, and is one of the few leading members of the opposition who is not living in exile.

## **Albania**

### **Concern over new refugee route**

Now that the West Balkan route for refugees has been basically closed, Albania fears there the refugee route could be diverted via the Adriatic Sea in the direction of Apulia (Italy). Italy will begin deploying border police to Albania on 15 March 2016 in a bid to strengthen border controls. Albania has no intention of opening its borders. It has already increased patrols along the most important border crossings with Greece.

## **Serbia/Kosovo**

### **Flooding**

Serbian authorities declared an emergency situation in several municipalities in central, southern and eastern Serbia on 11 March 2016 due to heavy rain and flooding. More than 700 homes were flooded, hundreds of people were evacuated. Meanwhile, the situation has improved slightly.

Serbia was hit by series of floods in 2014. More than 50 persons died and 485 homes were completely destroyed in the 2014 floods. The damage caused ran into the millions.

Kosovo was also hit by flooding. Several towns in the district of Pec were affected. One man drowned in the deluge.

## **Kosovo**

### **Protests and arson attacks**

Masked assailants threw a petrol bomb at the office of Kosovo's president on 12 March 2016, no one was injured. Similar attacks have been carried out in recent weeks in which private cars of government ministers were burnt. Tear gas was once again released in Kosovo's parliament on 10 March 2016. For months, opposition parties have been protesting against an EU-brokered deal from 2013, granting the Serbian minority more rights. They have repeatedly try to thwart the work of Parliament and have protested against the government.