

## Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

1 September 2014

### Afghanistan

#### Security situation

Last week as many as 1,500 Taliban fighters attacked Kunduz city (capital of the province of the same name in northern Afghanistan) and entered several districts of the town. After almost five days of fighting the Afghan army succeeded in driving them back, about 20 civilians lost their lives and ten more were wounded, it is said. The Taliban maintain that they control four of the province's seven districts.

Further incidents during last week:

25 August 2014: In Faryab province in the north 75 Taliban are said to have been killed in fighting between the Taliban and the Afghan military. In the northern province of Balkh (Mazar-e Sharif) a female candidate standing for the provincial council escaped an attack. In the eastern province of Kunar (Dangam district) five civilians were injured by Pakistani shells fired against militant bases (so-called cross-border shelling).

26 August 2014: 27 insurgents were killed and two health workers were abducted in incidents in the provinces of Kabul and Herat (west). In Herat a member of the lower chamber of parliament survived a bomb attack. In the southern province of Nimroz (Khashrod district) six civilians were wounded when a mortar shell hit. In the western province of Farah (Bala Bolok district) the Taliban beheaded a mullah they accused of collaborating with the government.

27 August 2014: Three people were killed and four wounded in a shoot-out in Nahrain district (north-eastern province of Baghlan). In the eastern province of Nuristan the Afghan army launched an offensive to win back Doab district. In fighting in the western province of Ghor 20 insurgents and five policemen died. Reportedly 20 policemen were taken prisoner by the insurgents. At least 15 civilians were injured in two bomb explosions in Nangarhar province in the east and in Paktia province in the south-east. In Farah province in the west, unknown assassins shot a judge and nine others.

28 August 2014: In fighting in the western province of Ghor 36 insurgents and nine policemen died. Afghan security forces announced that all insurgents had been purged from Khanabad district in the northern province of Kunduz and from Noab district in Nuristan province in the east. At least 18 insurgents were killed in several incidents in the provinces of Ghazni (south-east), Helmand (south), and Maidan Wardak (centre).

29 August 2014: The chairman of the peace committee of the province of Kabul was murdered there by unknown killers.

#### Presidential elections

After losing the run-off elections against Ashraf Ghani, candidate Abdullah Abdullah threatens not to accept the result of the recounting of the votes and is talking of election fraud of "industrial dimensions". Abdullah's team is not participating in checking the votes anymore. After missing the absolute majority in the first round Ghani had won the run-off elections by a clear margin. The votes were recounted because of the allegations of fraud. Although the candidates had agreed on forming a government of national unity (see BN of 18 August 2014) this seems rather dubious in the light of current developments.

### Pakistan

#### Government crisis

For about two weeks thousands of followers of former cricket champion Imran Khan (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, PTI) and of the cleric Tahir-ul Qadri (Pakistan Awami Tehreek party, PAT) have been protesting against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif demanding his resignation. The army leadership is now attempting to mediate between the parties.

When protesters tried to storm the prime minister's residence in the night to 31 August 2014 the police used tear gas and rubber bullets. Three people died in the protests.

## **Pakistan/India**

### **Ceasefire violations - mutual accusations**

For days there has been artillery and machine gun fire on the border to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir near the Pakistani city of Sialkot (Punjab province). India maintains that 70 "unprovoked" incidents were caused by Pakistan since the election of the Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi as Indian prime minister in May. Pakistan for its part accuses India of violating the ceasefire that has been in force since 2003 a total of 23 times since the beginning of July. It is said that about 3,000 people have been evacuated from the border region in India. Armed confrontations are frequent along the Indo-Pakistani border in the controversial area of Kashmir that has been divided since 1967.

## **Iraq**

### **Development of the situation**

Violence in Iraq continues. Iraq Body Count reports that 1,592 civilians have lost their lives in August (until 31 August 2014). The number of civilian casualties in July 2014 was 1,481.

### **German arms for Kurds**

On 31 August 2014 a ministerial committee chaired by the German chancellor resolved to support Iraqi Kurds in their battle against the IS militia by providing arms and equipment (anti-tank guns, assault rifles with ammunition) worth €70m from the stocks of the Federal Army. The Federal Government also wants to provide civilian aid worth roughly €50m.

### **Setback for IS**

On 30/31 August 2014 the siege of the city of Amerli by IS militias was terminated after more than six weeks. Some reports say that air strikes were directed against IS positions not only by the US, but also by Iran.

### **IS sells abducted women**

Last week IS members are said to have abducted dozens of Yazidi women and girls from Iraq to Syria. At least 27 of these women described as "spoils of the war against the infidels" were sold for USD 1,000 per person to other IS members and forced to marry them, as was reported by the Syrian Human Rights Observatory on 30 August 2014. About 300 women and girls had been kidnapped in Iraq in total and their fate is unknown.

## **Syria**

### **Some UN soldiers are safe**

72 Filipino UN soldiers on the Golan Heights are safe. 32 of them were liberated by UN soldiers after fighting with the al-Nusra Front on 30 August 2014, 40 more succeeded in reaching safe territory in the night of 31 August 2014. However, 44 UN soldiers from Fiji are still held by the al-Nusra Front.

After heavy fighting with Syrian government troops Syrian anti-government forces had taken control of the crossing to the Israeli occupied Golan Heights near Quneitra on 27 August 2014. These anti-government forces also included fighters of the al-Nusra Front. They surrounded 72 Filipino UN soldiers on 27 August 2014 and captured 44 UN soldiers from Fiji.

Since 1974 the forces of the UN UNDOF mission have been stationed on Golan to observe the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. The last extension of the mandate was in June 2014 until 31 December 2014.

### **UNHCR situation report**

In its report on Syria published on 29 August 2014 the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said the Syrian crisis "has become the biggest humanitarian emergency of our era". To date three million Syrians, i.e. one million more than in 2013, have fled the country since the beginning of the civil war in March 2011. There are 6.5 million internal refugees in Syria. Which means that almost half of the Syrian population (about 23m in total) are refugees, and the majority of them are said to be children. The UNHCR puts the death toll of the civil war at 200,000 people to date. The growing influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries causes food prices to rise drastically, e.g. in Lebanon, Jordan, and in Turkey. The report says that the UN had received EUR 3.1bn to date, but would need another EUR1.5bn until the end of 2014 to sustain the refugees.

### **Lebanon**

#### **Police persecute homosexuals**

On 28 August 2014 the press reported that the Lebanese police in Beirut had stepped up its persecution of homosexuals by using an instant messaging service. The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) organization Helem announced that people were arrested and their WhatsApp contacts were searched. Depending on the type of their WhatsApp messages content, the contact persons of the arrested were told to report to a police station.

Homosexuality is not illegal in Lebanon, but there is a prison sentence of one year for "unnatural sex".

### **Gaza Strip/Israel**

#### **Indefinite ceasefire agreed**

Israel and the Palestinians agreed on an indefinite ceasefire in the Gaza war to enter into force in the evening of 26 August 2014. After seven weeks of fighting the representatives of both parties agreed on this renewed truce in Cairo following Egyptian mediation. They also agreed on continuing these indirect talks within one month's time. The Egyptian foreign minister said that Israel would also be prepared to loosen its blockade of the Gaza Strip to allow the shipment of aid and construction material to the civilian population. In Gaza thousands celebrated the agreement of the new truce as a Palestinian victory. High-ranking representatives of Hamas, that is ruling Gaza, and of the Jihad al-Islami group appeared in public for the first time since the conflict started.

#### **Hamas rejects giving up arms**

Khaled Mashaal, head of the radical Islamist Hamas, told journalists in Qatar on 28 August 2014 that his movement will not abandon arms. Hamas' arms are its guarantee that its demands will be taken seriously, he said. He called upon the Egyptian government to reopen of the Rafah border crossing very soon, as this is where all aid from Egypt crosses into Gaza for its population.

#### **UNICEF publishes children's death toll of the Gaza war**

Since the war on Gaza began seven weeks ago 306 boys and 184 girls aged between ten days and 17 years died in the Gaza Strip, UNICEF announced on 25 August 2014. The Palestinian health ministry spoke of 577 casualties of minors. Israel accuses the radical Islamist Hamas of abusing civilians as human shields in its fight and thereby intentionally risking children's lives.

### **Iran**

#### **Arms supplies to Iraqi Kurds**

In their fight against the Islamist IS terrorists Iraqi Kurds receive military support from Iran. The president of the Kurdish autonomous areas, Masoud Barzani, said that Iran was the first country to provide the Pesh-

merga forces with arms. At a joint press conference with Barzani in Irbil Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif stressed that Iran had not deployed any troops to the neighbouring country.

### **Rohani turns against Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi**

In the dispute about the government favoured high-speed internet President Rohani turned against the influential Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi. Last week Makarem Shirazi had called high-speed internet unislamic and wanted to ban it, Rohani contradicted him. According to Makarem Shirazi the project planned by the Rohani government could make it easier for young people to gain access to "infested websites" which ran counter to the country's Islamic rules. Communication Minister Mahmoud Vaezi, the project's initiator, is to appear in parliament where some deputies are calling for his dismissal.

## **Yemen**

### **Powerful Houthi protest against the government**

In the capital of Sanaa ten thousands of Houthi followers assembled again to protest against the government and demanded its resignation on 27 August 2014. They also insisted on the reversal of a petrol price increase and accused the government of corruption. Led by Abdulmalik al-Houthi thousands of armed followers of the Houthi rebels had set up camp in Sanaa and its surroundings in recent days. Experts think that with these protests the Houthi rebels intent to strengthen their power in the north and thus ensure a stronger position in any future government. Ever since 2004 there have been repeated uprisings by the Shiite Houthi who feel discriminated by the Sunni-dominated central government. Talks between the government and the rebels to end the crisis failed on 24 August 2014.

## **Turkey**

### **Uncontrolled border crossing for IS fighters restricted**

In a letter to the ministry of the interior Calettin Lekesiz, the governor of the Turkish province of Hatay, said that last March 150 IS fighters from Syria had been staying in Turkey. Western intelligence services consider Turkey to be a retreat for Islamist groups. In mid-August the IS member Abu Yusaf was able to give the Washington Post an interview from the Turkish border town of Reyhanli.

The Turkish army announced that trenches four meters deep have been dug along the border to Syria near the city of Kilis which is the major transit point for Islamist fighters from the EU, Turkey, and neighbouring Arab countries to the Syrian war zone and to Iraq. This border section is now monitored 24 hours and other border crossings had already been closed down, the army said.

### **President sworn in**

On 28 August 2014 Turkey's first directly elected president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was sworn in as head of state.

Former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu succeeded Erdogan in the office of prime minister. Davutoglu had been nominated by the AKP on 27 August 2014 and also elected as its new party chairman. According to press reports of 27 August 2014 Davutoglu intends to work towards gaining access to the EU for Turkey. The report also said that a new constitution is to be prepared which will give more powers to the head of state.

## **Egypt**

### **Life prison sentences for the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood**

A criminal court commuted the death sentences pronounced for Mohammed Badie and seven other leading Islamists in June 2014 to life imprisonment. For six other defendants the court confirmed the lower court's death sentences. All defendants had been accused of having incited their followers to violence, thereby causing the death of ten people in July 2013 and the wounding of 20.

After the death sentences had been handed down in June 2014 the country's Grand Mufti who examines all death sentences for their compatibility with the Sharia according to Egyptian law, had refused to sign the

sentences because in his view there was not sufficient evidence. Although the Grand Mufti's assessment is not legally binding the courts usually take it into consideration.

### **Beheadings on the Sinai Peninsula**

Extremist Islamists of the Ansar Beit al-Makdis terror group are said to have beheaded four Egyptians on the Sinai Peninsula accusing them of spying for Israel's secret service Mossad. Allegedly the victims had provided information for an Israeli drone attack in which three extremists were killed.

## **Libya**

### **Interim government resigns**

A press release of 29 August 2014 announced the resignation of the Libyan cabinet of Prime Minister Abdullah Al-Thani.

A few days earlier the old national congress dominated by Islamists had engaged in a power struggle with the parliament newly elected in June.

## **West Africa/Ebola**

### **WHO: Highest number of new infections per week to date**

WHO stated that in calendar week 35 about 550 new cases of Ebola were recorded in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the countries worst affected by the epidemic, which is more than in any previous week. In calendar week 34 almost 400 new infections occurred, mostly in Liberia. The actual number of cases is, however, certainly two to four times higher in many regions, the report said. Who considers it quite possible that the epidemic will last another six to nine months which would mean another 20,000 cases. WHO quoted the number of Ebola infections in West Africa as 3,069 resulting in 1,552 casualties. The mortality rate of around 50%, however, varies strongly by country. It is clearly higher in Guinea at 66% than in Sierra Leone at 44%.

### **Guinea**

On 28 August 2014 and over the weekend protesters against a sanitary campaign to contain the spreading epidemic and the police clashed in N'Zérékoré, the country's second largest city. 55 people were injured in the course, about half of them policemen. The protesters attacked the emergency centre of the hospital and the vehicles of UNICEF and a doctor. They were convinced that the epidemic had been introduced to their city and that people had been infected during the disinfection of a market place.

### **Senegal**

On 29 August 2014 Senegal reported its first case of Ebola. The health minister said that 21-year-old patient had been isolated in a Dakar hospital. Reportedly this student from neighbouring Guinea had been under surveillance there and ran away to Senegal.

## **Nigeria**

### **Boko Haram conquers another town in Borno**

On 28 August 2014 fighters of the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram took over the city of Dikwa (seat of the administration of Dikwa Local Government Area – LGA) in the centre of the north-eastern state of Borno.

### **Ethnic strife in Nasarawa**

In the central state of Nasarawa at least 40 people died in fighting between the ethnic groups of the Eggon and the Alago in the village of Tudun Adabu (Obi LGA) on 27 August 2014.

## **Nigeria/Cameroon**

### **Nigerian border towns attacked by Boko Haram - soldiers flee to Cameroon**

In the morning of 25 August 2014 fighters of the Islamist terror organization Boko Haram assaulted the border town of Gamboru-Ngala (Borno state, about 180 km north-east of the state's capital Maiduguri) attacking the local military barracks and the police station. About 6,000 of the inhabitants and more than 400 soldiers who allegedly ran out of ammunition, fled across the border to the town of Fotokol in Cameroon. Boko Haram reportedly killed many people in Gamboru-Ngala and started to forcefully recruit young people. After their attack on Gamboru-Ngala the terrorist fighters crossed the border into Cameroon. In fighting with Cameroonian soldiers 27 terrorists were killed near the town of Fotokol on 25 and 26 August 2014, sources from Cameroon reported.

Already on 24 August 2014 the border town of Banki (about 120 km south of Maiduguri) had been attacked by Boko Haram, also causing many soldiers to flee to Cameroon. The Nigerian defence ministry called the soldiers' border crossing a 'tactical manoeuvre'. All of the 480 soldiers that had fled were returned across the border to Nigeria by Cameroonian authorities on 26 August 2014.

## **Central African Republic**

### **People killed in fighting between militias**

On 25 August 2014 at least 17 fighters were killed in fighting between rivaling groups of the Séléka militias (ethnic groups of the Goula and the Peul) in Bambari. Religious leaders tried to mediate unsuccessfully. An officer of the African Union forces said that the fighting in down-town Bambari continued also on 26 August 2014. French and African soldiers together with the local police were trying to protect the civilian population, he said.

## **Somalia**

### **Renewed offensive against al-Shabaab**

In the night of 30 August 2014 government units and AMISO forces launched a military offensive against the Shabaab. Reportedly they succeeded in taking the city of Bulomare (about 160 km from Mogadishu, Lower Shebelle region). Bulomare is considered an Islamist stronghold.

### **Al-Shabaab attacks secret service building**

Somali security sources reported on 31 August 2014 that al-Shabaab detonated a car bomb and used firearms to attack the building of the Somali secret service in Mogadishu. There had been up to 15 casualties, including nine of the Islamists, in the fighting with the security forces. With this operation al-Shabaab probably intended to liberate some of its members that were detained in the building.

## **Western Balkans**

### **Western Balkans conference in Berlin**

On 28 August 2014 the first "Western Balkans Conference" took place. Next to representatives of the EU Commission, the heads of the governments and the economics ministers of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo as well as of the EU member states Slovenia and Croatia had been invited. The purpose of the summit meeting is to strengthen the will to reform and regional relations in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkan countries are to be guided towards the EU fast and for this purpose further EU funds were promised. German Federal Chancellor Merkel stressed the "European perspective". At the same time she invited the countries to adjust to the EU's expectations. Annual follow-up conferences shall take place until 2018 to review the progress of reforms.

In fact the EU accession process of the Western Balkan countries is rather sluggish (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania) or even stagnating altogether (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo). Although the region is not in crisis anymore, its peace is still rather fragile even 15 years after the end of the war. The countries' economies are weak, democratization and the rule of law are underdeveloped.

## **Ukraine**

### **Kiev and Moscow exchange prisoners**

The media reported an exchange of captured soldiers between Russia and Ukraine on the weekend of 30/31 August 2014. Russian news agencies citing the deputy commander of Russian airborne forces, Alexej Ragozin, said that Ukraine returned Russian paratroopers captured on Ukrainian territory. Russia released 63 Ukrainian soldiers that had also been captured on the neighbouring countries' territory. The exchange had been preceded by difficult negotiations, the reports said.

The separatists in eastern Ukraine communicated that they released over 200 members of the government forces held by them. The prisoners, 223 soldiers and members of the national guard, had been handed over to the Ukrainian side in the Donetsk region the "Novorossiya Army" (new Russia), which the militants have formed, stated. Until now the release has not been confirmed by the Ukrainian government.

### **Putin urges talks on the status of south-eastern Ukraine**

In an interview on Russian state TV on 31 August 2014 Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded negotiations on the statehood of south-eastern Ukraine. In the interview he said that „substantive negotiations must be initiated immediately - not on technical issues, but on the political organization of society and statehood in south-eastern Ukraine" with the objective of "protecting the legitimate interests of the people living there." In the afternoon of the same day the Kremlin refuted the impression that Putin had called for sovereignty of south-eastern Ukraine. Speaking to journalists presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov stressed that "certainly" "Novorossiya" should remain part of Ukraine, as this was an internal conflict of the country.

Putin had already argued that Russian soldiers were in Crimea to protect the local citizens. After Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula in April 2014 he had publicly referred to the areas in eastern Ukraine as "New Russia" for the first time, reasoning that eastern and southern Ukraine had once been part of Russia. This indicated to observers that Putin is calling into question the state borders of Ukraine. In the past Russia had advocated a federal order for eastern Ukraine. The separatists use the term "Novorussiya" to demonstrate their goal of separating from Ukraine. In the last few days reporters of the AP news agency spotted at least half a dozen tanks flying the flags of the self-proclaimed autonomous republic of "Novorussiya" in Ukraine's south-east.

## **Georgia**

### **Former president Saakashvili to be put on Interpol's wanted list**

On 31 August 2014 the spokesperson of Georgia's attorney general, Natia Sukhiashvili, told Georgian TV station Rustavi-2 TV that former president Michail Saakashvili had been put on Georgia's wanted list after an arrest warrant for him had been issued on 14 August 2014, adding that the attorney general had also requested that he be put on Interpol's international wanted list. The attorney general's accusations against Saakashvili include abuse of office and embezzlement of state funds. If convicted, his prison sentence could be between five and eight years.

Some months ago Georgia's former president had already been summoned as a witness to be heard in ten criminal investigations, specifically in the investigations into the death of former Prime Minister Zurab Shvania in February 2005. Saakashvili, however, refused saying that he distrusted the law enforcement authority.

Saakashvili held the office of president from January 2004 to November 2013. In mid-November 2013 he went first to the US and later to Europe. Since 01 August 2014 he has been living in the US again. The former president denounced all accusations as politically motivated revenge of his opponents.

## **China**

### **Hong Kong: Decision on election procedure**

On 31 August 2014 the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress decided on the election method for the Hong Kong chief executive after 2017. The decision provides for the nomination of govern-

ment-loyal candidates by an election committee among which the population could decide for the first time. Thus the open elections demanded by the Occupy Central movement will not come about. The movement announced that it will go ahead with the occupation of the financial district which it had threatened, if this should happen. No date for the blockade has been announced yet. Already in the evening of 31 August 2014 there was a protest in front of the government seat.

In neighbouring Macau the Chief Executive Chui Sai On (aka Fernando Chui) was confirmed in office by a pro-Beijing election committee on 31 August 2014. A democracy movement in Macau is demanding an open election of the chief executive after 2019.