

Group 22 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

14 November 2016

Afghanistan

Attack on German consulate

Four Afghan nationals were killed and 128 injured in an attack on the German consulate-general in Masar-i-Sharif in the province of Balch (North Afghanistan) on the night of 10.11.16. A suicide attacker drove a truck packed with explosives into an outer wall of the consulate. Armed attackers then exchanged fire with security forces on the grounds of the consulate. No German nationals came to harm. The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it was carried out in revenge for German support of an air raid by the USA in the province of Kundus at the beginning of November 2016. Some 30 civilians are also reported to have been killed in the air raid.

On 12.11.16 German soldiers shot dead two motorcyclists in Masar-i-Sharif who failed to respond when they were challenged and told to stop immediately.

Attack on US base

Four US citizens have been killed and 16 injured, together with a Polish soldier, in an attack on the US air base in Bagram in Parwan province (Central Afghanistan). The Taliban have claimed responsibility for the attack, in which a suicide attacker blew himself up near to a canteen. According to information from the Afghan district governor, the attacker was a former Taliban who joined the peace process in 2008 and had reportedly worked at the base.

Pakistan

Bomb attack on religious site in Baluchistan

50 people were reportedly killed and more than 100 injured in a bomb attack on the Shah Norani shrine (150 km from the city of Hub) on 12.11.16. The Sufi believers were taking part in a ceremony at the religious site. The IS has reportedly already claimed responsibility for the attack.

Turkey

Progress report

On 09.11.16 the EU Commission published its progress report on the state of the accession negotiations with Turkey. Developments since the failed military coup in July 2016 are sharply criticised in the report. In particular, it is noted that freedom of expression and the independence of the judiciary have been called into question. EU Commissioner for Enlargement Johannes Hahn said that while it was legitimate for the Turkish government to react to the failed coup attempt in July, the scale of the action against those critical of the government raised serious misgivings. He emphasized that the lifting of immunity for a large number of MPs and their arrests was a matter of grave concern. Mr. Hahn stated that, as an accession candidate, Turkey had undertaken to observe the highest standards in matters such as the rule of law and guaranteeing fundamental rights, adding that there could be no compromising on such matters. He also highlighted the EU's alarm at plans to re-introduce the death penalty. The EU Commission nevertheless intends to continue the accession negotiations.

Publisher of Cumhuriyet arrested

Akin Atalay, the publisher of the of the Cumhuriyet newspaper, which is critical of the government, was arrested when entering Turkey on 11.11.16. He was returning from Germany, where he had taken part in an event held by a branch of the Turkish opposition party CHP and had visited the Nazim Hikmet cultural foundation. He is charged with having links to the PKK and the Gülen movement. The state prosecutor's office accuses the newspaper of having legitimised the failed military coup in its coverage and of having committed criminal offences for the benefit of the PKK and the movement headed by the preacher Fethullah Gülen. The editor-in-chief and other Cumhuriyet journalists were arrested at the end of October.

Syria

Fighting in Aleppo

According to media reports, two weeks after the beginning of the rebel offensive in the city of Aleppo the government troops have re-taken virtually all the territory which they had lost in recent weeks. The opposition Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported on 13.11.16 that the government troops have reclaimed territory including the district of Dahijet al-Assad in the west of the city and the village of Minjan outside Aleppo.

Egypt

200 alleged Islamists arrested

According to information from the Egyptian government, some 200 people have been arrested who took part in a demonstration against rising prices on 11.11.16. They allegedly followed a call from the banned Muslim Brotherhood for protests to be staged. The protests are a reaction to austerity measures such as a devaluation of the Egyptian pound and reductions in subsidies on food and fuel which have been introduced as a pre-condition for the granting of a 12 billion US dollar loan by the International Monetary Fund. On account of a massive presence by the security forces in Cairo and other cities, far fewer people than expected followed the calls in social media for mass demonstrations on 11.11.16.

Nigeria

Boko Haram: Seven soldiers killed in Malam Fatori

On 04.11.16 fighters belonging to the Islamist terrorist organisation Boko Haram attacked soldiers in the town of Malam Fatori on the border with the Republic of Niger. Seven members of the army and a number of terrorists were killed in the surprise attack.

30,000 people in Lagos homeless after their huts were demolished

Otodo Gbame, a settlement of stilt huts on the edge of the Lagos lagoon in the Lekki district, was set on fire on the morning of 09.11.16. According to Amnesty International it is unclear who started the fire in the slum; eye witnesses report that the police obstructed attempts to extinguish the fire. After the fire had died down in the afternoon, the police allegedly returned at around midnight with a demolition team, starting fires and demolishing huts. In all, some 30,000 people were made homeless. A high court had prohibited evictions from the informal settlements on 07.11.16.

One month previously, on 09.10.16, Akinwunmi Ambode, governor of the federal state of Lagos, had announced that all slum settlements along the bays and waterways were to be demolished. The Lekki district is attractive to investors, who have built apartment complexes and business centres on the banks of the lagoon in recent years.

Somalia

Hostilities

Despite a new ceasefire between Puntland and Galmudug which came into effect on 07.11.16, (see BN of 07.11.16), fierce fighting broke out in Galkayo on 09.11.16. On 09.11.16 Al-Shabaab fighters attacked a checkpoint of the security forces belonging to the Interim Southwest Administration (Bay, Bakool and Lower Shabelle regions), killing one soldier and injuring several others. On 09.11.16 the Puntland navy fired on positions of fighters who have declared allegiance to the IS outside the port of Qandala (Bari region) (see BN of 07.11.16). Numerous IS supporters were reportedly killed in the attack.

Attacks

Suspected Al-Shabaab fighters have carried out a grenade attack on the Bakara market in Mogadishu. There has been no reporting as to fatalities. Suspected Al-Shabaab fighters also carried out an assassination attempt on the head of the administration of the town of Elasha Biyaha near Mogadishu, killing a security guard. On 09.11.16 suspected Al-Shabaab fighters killed two soldiers in a town near Belet Weyne (Hiraan region). On 10.11.16 a convoy of Ethiopian AMISOM soldiers was ambushed by Al-Shabaab near to the town of El Bur (Hiraan region). One AMISOM vehicle was destroyed in the attack. According to eye witness reports, the Ethiopian AMISOM soldiers then shot dead seven unarmed civilians.

Security situation

Soldiers of the Somali army and Djibouti AMISOM soldiers captured the towns of Berhani and Berdere in the Hiraan region on 07.11.16. Following the Ethiopian AMISOM units' withdrawal from the region, Al-Shabaab was able to strengthen its presence in the region once again.

Côte d'Ivoire

New constitution adopted

As expected, president Alassane Ouattara's bill for a new constitution has been approved in a referendum. Around 93 % of voters approved the bill. The turnout stood at 43 %. The opposition had called for a boycott of the referendum - it regards the new constitution as an attempt by the president to extend his scope of power.

The government is looking to the new constitution to strengthen the institutions and to bridge the deep political divides which have repeatedly plunged the country into crisis in recent years. The most important new development is the abolition of the "Concept d'Ivoirité", which requires both parents of a presidential candidate to be native Ivoirians. This rule dating from 2000 led to the civil war from 2002 to 2007, because citizens from the north felt disadvantaged. People in the north have particularly close ties to the neighbouring country of Burkina Faso. This restriction also affected Ouattara, whose father originated from the north. Ouattara was only able to run for president because his predecessor had bowed to international pressure and signed a decree specifying an exemption clause. Further new aspects of the constitution are the establishment of a senate as a second chamber of parliament and the appointment of a vice-president.

Western Balkans

EU progress report

On 09.11.16 the EU Commission published the so-called progress reports for the EU accession candidates (Albania, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and for potential applicants (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo). The EU's report gives the Balkan countries a patchy rating and calls for greater efforts with political and economic reforms.

The candidate countries **Serbia** and **Albania** come in for particular praise. Both are deemed to be making good progress on the reform front. Serbia received the most positive rating, despite problems in the areas of corruption, freedom of expression and the protection of minorities. Albania was also commended for beginning the process of constitutional change and for its judicial reforms. It was noted that the country still required a yet more efficient and depoliticised administration and improvements regarding the protection of minorities, however. It was nevertheless recommended that accession talks be started. **Montenegro** was

judged in less positive terms. The deterioration in financial development and restrictions to the freedom of expression raised grounds for concern.

Bosnia and Herzegovina and **FYR Macedonia** received substantially worse assessments. Macedonia was found to be dragging its feet, with a lack of political will to push through urgently needed reforms. The report points out that the internal political crisis is far from over. Bosnia and Herzegovina is also considered to be politically unstable and to fall short of international standards. The report also criticises **Kosovo** regarding the politicisation of its institutions, stating that the country must strengthen its institutions and carry out economic reforms. It is praised for progress with human rights legislation, concerning members of the LGTB minorities, for example.

Moldova

Pro-Russian candidate set to become president

With 92 % of the votes cast in the second ballot for the presidency on 13.11.16 (cf. BN of 7.11.16) now counted, the socialist Igor Dodon is in the lead with 55.9 %. The pro-Western politician Maia Sandu has taken 44.1 % of the vote.

The election is seen as crucial in determining the country's future direction. Sandu from the centre-right opposition ran on a ticket in favour of further European integration. Dodon favours a strategic partnership with Russia. In the election campaign he announced that Moscow would be his first port of call. He also proposed a referendum on relations with the EU to date (2014: treaty of association). He is advocating that Moldova join Russia's customs union instead. To date, the present government has attempted to steer a course between the EU and Russia.

Moldova is the poorest country in Europe. The average monthly wage stands at around 220 euros; 20 % of the population live below the absolute poverty line. Around 100 people - predominantly young - reportedly emigrate from the country every week. A quarter of the total population of 3.5 million already live abroad. Around half of these live in Russia or the former Soviet republics. The other half have moved to the West. The visa requirement for the Schengen area was lifted in April 2014. Some 300,000 Moldovans have Romanian passports.

Russian Federation

Planned attacks thwarted in Moscow and St. Petersburg

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) has reported that it arrested ten men on 13.11.16 who were allegedly planning terrorists attacks in Moscow and St. Petersburg similar to those which took place in Paris a year ago. According to the Russian government newspaper, Rossijskaja Gaseta, there is evidence that the suspected members of the IS terrorist militia were intending to attack various targets, including two shopping centres, with explosives and machine guns. The newspaper reports that those arrested originate from the predominantly Islamic ex-Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in central Asia.

Russia has already been targeted by the IS on account of its alliance with Syria's dictator, Bashar Al-Assad. In an IS bomb attack on a Russian passenger plane over the Sinai peninsular in Egypt in October 2015, all 224 people on board were killed.

India

Important bank notes declared valueless

In the night of 08.11.16 the government unexpectedly declared all 500 and 1000 rupee notes (approx. 6.80 and 13.60 euros respectively) - the most common banknotes - invalid. Prime minister Modi explained that the government had taken this step in order to combat corruption and the black economy. Up to the end of 2016, the old notes can be paid into an Indian bank account or exchanged for new 500 and 2000 rupee notes, subject to presentation of ID. Local media cite sources according to which the illegal black economy makes up around one fifth of India's economic output; India has always rated very poorly in international corruption rankings. Experts estimate that several hundred billion euros of black money is in circulation.

Myanmar

Violence in Rakhine State

According to various reports, around 30 people were killed in clashes between the military and armed groups in the Maungdaw district in Rakhine State on 12. and 13.11.16. Human Rights Watch reported on 13.11.16 that an analysis of satellite images had shown that 430 houses in three villages were destroyed by fire after the break-out of violence in the Maungdaw district on 09.10.16 (cf. BN of 10.10.16).

Vietnam

Activists detained

The government is taking action nationwide against activists who are criticising the its handling of an environmental disaster. According to reports on 08.11.16, Luu Van Vinh and three other activists were arrested on 06.11.16, following the arrests of two bloggers critical of the government on 02.11.16 and 10.10.16.

In June 2016 a Taiwanese company accepted responsibility for the mass death of fish in several coastal provinces in April 2016, which according to a government report in July 2016 threatens the livelihoods of more than 200,000 people, including 41,000 fishermen. The company offered to pay 500 million US dollars in compensation. There have since been repeated protests by victims who consider the compensation inadequate.

Columbia

Agreement on revised peace treaty

On 12.11.16 representatives of the government and of the rebel organisation Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) agreed in Havanna (Cuba) on a revised peace treaty. Following discussion of the amendments desired by those opposed to the previous treaty, 56 of the treaty's 57 points were amended. Among the new provisions, victims of the conflict are to be compensated from FARC assets and rebels are no longer to serve their sentences under house arrest but will merely be required to remain in certain zones under government control. The constitutional court is designated as the court of appeal against decisions by the special judiciary which is to be set up. Ex-president Alvaro Uribe, who was a prominent key opponent of the initial treaty, intends to examine the results of the negotiations with his camp. He reserved the right to submit further objections. No new referendum is required. President Juan Manuel Santos can present the latest peace treaty to parliament for a vote. The people unexpectedly rejected the first version of the peace treaty of 26.09.16 in a referendum on 02.10.16 (cf. BN of 04.10.16).