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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

23 September 2024

Afghanistan

Security situation

The National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) reported that they killed around eleven Taliban fighters and injured others in several attacks in Kabul and Herat between 16.09. and 21.09.24. According to a report by the UN Secretary-General, the armed opposition assaulted the Taliban 73 times between 14.05. and 31.07.24. The NRF and the AFF were responsible for most of these attacks, but numerous other incidents could not be attributed to any group. The rate of security incidents has increased by 53 % against last year. On 19.09. and 20.09.24, Pakistani border guards and the Taliban clashed yet again. According to the local population, also civilians were injured.¹

Persecution situation

On 16.09 and 18.09.24, the Taliban reportedly arrested a former soldier from Panjshir province in Kabul accusing him of supporting the NRF. In Takhar province, a former police commander was reportedly shot dead by the Taliban on 19.09.24. The latest UN report on the security situation confirms that there are still cases of extrajudicial killings and torture of former government employees and security forces. Between May and July 2024, four killings, nine arrests without trial and six cases of torture were verified.

Between 15.09 and 22.09.24, the Taliban flogged at least eight people in the provinces of Balkh, Faryab, Sar-e Pol and Herat. They were accused of drug offences, sodomy and "running away from home", among other things.

The Taliban allegedly accused six people of theft and shot them dead in Takhar province on 19.09.24. It is said that the bodies were put on public display afterwards.

According to a report from 21.09.24, the Taliban have arrested the editor-in-chief of Radio Baghlan, Jawed Forugh. The background is unclear.

On 20.09.24, Amnesty International drew attention to the fact that education activist Fahim Azizmi had been in Taliban custody for eleven months and that his mental health was deteriorating.²

Government affairs

According to a report of 17.09.24, the Taliban have stopped a polio vaccination campaign without giving reasons.

On 20.09.24, the Taliban banned religious debates and warned against broadcasting such debates in the media. In particular, they emphasised that no critical voices should "confuse" the population and that no alternative interpretations of Islam should be disseminated. Several religious scholars criticised the regulation. On 21.09.24, the Taliban reportedly instructed media representatives in Kabul that all political programmes must be recorded and submitted to the Taliban for censorship ahead of being broadcasted. They also presented a list of 68 people from which guests for political programmes were to be selected.³

Colombia

Peace talks with ELN suspended

The Colombian government's peace delegation announced on 18.09.24 that it was suspending peace talks with the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). This step follows an attack on a military base in Arauca attributed to the ELN on 17.09.24, in which three soldiers were killed and 26 others injured. According to the peace delegation, a resumption of talks is only possible if the ELN unequivocally commits to peace. According to Antonio Garcia, one of the group's commanders, the ELN believes that peace negotiations can continue despite military operations. Peace talks with the ELN have been ongoing since 2022 as part of President Gustavo Petro's policy of comprehensive peace (Paz Total). An agreed ceasefire expired in August 2024 after months of stalled negotiations (cf. BN of 05.08.24). Since then, the guerrilla group stepped up its attacks on security forces and oil pipelines and staged an armed strike (cf. BN of 19.08.24).⁴

Ethiopia

Renewed fighting in Amhara

According to media reports, at least nine people were killed and more than 30 injured in renewed fighting between the Fano militia and Ethiopian army units. These victims include both soldiers and civilians. The fighting broke out on 16.09.24 in the two towns of Debark and Dabat in the Amhara region and continued until the following day. According to unconfirmed reports, there was also fighting in the regional capital of Gondar.⁵

Georgia

Parliament passes controversial anti-LGBTIQ law

On 17.09.24, the Georgian parliament passed a controversial law restricting the rights of LGBTIQ people in its third reading. Officially, it is about the protection of family values. However, it includes a ban on same-sex marriages, adoptions by same-sex couples and trans people, gender reassignment treatments, public endorsement of LGBTIQ relationships and people (e.g. Pride gatherings) and their portrayal in the media. The law also declares same-sex marriages performed abroad invalid on Georgian territory.

In a vote boycotted by the opposition parties, the ruling Georgian Dream party adopted the bill with 84 votes in favour and none against. The law is similar to the Russian legislation restricting LGBTIQ rights. According to parliamentary speaker Shalva Papuashvili, who introduced the law in parliament himself, it shall strengthen family values and in particular the protection of minors.

In December 2023, the EU granted Georgia the status of an EU accession candidate. After the parliament in Tbilisi passed a law against foreign funding of NGOs in May 2024 (cf. BN of 10.06.24), relations with the EU deteriorated. The adoption of the new anti-LGBTIQ law – which was accompanied by massive protests – has further reduced Georgia's chances of joining the EU.⁶

Well-known transgender activist killed

One day after the adoption of the internationally controversial anti-LGBTIQ law, a well-known transgender activist has been killed. According to the Georgian Ministry of the Interior, Kesaria Abramidze, a model, actress and influencer, was stabbed several times in her flat on 18.09.24. As a result, the police arrested Abramidze's boyfriend as a suspect. However, as far as is currently known, there are no indications of a connection to the law that was passed. The 37-year-old Abramidze, who was followed by 500,000 people on Instagram, was the first celebrity in Georgia to speak publicly about her gender reassignment.⁷

Haiti

Multinational security assistance mission

During a visit to Haiti on 21.09.24, Kenyan President William Ruto declared his support for the transformation of the UN-backed and Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS) into a full UN peacekeeping mission.

Ruto visited Haiti to get an overview of the progress of the MSS, whose 12-month UN Security Council-authorised mandate expires at the beginning of October 2024. According to media reports, the Security Council is currently reviewing a draft resolution to extend the MSS mandate and transform it into a formal UN peacekeeping mission. In addition, the Kenyan government has pledged to send 600 more police officers to Haiti in the coming weeks to support the fight against gangs. This would increase the Kenyan contingent to 1,000; an initial contingent of 400 Kenyan security forces arrived in June and July 2024 (cf. BN of 03.06.2024). The US and other countries stated that the strength of the armed forces is insufficient and that they lack resources. During a visit on 20.09.24, also UN human rights expert William O'Neill stated that gang violence is spreading further and that the Haitian police lacked the logistical and technical capacity to take action against the gangs, which are conquering new territory and currently control around 80 % of the capital Port-au-Prince. On 04.09.24, the state of emergency was extended to cover the entire country (cf. BN of 09.09.24).⁸

Honduras

Killing of an environmental activist

According to police reports, another environmental activist was murdered in Tocoa in the Colón region on 14.09.24. Activists demonstrating against mining and hydropower projects had already been killed there several times in recent years. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the assassination victim killed had been threatened by various actors beforehand and had already been covered by state protection measures. According to the annual report published by the NGO Global Witness, 85% of all killings of environmental activists took place in Latin America in 2023. Honduras ranks third with 18 homicides, however, it recorded the highest number of murders per capita. The most dangerous country in 2023 for land and environmental defenders was Colombia, with 79 documented killings. Since the reports began in 2012, a total of 461 land and environmental activists have died there from violence.⁹

Iran

Report on executions

According to a report by the Norway-based NGO Iran Human Rights (IHR), a total of at least 1,425 people have been executed in Iran since Jina Mahsa Amini's death on 16.09.22 triggered a nationwide protest movement. According to the IHR, almost twice as many executions were carried out in the two years following the outbreak of the protests than in the same period before. From 16.09.20 to 15.09.22, executions numbered 815 and from 16.09.22 to 15.09.24 around 1,425. The sharpest increase was in suspected drug offences, the NGO said. For these, the number of executions had risen by 163 %, from 302 by 15.09.22 to 796 cases by 15.09.24. According to a report by Amnesty International, Iran executed the highest number of people worldwide in 2023, second only to the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, Iran has also imposed other punishments such as flogging more frequently since Amini's death. The US-based Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Iran's Human Rights announced on 16.09.24 that over 100 floggings had been ordered in connection with the protests. At least two of these punishments were imposed on women.¹⁰

Iraq

Fight against the IS

The Iraqi military announced that it had flown air strikes against IS positions in Kirkuk on 19.09.24, killing six IS supporters. Furthermore, several IS hideouts in Kirkuk and Salah al-Din were destroyed by air strikes on 17.09.24. In addition, according to Iraqi security authorities, six suspected IS supporters were arrested in Baghdad on 16.09.24 and nine in Salah al-Din on 21.09.24.

With the exception of Baghdad, the above-mentioned provinces belong to the so-called disputed territories, which also include Nineva and Diyala and are claimed by both the central government in Baghdad and the Autonomous Regional Government in Kurdistan-Iraq (KR-I). This results in a security vacuum in the region and thus individual IS cells are still active there, even though IS has not controlled any areas in Iraq since 2017.¹¹

Türkiye-PKK conflict

According to media reports, one member of the PKK was killed and two others were injured in a drone attack on targets in the Makhmour refugee camp (Erbil and Nineva province) on 16.09.24. The Kurdish counter-terrorism authority accused Türkiye of being responsible for the attack. Türkiye considers the refugee camp in Makhmour, which mainly houses Kurdish-Turkish refugees from south-east Türkiye, to be a PKK stronghold and has already attacked it several times in the past (cf. BN of 16.09.24).

According to media reports, two more PKK members were killed in clashes with the Turkish army in a separate incident on 16.09.24 in the Gara Mountains (Dohuk province).

The Turkish Ministry of Defence informed that four more PKK fighters were "neutralised" on 18.09.24 in the Asos Mountains (Sulaymaniyah province). In Ankara's parlance, this can mean killing, wounding or capturing the enemy. The media reported that the attack involved air strikes which set forest and agricultural areas on fire.

For years, Türkiye has regularly attacked PKK positions in northern Iraq by air and ground operations. Direct damage to civilians is rare, but the resulting wildfires destroy the livelihoods of many inhabitants of the affected areas.¹²

Lebanon

Situation in the Lebanese-Israeli border region

The armed conflict between Hezbollah and Israel is currently escalating.

On 17.09. and 18.09.24, several thousand Hezbollah-issued pagers and thereafter Hamas-issued walkie-talkies exploded in two waves, killing at least 37 people. While most of the victims were most likely Hezbollah members, two children were also among the dead. Several hundred people were injured, some of them seriously. Although no responsibility has been claimed, Israel is generally seen as the strike's mastermind, which appears to have hit Hezbollah's middle command level particularly hard. It seems that also Iranian contacts of Hezbollah have been affected to a considerable extent. In Lebanon, the Iranian ambassador was seriously wounded when his pager, apparently handed to him by Hezbollah, exploded. In Syria, too, many pagers of the same batch exploded, killing 19 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

On 20.09.24, Ibrahim Akil, the commander of the Radwan forces, an elite Hezbollah unit, and a large number of other high-ranking Hezbollah members were killed by an Israeli air strike in Beirut. The number of people killed in the attack has not yet been determined and was initially reported as 45 on 22.09.24.

On 22.09.24, one of the largest exchanges of fire to date took place. Hezbollah claimed to have fired a three-digit number of rockets, primarily at two military bases in Israel, with no casualties reported on the Israeli side. Several rockets landed in Israel in obviously civilian areas. According to Israeli reports, also pro-Iranian Iraqi militias fired several rockets which were repelled.

The Israeli air force struck over 400 targets in southern Lebanon on 21.09. and 22.09.24, primarily targeting rocket launchers. Videos of several large explosions, which indicate that larger Hezbollah ammunition depots were also hit, are circulating on social media.¹³

Mali

Attacks in Bamako kill dozens of people

On 17.09.24, suspected jihadists in the capital Bamako attacked both a military police training camp and the city's airport, killing over 70 people and injuring at least another 200. The media reported that they had received this information from sources within the security authorities and the diplomatic service. The Malian government has not provided any information on the number of victims. Attacks by suspected jihadists in the northern regions of the country are a regular occurrence in the conflict that has been sweltering for years. Bamako had been spared attacks since 2016.¹⁴

Myanmar

Security situation

In an attack on a village near the town of Shwebo (Sagaing region), soldiers of the Myanmar military killed eight civilians on 12.09.24. According to media reports, air strikes by the military on several villages near the towns of Mindat (Chin State) and Hpakant (Kachin State) as well as the town of Nawngkhio (Shan State) on 18.09. and 19.09.24 did not claim any civilian casualties. On 16.09.24, members of a resistance group from Okpho Township (Bago region) killed a police officer and a man who was believed to be a police informer. The victims were part of a group of police officers who were allegedly travelling on behalf of the military to enforce compulsory military service. On 17.10.24, suspected members of an armed resistance group killed twelve female residents of the predominantly pro-military village of Kywei Pon in Sagaing. Three other men, believed to be members of the pro-military Pyu Saw Htee, were injured in the attack. On 20.09.24, unknown persons shot dead a district administrator of South Dagon Township and another employee of the military administration in Yangon.¹⁵

Arrests and planned executions

On the night of 19.09.24, a protest took place in Yangon against compulsory military service, the rise in commodity prices and the military junta's disaster management in connection with typhoon Yagi. On 19.09.24, security forces arrested four political activists, some of whom had previously been in political detention. According to reports from prisoner aid organisations, former political prisoners are under special observation and are subject to regular interrogation and the risk of re-arrest for suspicious behaviour. On 24.09.24, the military junta plans to execute five activists who were sentenced to death on 18.05.23 for the alleged murder of six police officers in Yangon in August 2021 and for unauthorised possession of weapons.¹⁶

Compulsory military service

According to media reports, in the regions of Naypyidaw, Yangon, Mandalay, Ayeyarwady and Kayin State the Myanmar military began conscripting men up to the age of 65 and seriously and/or chronically ill people as well as people with disabilities, including men suffering from tuberculosis and HIV-positive men who are dependent on medication. In several communities in Ayeyarwady, men between the ages of 35 and 65 are reportedly banned from leaving their homes. In August 2024, the establishment of a Central Committee for People's Security and Counterterrorism was announced by the military. The committee shall train and arm civilians in Naypyidaw and other regions and federal states for the fight against resistance forces.¹⁷

Flood disaster after typhoon Yagi

According to official figures, the number of flood victims claimed by typhoon Yagi has risen to 384 by 21.09.24, with 89 more people still missing. The chairman of the military junta, Min Aung Hlaing, admitted on 17.09.24 that he had not been prepared for the scale of the disaster and put the number of people displaced by flooding and landslides at 400,000. According to UN estimates, up to 887,000 people have been affected by the typhoon. Aid organisations from the Bago region and the state of Kayah report that the military is controlling and restricting aid deliveries to prevent them from reaching resistance groups and denying aid workers access to disaster areas.¹⁸

Nigeria

Zamfara State: Military kills notorious gang leader

Armed forces killed Halilu Sububu alias Kachalla Halilu Sububu Seno, leader of a criminal group linked to numerous offences in the region, in the north-western state of Zamfara on 12.09.24. According to media reports, the military cooperated with vigilante operatives in the operation.

The armed group led by Halilu Sububu is said to be responsible for numerous attacks on villages, cattle thefts and kidnappings for extorting ransom money. He is also said to be active in arms smuggling (cf. BN of 31.10.22). According to media reports, one feature that distinguishes Halilu Sububu from other gang leaders in the region is his connection to jihadists in the Sahel region.

Kidnapping crime is a persistent security problem in large parts of Nigeria, e.g. in the north and in central Nigerian states (cf. BN of 29.07., 19.08., 26.08. and 02.09.24). The media regularly report on military operations directed

against kidnapping offences in the affected regions (cf. BN of 17.06. and 16.09.24). In October 2022, for example, the military flew air strikes against the group led by Halilu Sububu claiming the lives of dozens of gang members (cf. BN of 31.10.22). The Nigerian government has regarded and labelled such groups as terrorists since the beginning of 2022.¹⁹

Pakistan

IS attack in Balochistan

According to media reports of 16.09.24, the jihadist Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for a bomb attack in which two police officers were killed. IS claimed to have detonated an explosive device targeting a Pakistani police vehicle in the city of Kuchlak near Quetta, the capital of Balochistan. According to the Pakistani authorities, two security personnel were killed and two others injured in the attack on a main road. The incident is a sign of the increasing co-operation between militant Islamist and separatist groups, which have been attacking security forces for years. The separatist Balochistan Liberation Army has already claimed responsibility for similar attacks in the past.²⁰

Security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On the night of 20.09.24, heavily armed fighters attacked an army checkpoint in the tribal district of South Waziristan. According to media reports, at least six Pakistani soldiers were killed and ten others injured. No one initially claimed responsibility for the attack. The South Waziristan district near the Afghan border is one of the most unstable regions in Pakistan. The area was controlled by militant Islamist groups with links to al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban until a large-scale military offensive began in 2024. The Pakistani Taliban and groups close to them are said to once again exercise de facto control over some parts of the region (cf. BN of 16.09.24).

On 22.09.24, a police vehicle belonging to a convoy of diplomats from eleven countries hit a landmine in the Swat district, killing one policeman and injuring three others. The convoy was on its way back from an event organised by local business people to promote tourism in the region. It is unclear whether the convoy was the intended target. Also the Swat Valley once was a Taliban stronghold.²¹

Palestinian Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

The Hamas-led Ministry of Health stated on 18.09.24 that more than 41,272 Palestinians had been killed and 95,551 others wounded in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. The ministry does not officially differentiate between combatants and civilians and does not allow any insight into the methodology of the survey.

According to the Israeli military on 20.09.24, a total of 346 military personnel have been killed and 2,284 others wounded since the start of the ground offensive. Hamas is still believed to be holding 101 hostages in the Gaza Strip, 33 of whom are presumed dead. Four hostages were already being held in Gaza before the war began. At least 1,546 Israelis and citizens of other countries have been killed so far. According to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), 17,000 Palestinian fighters have been killed so far, but no insight into the methodology used for the survey is provided.

Fighting in the Gaza Strip continues.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 83 % of medicines and 70 % of other medical supplies from the camps in the Gaza Strip have been used up.²²

West Bank

On 19.09.24, video footage emerged showing Israeli soldiers throwing four apparently lifeless bodies from the roof of a building in the West Bank. An IDF spokesperson condemned the actions and made it clear that they were not in line with Israeli rules of engagement or expectations of IDF soldiers. An investigation into the incident has been launched. The video was widely shared on social media.

On 22.09.24, the office of the Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera in Ramallah was occupied and closed by the Israeli army. The reason given was that Al Jazeera was jeopardising Israel's security and inciting hatred against the Jewish state.²³

Russian Federation

Protesters demand demobilisation of Russian troops in Ukraine

A group of wives, mothers and children of mobilised Russian soldiers involved in their country's invasion of Ukraine protested outside the Ministry of Defence in Moscow on 21.09.24. An unspecified number of protesters was detained. The protest coincided with the date two years ago when Russian President Putin signed a decree on partial mobilisation and called up around 300,000 soldiers, mostly reservists, for the war in Ukraine. The protesters reportedly demanded a meeting with the new Russian defence minister Belousov and the demobilisation of Russian troops in Ukraine but were not successful.

Since the summer of 2023, women's groups have regularly organised small protests against the war in Ukraine. However, by now there are many such women's groups in numerous regions of Russia, not just in Moscow.²⁴

Sri Lanka

Presidential elections

On 21.09.24, the candidate Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected as the new president with 42 % of the vote. His party, the communist-orientated Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), had only received 3 % of the vote in the 2019 presidential elections. In the 1970s and 1980s, the JVP had led two uprisings in which around 80,000 people lost their lives. However, Dissanayake had distanced himself from violence during the election campaign. Observers see his election as a protest vote by the population, as the previously established political forces, particularly those centred around former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his influential family, had led the country into an economic crisis. The interim president in office from 2022, Ranil Wickremesinghe, only came third with 17 %. This is attributed to the strict measures of the IMF programme he advocated and supervised to restructure the economy. Dissanayake had also announced that he did not want to leave the IMF programme. This was the first election since 2022, when the then President Rajapaksa fled the country in the midst of the economic crisis following upheaval.²⁵

Syria

Latakia: Arrest of prominent government critics

According to media reports, three Alawites were arrested by government troops in the Latakia governorate between 14.08. and 09.09.24. The three people concerned were reportedly two prominent doctors and a car parts dealer who were considered to be critics of the central government in Damascus. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the proceedings are being kept under wraps and the whereabouts of the three detainees are unclear. According to a single source, they were accused of having founded an opposition movement and being in contact with opposition forces abroad.²⁶

Türkiye

Newspaper report on the creation of forged UYAP documents

As the news website Serbestiyet reported on 19.09.24, it may happen that people smugglers create fake legal documents which are later displayed on UYAP, Türkiye's national judicial information system. This method shall permit the manipulation of asylum applications of Turkish nationals seeking refuge in Europe.

According to Serbestiyet, some smugglers openly advertise their services on social media platforms such as TikTok and Facebook. They offer comprehensive packages containing forged indictments, arrest warrants and invented persecution stories for fees of up to 6,000 US dollars. The documents falsified by the smugglers are then shown in UYAP in the proceedings of the refugees from Türkiye, the news website said. Turkish law firms interviewed by Serbestiyet confirmed that these forged documents appear authentic and official. Examples of forged documents include membership cards of a pro-Kurdish party (HDP), official medical certificates of assaults, search warrants, arrest warrants and indictments. A video shared by a smuggler interviewed by Serbestiyet showed more arrest warrants and other legal documents that had been uploaded to UYAP. According to Serbestiyet, it remains unclear whether these are forged documents or whether they have already been used in official proceedings.

The report says that some smugglers also offer fictitious stories about persecution in connection with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Gülen movement, LGBTIQ identities or persecution due to the Alavi belief. According to the report, they offer "complete asylum files with valid reasons for asylum procedures" on TikTok or Facebook. They also advertised that they already had hundreds of references from the US, Canada, Europe and the UK.

The article goes on to say that the smugglers organise the refugees' departure from Türkiye and provide them with forged documents abroad. One of the smugglers reports that the refugees first travel to Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina. From there, the people are driven to the EU in lorries. Once in the EU, they have to hand themselves in to the police and apply for asylum. The refugees can then use the falsified documents to substantiate their alleged reasons for seeking asylum.

No specific information is available on the frequency with which such forged court documents appear. The smugglers contacted by Serbestiyet said that thousands of people had already made use of this method in 2024 alone. However, this unspecified figure given by the smugglers cannot be verified.

Swiss media also reported similar incidents in connection with asylum applications from Turkish citizens in early 2024. Asylum seekers were given refuge in Switzerland by presenting forged arrest warrants issued by Turkish public prosecutors. A network of intermediaries, including public prosecutors in Türkiye who accepted bribes for issuing forged arrest warrants, were involved in the process. In these arrest warrants, applicants were portrayed as persecuted political activists or members of banned organisations such as the PKK.²⁷

Tunisia

Numerous members of the opposition arrested

According to media reports from 17.09.24, numerous opposition politicians have once again been arrested. A total of 97 people are said to be members of the Ennahdha party. They are being investigated on suspicion of unspecified "conspiracy", among other things. The media report that the arrests had already been made on 12.09. and 13.09.24. A new head of state will be elected in Tunisia on 06.10.24. In recent months, potential candidates have already been prosecuted in connection with the candidacies (cf. BN of 26.08.24). Since taking power on 25.07.21 (cf. BN of 26.07.21), President Saïed has continuously stepped up repressive action against political opponents and people working in the media. International organisations and civil society accuse him of leading the country into an autocracy.²⁸

Ukraine

Civilian victims

According to the responsible governor, two people were killed by Russian shelling in the small town of Komyshevukha (Zaporizhzhya region) on 17.09.24. Media reports of 18.09.24 report one person dead in the town of Kropyvnytskyi (Kirovohrad region) as a result of a Russian air strike. Also as a result of a Russian air strike, at least one civilian was killed in the city of Sumy on 19.09.24. According to media reports from 19.09.24, one civilian was killed in a Russian air strike in the Zaporizhzhya region. On 21.09.24, the media reported three fatalities following Russian air strikes in the city of Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk region) and two fatalities in the Kharkiv region. In addition, one civilian was reported killed by Russian shelling near the city of Kherson.²⁹

War effort, military financing and execution of prisoners of war

According to a statement by President Zelensky on 18.09.24, a comprehensive "victory plan" to end the war has now been "fully worked out" and is to be discussed with President Biden during his state visit to the US. The specifics of the plan are not yet known. Zelensky merely commented: "There is no alternative to peace, no freezing of the war or other manipulations that would only postpone Russian aggression to another phase." The President also declared his intention to organise another international peace summit in November, to which Moscow would also be invited. The Russian Foreign Ministry has already responded by cancelling such a summit. It would only discuss "serious proposals" that reflect the "geopolitical reality on the ground".

In order to be able to pay soldiers their frontline allowances for September, the Ukrainian parliament has passed a supplementary budget with EUR 10 billion in additional expenditure, primarily for the military. Ukrainian budget

expenditure has thus reached a record EUR 81 billion. The increase in expenditure is to be financed by higher tax revenues, EU loans and savings in the social sector.

The spokesperson for the "Coordination Council" responsible for Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians in Russian hands, Petro Yatsenko, has pointed out that the number of executions carried out by Russian military personnel has increased in the course of the large-scale Russian invasion. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine registered the execution of 32 soldiers in the period from December 2023 to February 2024 alone. According to Yatsenko, this is evidenced by photos and videos from Russian sources or footage of Ukrainian drones. The executions are not only intended to spread fear in Ukraine, but are also a signal to Russian soldiers not to surrender. He assumes that the incidents are part of Russian state policy.³⁰

Energy infrastructure and international support

As a result of a major Russian drone attack in the Sumy region on 17.09.24, a fire broke out in a substation, causing power outages in large parts of the region, according to the relevant military administration and the Ministry of Energy. As a result, emergency teams endeavoured to repair the damage and tap into reserve capacities for water and other supply infrastructure. According to the authorities, hospitals and waterworks, for example, were supplied with electricity via reserve lines. Later, the power supply was partially restored.

With winter approaching, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has called on Ukraine's partners to support the country's energy supply, which is under enormous pressure, in order to guarantee the supply of electricity and heat to the population. An IEA report says that Ukraine's electricity supply shortfall in the critical winter months could reach around a third of the expected peak demand. Specifically, the IEA therefore called for the following assistance: increased protection of the energy infrastructure against attacks and cyberattacks, deliveries of spare parts, accelerated decentralisation of the power supply and expansion of capacities for electricity and gas imports from the EU. Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine declared that the attacks on the power grid probably violate international humanitarian law.

According to EU Commission President von der Leyen, Ukraine will receive further EU aid totalling EUR 160 million for repair work, the expansion of renewable energies, mobile heaters and accommodation. For this purpose, frozen Russian assets in the EU will be accessed for the first time. To date, around EUR 2 billion in EU aid have been channelled into the Ukrainian energy sector. With EU support, around 25 % of the electricity demand could be secured. The remaining energy must be generated in Ukraine. Germany is also providing Ukraine with a further EUR 100 million in winter aid, Foreign Minister Baerbock said during a visit to the neighbouring republic of Moldova.³¹

Appeals by Crimean Tatars rejected by Russian court

The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation (RF) has rejected the appeals of four Crimean Tatars sentenced to long prison terms. The sentences from October 2021 were based on accusations of extremism, as the four Crimean residents were members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT). While HuT was classified as an extremist organisation and banned in the Russian Federation, it is permitted in Ukraine.³²

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