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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

6 May 2024

Afghanistan

Governance and persecution situation: Insurgency against the Taliban in Badakhshan

According to a press release dated 03.05.24, local people (mainly Uzbeks) in the Darayim and Argo districts of Badakhshan province protested against the Taliban for destroying poppy fields. One protester was reportedly shot dead by the Taliban and others were injured when the Taliban fired into the crowd. The protests continued for several days and were generally against "Taliban oppression" and demanded the withdrawal of the Pashtun Taliban from the region.

The Jamiat-e Islami party, which has its headquarters in the province and whose unofficial TV station NoorTV was recently closed down by the Taliban (cf. BN of 22.04.24), supports the protests against the Taliban. The Taliban have sent a delegation to investigate the incidents. In addition, troops have been deployed to the region to put an end to the uprisings by force if necessary. According to the "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2023", opium production has fallen by 95 percent since the Emir's ban in April 2022. Despite this decline, Badakhshan is still second only to the province of Kandahar in terms of poppy cultivation.¹

Security situation

The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) has claimed responsibility for the attack of 29.04.24 on the Shia Imam Zaman mosque in Andisha community (Guzara district, Herat province), which is mainly inhabited by ethnic Hazaras. Six civilians were killed (including a woman and a child) and around ten others were injured.²

Humanitarian situation

Reports of 05.05.24 say that heavy rains, flash floods and lightning strikes have killed around 15 people, displaced 500 families, and destroyed many homes and shops in the Ghor, Uruzgan, Herat and Farah provinces.³

Georgia

Mass protests continue over controversial draft law

Overshadowed by violent protests, the parliament passed a controversial law tightening controls on NGOs in its second reading on 01.05.24. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has already announced that the third reading will be held in mid-May 2024 despite the ongoing protests. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Tbilisi on 30.04.24 and 01.05.24. Police reportedly used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets against the demonstrators in front of the parliament. Several people were injured and, according to the interior ministry, 63 people were temporarily detained. The interior ministry justified the police crackdown on the demonstrators by saying that they had tried to break down the doors of parliament. For weeks, massive protests against the controversial law have been going on in the streets of Tbilisi, accompanied by violent clashes between security forces and protesters (cf. BN of 29.04.24 and 22.04.24).

The law is aimed at curbing alleged influence of foreign countries on civil society in the EU accession candidate country Georgia. For example, the planned law requires NGOs that receive more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad to account for its origin. Many projects promoting democracy in Georgia are funded by EU countries or the U.S. The ruling Georgian Dream party says the law will increase transparency. Critics expect the law to be abused, as in Russia, to stop the flow of money and persecute pro-Western forces. The Georgian Dream party, which has been in power since 2012, is taking an increasingly authoritarian stance ahead of the parliamentary elections to be held in autumn 2024 and is also probably exposed to Russian pressure. The pro-European demonstrators fear that this course will jeopardise the country's hopes of joining the EU.⁴

India

RSF: 28 targeted killings of media professionals since 2014

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) says that 13 of the 28 journalists deliberately killed in India since 2014, among them one female journalist, were covering environmental issues, in particular illegal mining and land grabbing. According to RSF, they were killed because they were working on investigative articles about the so-called sand mafia, an organised crime network that illegally mines sand for the country's booming construction industry. The sand mafia is believed to be intertwined with, and often protected by, politics. According to RSF, the remaining 15 media professionals were deliberately killed because of their journalistic work, which included reports on corruption, election manipulation, and a Maoist uprising. RSF criticises the inadequate protection mechanisms for media professionals, most recently especially for those who report on environmental issues. India ranks 159 out of 180 countries analysed in the RSF Press Freedom Index 2024.⁵

Iran

Press freedom: Charges against journalists

Media report that on 01.05.24, the Iranian judiciary brought charges against several media professionals. Further background information, such as the number of people affected and the charges, has not yet been reported. Persian foreign media say the charges are related to the publication of a report by the British news channel BBC News on 30.04.24 which revealed details of sexual assaults and the killing of a 16-year-old girl by three security forces in the course of the nationwide protests in 2022. According to the BBC, the girl apparently killed was activist Nika Shakarami who had been arrested at the beginning of the protests in 2022 and was found dead a few days later. According to the Iranian authorities, she had committed suicide. However, according to the BBC report, there are now indications that the woman was mistreated and killed by Iranian security forces. The report refers to an internal, apparently leaked, document from Iranian security forces that allegedly names those responsible for the girl's death as well as the commander-in-chief involved in a subsequent cover-up. The official news portal of the Iranian judiciary has stated that the BBC report was a forgery. In a press statement, interior minister Ahmad Vahidi labelled the report a conspiracy by Iran's enemies.

According to the 2024 press freedom ranking published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on 03.05.24, Iran is ranked 176 out of 180 countries.⁶

Reports of armed clashes in Sistan and Balochistan province

Media report of clashes between security forces and several unidentified persons in Zahedan (Sistan and Balochistan province) on the night of 05.05.24. The confrontation was apparently linked to the arrest of several members of the separatist group Jaish al Adl (Army of Justice). However, there were also reports of a private confrontation in which one individual was killed and three others were injured.

Jaish al Adl is labelled as terrorist by the Iranian government. On 04.05.24, state news agencies reported the arrest of several members of the group at a religious school in Pashamag village near the city of Rask. Those arrested were reportedly involved in armed attacks on Iranian security force bases in the province in December 2023 and April 2024 (cf. BN of 18.12.23 and 08.04.24). The reports cannot be independently confirmed.⁷

Death penalty: More than 60 death sentences carried out in April 2024

Human rights organisations report that at least 63 people were executed in Iranian prisons within 14 days in April 2024. This brings the total number of death sentences carried out since January 2024 to at least 171 people, among them six women. The majority of executions during this period were reportedly carried out on convictions for drug offences and murder charges. One death sentence was carried out for rape.

In its annual report, the human rights organisation Iran Human Rights (IHRNGO) states that in 2023, at least 471 death sentences were carried out for drug-related offences. This represents an 84 percent increase on the previous year. In April 2024, human rights groups published a joint statement on ending executions for drug-related offences, highlighting the lack of due process before the revolutionary courts.⁸

Iraq

Press freedom

In the annual report on global press freedom published on 03.05.24, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked Iraq two places lower than last year, at 169 out of 180.

Reasons given for the deterioration included ongoing attacks on journalists, political interference and laws that restrict press freedom.⁹

Lebanon

Israeli air strike in southern Lebanon: At least three civilians killed

Media report at least three civilians killed and others injured in an Israeli airstrike on the southern Lebanese village of Mays al-Jabal on 05.05.24. According to the Israeli military, the attack targeted Hezbollah's military infrastructure. On the same day, Hezbollah stated that it had carried out at least ten attacks on the Israeli military along the Lebanese-Israeli border. The Israeli military, on the other hand, said that some 40 rockets had entered Israeli airspace.¹⁰

Mali

Leading jihadist killed

The Malian military government has informed that on 28.04.24, the senior commander of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS/EIGS) group, Abu Huzeifa, was killed in northern Ménaka region, in a joint military operation with Burkina Faso and Niger. Huzeifa, who had a USD 5 million bounty on his head, is held responsible for numerous attacks in the Sahel region, including a terrorist attack in Niger in 2017 that had killed four U.S. soldiers.¹¹

Myanmar

Security situation

After the Karen National Liberation Army captured the strategically important town of Myawaddy on the border with Thailand on 10.04.24 (cf. BN of 15.04.24), troops of the Myanmar military regained control of their base there on 23.04.24. On 26.04.24, the military killed four civilians and injured 15 others in an airstrike on a hospital in Mindat (Chin State). The exiled National Unity Government (NUG) states that since the end of February 2024, the military has destroyed at least 35 hospitals and clinics in the states of Shan, Rakhine, Mon and Chin as well as in the Magway region, with a total of 343 healthcare facilities destroyed nationwide. 104 healthcare workers have been killed, 131 injured and over 800 arrested since the military coup on 01.02.24. In Singtu (Mandalay region), fighting broke out on 28.04.24 between the military and the Mandalay People's Defence Force (PDF), resulting in the capture of a military base by the PDF. There were no reports of civilian casualties. Fighting between troops of the military junta and resistance groups was also reported from Kanteplet (Chin) and Myitkyina (Kachin State). On 03.05. and 04.05.24, the military carried out air and artillery attacks on the communities of Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Pauktaw and Minbya (Rakhine) as part of fighting with the Arakan Army, leaving at least ten civilians injured in Minbya. In Kale (Sagaing

region), soldiers of the military junta reportedly shot dead two mentally ill men on 06.04.24. Two women were killed and three other civilians, including a child, were injured when a military grenade and a landmine hit the same community.

In Sittwe (Rakhine), around 300 more stateless Rohingya men were forcibly recruited by the Myanmar military between 22.04 and 25.04.24. The military had already conscripted around 1,000 Rohingya in February and March 2024 (cf. BN of 04.03.24).

In Laukkai (Shan) on 24.04.24, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army executed three of its members and sentenced seven others to between two and 20 years' imprisonment in a show trial for abuse of power.¹²

Ban on men working abroad

On 02.05.24, the military junta announced that it was suspending the issuance of work permits for male nationals abroad with retroactive effect from 01.05.24. The labour ministry said that the suspension was "temporary" and would continue "as needed". The reason given was that "more time is needed to review the exit processes and other matters". Observers believe that the move is a reaction to the exodus triggered by the enforcement of compulsory military service from February 2024 (cf. BN of 04.03.24). Female nationals may continue to be sent as labour migrants.¹³

Niger

Withdrawal of U.S. troops decided

According to media reports, the Nigerien military junta has asked the USA to withdraw its soldiers stationed in Niger. Around 1,000 soldiers are currently stationed in the country. From there, they carry out counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel region. Following the withdrawal of French troops at the end of 2023, U.S. troops will now follow. At the same time, the Nigerien military junta is intensifying its cooperation with Russia. Russian military personnel have reportedly already arrived in the capital Niamey.

Resentment about the presence of U.S. military personnel has grown among the population, with repeated demonstrations. For weeks, people were demanding their immediate withdrawal (cf. BN of 15.04.24).¹⁴

Nigeria

Enugu State: Deadly attack on village

Media reports say that on 28.04.24, unidentified assailants attacked the village of Nimbo in the Uzo Uwani Local Government Area (LGA) in south-eastern Enugu State, killing at least four people. The attackers entered the village in the evening and opened fire. They are believed to be nomadic cattle herders belonging to the Fulani ethnic group. According to an eyewitness, there have been several such attacks in the area recently. This is partly due to the lack of security forces in the region. The incident is reminiscent of an attack on the same village in 2016, known as the Nimbo massacre, in which dozens of people had been killed.

Conflicts between nomadic herders and farmer communities also occur in neighbouring federal states. The background to these acts of violence, also known as intercommunal violence, can be conflicts over land, grazing and water rights, but also the desire for retribution for earlier acts of violence or - or at the same time - smouldering ethnic rivalries (cf. BN of 13.03.23 and 29.01.24).

Fulani herdsmen have also been blamed by some for a high-profile kidnapping case in southern Nigeria a few days before the attack in Enugu State. Media reports say that on 23.04.24, gunmen attacked a coach travelling from Delta State to Bayelsa State in Ughelli North LGA and kidnapped 18 people.¹⁵

Pakistan

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Abducted judge released; security situation in Central Asia

The judge abducted on 28.04.24 in Tank district has been released (cf. BN of 29.04.24). No group has officially claimed responsibility for the offence. The abductee named the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) as responsible.

Pakistan ranks fourth on the Global Terrorism Index 2023, overtaking Afghanistan and Iraq after two decades of more terrorist attacks in the region.

Terrorism and extremism remain present in Central Asia. The Taliban's nearly three-year rule in Afghanistan has led to an increase in security-related incidents, particularly in neighbouring Central Asian countries. The Afghan Taliban's links to Islamist networks have continued, in particular to regional groups such as the TTP, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and al-Qaeda. It is believed that places of retreat and training camps for these networks still exist in Afghanistan.¹⁶

Attack on journalists in Balochistan

On 02.05.24, a Pakistani journalist and chairman of the Khuzdar Press Club was killed along with two other people in an attack in Balochistan's Khuzdar district. Surveillance camera footage showed an assassin on a motorbike attaching an explosive device to the car of those killed, which then exploded. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Khuzdar was once listed by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as one of the ten most dangerous places in the world for media professionals. On the RSF's Press Freedom Index 2024, Pakistan ranks 152 out of 180 countries analysed.¹⁷

Dismantling of protest camp at Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing

On 04.05.24, the spokesperson of a protest camp at the Chaman-Spin Boldak border crossing stated that the paramilitary Frontier Corps took advantage of the absence of the protesters who had been there since October 2023 to demolish the camp at the beginning of May 2024 and set fire to the makeshift tents. When the peaceful protesters returned, they were shot at; one individual was killed, and more than a dozen people were injured in the incident. The demonstrators, mainly traders, were demanding that the government abolish the new regulation requiring them to have valid documents to cross the border. In October 2023, the government had abolished the 19th century customary law of 'easement rights', which allowed members of some communities along the Durand Line to cross the border freely. This was heavily criticised by members of the Pashtun communities on both sides of the border due to the financial losses it caused.¹⁸

Palestinian Autonomous Territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Recent developments; humanitarian situation

The Hamas-led health ministry stated on 05.05.24 that more than 34,600 Palestinians have been killed in the Gaza Strip since the start of the war. The ministry does not officially distinguish between combatants and civilians. The figures cannot be independently verified.

In addition, according to the Israeli military, a total of 262 military personnel have been killed and 1,602 others wounded since the beginning of the ground offensive until 01.05.24.

Fighting in Gaza continues, including airstrikes by the Israeli military. On 05.05.24, Hamas forces fired rockets at the Kerem Shalom border crossing in southern Gaza, the main point of entry for humanitarian aid from Israel: Three Israeli soldiers were killed in the incident. The border crossing was temporarily closed to further aid deliveries, and targets near the border crossing at Rafah were bombed by the Israeli military.

On 06.05.24, ahead of an announced military offensive on the overcrowded town of Rafah in southern Gaza, the Israeli military called on the approximately 1.4 million people living there to leave the eastern part of the town bordering Egypt and to move to the al-Mawasi camp on the coast. More than one million Palestinians from other parts of Gaza have apparently sought refuge there. The military offensive will initially be launched on a limited scale.

A UN study concluded that rebuilding the destroyed homes in Gaza would take until at least 2040, assuming that work could be carried out at five times the rate of past reconstruction projects. With reconstruction capacities similar to those seen after past military conflicts, it would take around 80 years. More than 370,000 housing units are estimated to have been damaged, of which 79,000 are considered destroyed.

The UN report also assumes a total casualty rate of 5 percent of the 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza. This figure is based on the number of deaths and injuries reported by the Hamas-led authorities on the ground. In the last quarter of 2023, Gaza's economy shrank by 81 percent, and much of its economic base was destroyed.

On 01.05.24, the Israeli military opened the Erez border crossing to allow more aid into northern Gaza via Israel. However, food shortages and hunger remain widespread, particularly in northern Gaza.¹⁹

West Bank: Several killed in armed clashes

On 02.05.24, a Palestinian was killed by Palestinian security forces in a rare inter-Palestinian armed conflict. He was reportedly a member of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine (PIJ) group. According to the Palestinian Authority, fire was opened at a patrol of the security forces, which they returned.

Both Palestinian and Israeli authorities have stated that on 04.05.24, five Palestinians were killed in a raid by the Israeli military and subsequent armed clashes with armed Palestinians in the village of Deir al-Ghusun near the town of Tulkarem. Four of those killed have reportedly been confirmed by Hamas as members of the group. The fifth victim has not yet been identified. The Israeli military has blamed the group for several attacks on Israeli military personnel and civilians.

According to UN OCHA data of 01.05.24, at least 800 attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian people and property in the West Bank have been recorded since 07.10.23. In the course of these attacks, 31 Palestinians were reportedly killed by settlers or the military.²⁰

Israel: Government bans Al Jazeera news channel

On 05.05.24, the Israeli government announced the closure and banning of the Al Jazeera news network in Israel, describing the medium as a "mouthpiece of Hamas". Equipment was confiscated during a raid on the network's premises. Al Jazeera, which is based in Qatar, said it would take legal action against the ban. Press associations and human rights groups have criticised the ban. Just last month, parliament had passed a law allowing the government to temporarily close foreign media organisations if they pose a threat to national security in times of war.

The network's activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are not expected to be affected by the ban.²¹

Panama

Presidential election results

The national electoral authority has informed that the candidate of the right-wing Realizando Metas (RM) party, José Raúl Mulino, secured more than 34 percent of the vote, thus beating the seven other candidates for the presidency. Former security minister Mulino had run as a replacement candidate for ex-president Ricardo Martinelli. Prior to the election, Martinelli had lost an appeal against a prison sentence of several years for money laundering and had been disqualified from running. Martinelli described the case as politically motivated and applied for asylum at the Nicaraguan embassy in February 2024. Migration, corruption and social issues had dominated the election campaign.²²

Russian Federation

Activist sentenced to long prison term after attack on military commissariat

Following repeated protests against the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, a military court in the far eastern city of Khabarovsk sentenced Angel Nikolayev on 03.05.24 to a total of 15 years in prison. The anti-war activist was accused of setting off two Molotov cocktails in the windows of the local recruitment office in autumn 2023, causing serious damage to property but no personal injury, according to the investigating authorities. The court considered the offence a terrorist act under Article 205 of the Russian criminal code. Nikolayev was also found guilty of desecrating graves and vandalism for smearing red paint on Russian national flags placed on the graves of soldiers killed in the Ukrainian war and removing the "Z" sign of sympathy for the Russian invasion, from vehicles and bus stops.

The independent civil rights portal OWD-Info says that since the start of the war in February 2022, at least 962 people across Russia have been prosecuted under criminal law (and not 'just' under administrative law) in connection with statements or actions critical of the war. In contrast to the first year of the war, attacks on military commissariats, which previously rarely resulted in more than fire damage to the entrance doors, are now often punished not as damage to property, but as acts of terrorism, with correspondingly long prison sentences.²³

Somalia

Journalist suspended

In March 2024, Sugaal Moalim Mohamud, who worked for the government-run media outlets Radio Mogadishu and Somali National TV, was initially suspended for one month. The reason given was that he had made anti-government comments on social media, including criticism of military operations and corruption in the defence ministry. According to Mohamud, the suspension has continued even after the one-month ban. His salary has also been stopped, he added. The Somali Journalists Syndicate expressed concern about his situation. In Somalia, media professionals face restrictions and threats both from armed groups such as al-Shabaab and the government. Between 2020 and 2024, five journalists died in the course of their work.²⁴

Bomb attack

On 28.04.24, six Hormuud Telecom employees were reportedly killed in an explosion. The bombing took place on a roadside in Garasbaley district on the outskirts of Mogadishu. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.²⁵

Sudan

Fighting continues

Since mid-April 2024, the capital of North Darfur, El Fasher, has been under siege by forces of the paramilitary militia Rapid Support Forces (RSF), preventing relief aid from reaching the city. As a consequence, there are severe shortages of medical supplies, food, and raw materials such as oil and diesel. Due to the lack of fuel, two health centres have been unable to operate their own generators to produce energy and have had to stop work. Electricity has not been available for some time. As local militias, many of them members of the Zaghawa ethnic group, are preparing to defend themselves in El Fasher, besides the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), representatives of the international community expect widespread violence, from sexual violence against civil society to ethnically motivated killings.

To the east of Wad Madani, capital of the Al-Jazira State region, fierce fighting has erupted between SAF and RSF forces. Wad Madani was captured by the RSF in December 2023. According to media reports, the Sudanese army is attempting to capture the town of Shabarqa, 25 kilometres east of Wad Madani, in order to advance from there against the regional capital.

Fighting continues unabated in the capital Khartoum. SAF forces are attempting to capture RSF positions with artillery fire and airstrikes. Since fighting broke out in April 2023, the RSF has controlled large parts of the capital and its neighbouring towns of Omdurman and Bari.²⁶

Syria

Northwest: Deaths from IS attack

Syrian media report that in the morning of 03.05.24, at least 13 Syrian military personnel and members of pro-government militias were killed in suspected IS attacks on at least three checkpoints near the village of Sukhna in Homs governorate, a former IS stronghold. According to contradictory information from the London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), at least 15 people were killed.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the killings.²⁷

Damascus: Injured in Israeli airstrike

The Syrian defence ministry has informed that on 02.05.24, at least eight military personnel were wounded in an Israeli airstrike targeting the foothills of the capital. A source told Reuters news agency that targets south of the Sayyida Zaynab shrine were hit. This is an area where Hezbollah and Iranian troops are said to be increasingly present. However, the building hit was apparently used by Syrian security forces.²⁸

Syria ranks penultimate in World Press Freedom Index

On 03.05.24, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published the results of its World Press Freedom Index for 2024, in which Syria was ranked penultimate (179) out of 180 countries, down four places from the previous year. The organisation stresses that entire swaths of the territory are inaccessible to media workers and that the government is using the media to spread its own ideology and to make any pluralism impossible, forcing many journalists into exile.²⁹

Togo

Parliamentary and regional elections: Ruling party wins majority in parliament

Togolese citizens cast their votes on 29.04.24 for parliamentary and regional elections. According to the national electoral commission, voter turnout was 61 percent. Around 4.2 million Togolese had registered to vote. Media report that the election day passed off without any major incidents. The president of the national election commission announced the provisional results on 04.05.24, stating that the ruling Union pour la République (UNIR) party had won a clear majority in parliament with 108 out of 113 seats. These results, which are subject to confirmation by the constitutional court, represent a triumph for President Faure Gnassingbé's party.

In a statement on 01.05.24, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU) and the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) expressed their satisfaction with the calm conduct of the elections. However, individual opposition politicians and alliances of several opposition parties, such as Dynamique pour la majorité du peuple (DMP), questioned the proper organisation and results of the elections, saying that irregularities and fraud were discovered on election day in the form of an "inadmissible number of votes in several centres", "delays in the start of voting" and "voter lists that were not posted".

The political climate has remained tense, especially since the National Assembly passed a new controversial constitution on 19.04.24 (cf. BN of 22.04.24). As a consequence of the constitutional reform, the results of the parliamentary elections are particularly important for the political future of the country, as the leader of the party with the majority in the National Assembly is automatically appointed President of the Council of Ministers. This newly created office in the new parliamentary system, similar to a prime minister, is intended to concentrate powers. The position of President of the Republic will become a purely representative office. Observers believe that President Gnassingbé is seeking the presidency of the Council of Ministers in order to avoid limitations in his term of office.³⁰

Türkiye

Nationwide demonstrations on 1 May

Media report that on 01.05.24, Labour Day, police used tear gas and rubber bullets in Istanbul to disperse demonstrators who tried to break through barricades to reach Taksim Square in Beyoğlu district. Police and demonstrators also clashed near the city hall in Istanbul's Sarachane district.

There are differing reports on the number of people arrested. According to the Turkish interior minister Ali Yerlikaya, a total of 217 people were arrested in Istanbul on 01.05.24. A lawyers' association providing legal support to demonstrators says that at least 216 people were arrested throughout Istanbul on 01.05.24. Arrest warrants were issued for 35 of those detained. 182 detainees have been released from custody. Interior minister Yerlikaya stated that a total of 226 arrests were made throughout the country, including the arrests in Istanbul.

Around 42,000 police officers were deployed throughout the city, blocking off streets with metal barriers after President Erdoğan declared on 30.04.24 that the annual Labour Day protests would not be allowed to take place in Taksim Square. Previously, on 29.04.24, interior minister Yerlikaya had stated that Taksim Square would be closed to rallies in order to prevent terrorist organisations from using the site for propaganda.

Following the May Day demonstrations, the Çağdaş Hukukçular Derneği (Contemporary Lawyers' Association, ÇHD) stated that on 03.05.24, a further 47 people were arrested in raids in Istanbul because they had resisted the ban on entering Taksim Square on 01.05.24. In addition, interior Minister Yerlikaya informed that on 03.05.24, a total of 29 people were arrested who had gathered in Sarachane Square on 01.05.24 in order to walk from there to Taksim Square. The detainees had attacked police officers with stones and sticks, he added. According to Yerlikaya,

more arrests were made against people who were identified as being involved in the attack on the basis of camera footage and facial recognition systems.

In 2023, the constitutional court had ruled that the closure of Taksim Square for protests was a violation of the right to organise public meetings and demonstrations enshrined in Article 34 of the Constitution. The square had served as a rallying point for the 1 May celebrations until 1977, when at least 34 people were killed in demonstrations. The authorities reopened the square in 2010, but after protests there in 2013, the site was once again closed to demonstrations. The closure remains in place to this day.

In the other major cities, including Ankara and Izmir, the demonstrations on 1 May ended peacefully. In the predominantly Kurdish south-east of Türkiye, thousands gathered in Batman, including the newly elected mayors of the pro-Kurdish DEM party. According to interior minister Yerlikaya, a total of 210 Labour Day events were held in 78 provinces on 1 May, in which 241,000 people took part.³¹

Türkiye ranks 158 on the World Press Freedom Index

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published the World Press Freedom Index on 03.05.24, which is the International Press Freedom Day. Türkiye is ranked 158th out of 180 countries analysed, with a total score of 31.6 points. This puts the country in the category in which the press freedom situation is considered "very serious" according to the RSF. In 2023, Türkiye had been ranked 165th. However, according to RSF, the change is not due to an improvement in press freedom in the country, but rather to regression in other countries. For example, the situation has deteriorated in countries such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and India, which were still ahead of Türkiye last year.

The index is calculated on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 representing the highest level of press freedom and 0 the lowest. This score is the result of both a quantitative survey of abuses against media professionals and a qualitative analysis by press freedom experts who respond to an RSF questionnaire available in 24 languages. The questionnaire assesses five key indicators, including political context, legal framework, economic context, socio-cultural context, and security.

According to RSF, the one-sided orientation of public broadcasting during the presidential and parliamentary election period and the arrest of dozens of journalists are developments that make Türkiye one of the countries with the biggest setbacks in terms of the political context indicator. The report also mentions other factors such as online censorship, lawsuits against critical media, and financial pressure on critical media professionals and media companies, which are leading to the erosion of media pluralism and press freedom in the country.

Human rights groups reportedly regularly accuse the Turkish government of trying to control the press by imprisoning journalists, closing media companies, monitoring the purchase of media brands by government-affiliated conglomerates, and using regulatory authorities to exert financial pressure.

According to a count by the Expression Interrupted platform, which monitors the situation of media professionals in Türkiye, 32 journalists are currently in prison, among them mainly Kurdish journalists and those working for media outlets allegedly close to the Gülen movement. The Turkish Journalists' Union (TGS) has stated that a total of 69 journalists were arrested in 2023 and 264 were put on trial. 63 were acquitted, while 36 journalists were sentenced to a total of 55 years in prison. The Bianet press agency has stated that since Erdoğan became president in August 2014, a total of 76 journalists have been sentenced to prison or fined for insulting the president under Article 299 of the Turkish penal code.³²

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

On 29.04.24, five people were killed and over thirty injured in a Russian missile attack on an educational facility in Odessa. Ukrainian naval spokesman Dmytro Pletentschuk said that cluster munitions were used in the attack. The authorities have informed that on 30.04.24, three people were killed in Russian attacks on Kharkiv. According to regional authorities, further Russian attacks on 01.05.24 claimed two lives in the Donetsk region and three in the Kharkiv region. Also on 01.05.24, three people died in a Russian missile attack on the Black Sea port of Odessa, as was reported by the regional governor. On 03.05.24, the local military administration of the city of Kurakhove (Donetsk region) reported two fatalities following a Russian attack. According to the regional authorities, three civilians were killed by Russian shelling in the Kharkiv region on 04./05.05.24 and two people in Pokrovsk (Donetsk region) on 05.05.24. The International Red Cross has noted a sharp rise in casualties in the region due to the

significant increase in airstrikes, particularly on Kharkiv, and the associated destruction of energy, transport and civilian infrastructure. According to the UK defence ministry, the UN recorded 604 civilians killed or injured across Ukraine in March 2024, which is a 20 percent increase on the previous month. In addition, the Crimean envoy of the Ukrainian president, Tamila Taschewa, says that the Russian occupying power is forcibly abducting and torturing civilians on the peninsula.³³

War events and recruitment

The U.S. State Department has accused the Russian forces of violating the international ban on chemical weapons by using the asphyxiant chloropicrin against Ukrainian troops and of using chemicals "as a method of warfare" in Ukraine to combat unrest. Ukrainian military sources say that the Russian side has also illegally used shells containing CS and CN gases, known as tear gases, intended to drive Ukrainian forces out of fortified positions in order to gain tactical advantages on the battlefield. The Kremlin has denied the accusations.

Human rights organisation HRW claims to have evidence of the killing of at least 15 Ukrainian soldiers who wanted to surrender to Russian units or have already done so since December 2023. Andriy Demchenko, spokesman for the Ukrainian border guard, says that since 24.02.22, around 30 men have died trying to avoid conscription by fleeing illegally abroad. Most of them died while crossing the border river Tisza into Romania. Ukrainian deputy Prime Minister Olha Stefanishyna, who is responsible for EU integration, has made it clear that despite stricter conscription regulations, there are no plans to forcibly repatriate conscripted Ukrainians living abroad.³⁴

Struggle for negotiation process

Switzerland has now issued an official invitation to the Ukraine conference planned to be held on 15./16.06.24. Organised at the request of Ukraine, the conference is to be attended by more than 160 delegations at the level of heads of state and government in order to develop a common understanding of a possible path to a just and lasting peace in Ukraine as the basis for a peace process, according to the foreign ministry in Bern. The Kremlin leadership has already ruled out attending. Meanwhile, the Russian state news agency TASS reported on 04.05.24 that the Russian interior ministry has placed President Volodymyr Zelensky and his predecessor Petro Poroshenko on a wanted list without giving specific charges. In turn, the Ukrainian foreign ministry has referred to the arrest warrant issued against Russian President Vladimir Putin by the International Criminal Court in March 2023.

Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu estimates that his armed forces have gained 547 square kilometres of territory since the beginning of 2024. A high-ranking Ukrainian intelligence officer stated in an interview published on 02.05.24 that Ukraine would eventually have to start talks with Russia to end the war, which has been going on for more than two years. President Zelensky had repeatedly ruled out talks with the Kremlin leadership and declared negotiations "impossible" by presidential decree issued after the formal annexation of four Ukrainian regions by Russia in 2022. Major General Vadym Skibitsky, deputy head of Ukraine's military intelligence service HUR, told The Economist magazine that he sees "no way for Ukraine to win the war on the battlefield alone. Even if Ukraine were able to push Russian forces back to its borders – an increasingly distant prospect – it would not end the war." In his opinion, both sides are currently jockeying for the "most favourable position" ahead of potential talks. However, Skibitsky believes that meaningful negotiations can only begin in the second half of 2025 at the earliest. On 02.05.24, President Zelensky described the upcoming Ukraine conference as "practically the first real opportunity to start restoring a just peace" and reiterated that "all our positions, on the battlefield, in diplomacy and in the information sphere, must now be equally strong".³⁵

West and Central Africa

Heat wave: lack of adaptation options to climate change

At the end of March and in the beginning of April 2024, large parts of West Africa, particularly in the Sahel region, experienced extreme heat, with maximum temperatures reaching more than 45°Celsius; on 03.4.24, the city of Kayes (western Mali), which is already known for its heat, recorded 48.5°C. Heat-related deaths have been reported in Mali and Burkina Faso. Neither country has yet developed any heat plans. A quick analysis by World Weather Attribution (WWA), a scientific association for the assessment of weather phenomena, has found that at current levels of global warming, a comparable heat wave can only be expected every 30 to 200 years, depending on the

region. If man-made climate change were to increase the average global temperature by 2.0 degrees, such events would occur ten times more frequently.

Media reports draw attention to how the increasing heat is already affecting the well-being of the region's people and its economic base. There is a glaring lack of resources to adapt, especially among the poorest, who often live in informal settlements in large cities. Many economic activities have to be carried out outdoors all day. Despite the generally sunny and hot climate, people here also suffer from extreme temperatures. In Mali and Chad, for example, increasing problems with electricity supply have made it difficult to cope with the heat as fans, air conditioners and refrigerators have become unreliable.

Most countries of West and Central Africa scored badly in the ND-GAIN Index of the American University of Notre Dame. The index measures both the vulnerability of countries to climate change and their ability to improve their resilience to its effects.³⁶

Yemen

Six fighters of the Southern Transitional Council killed in suspected al-Qaida attack

On 29.04.24, six fighters of the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC) were killed and eleven others injured in an explosive attack in Mudiyah district (Abyan governorate).

A spokesman for the military wing of the STC blamed the attack on al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) which is mainly based in southern Yemen and primarily fights the Houthis and the STC.³⁷

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