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Briefing Notes

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

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Afghanistan

Security situation

Fighters belonging to the Taliban and the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) are reported to have clashed in Ghor province on 13.10.24. The Taliban claim that three high-ranking members of ISKP were killed.

Unknown assailants attacked a vehicle in Faryab province on 17.10.24, killing or injuring eleven people. Two Taliban were among the casualties. By its own account, the Afghanistan Freedom Front attacked the entrance gate to the Taliban's interior ministry in Kabul on 18.10.24, killing four Taliban.¹

Persecution

Some 30 people were publicly flogged in a number of provinces between 13.10. and 17.10.24 for alleged offences such as "illegal relations", homosexual relations or corruption.

The political analyst Jawed Kohistani was released by the Taliban on 15.10.24 after three weeks in custody. Prior to his arrest, he had criticised the Taliban on numerous occasions. No official charges were brought against him.

A man is reported to have been shot dead by the Taliban at a checkpoint in the city of Herat on 19.10.24. The background remains unclear.²

Control of the media

Several TV stations in Takhar province suspended broadcasting on 14.10.24 on account of the ban on showing images of living beings under the so-called "morality law" and its strict implementation by local Taliban representatives. On 20.10.24, journalists in Khost province were prevented from filming a public event at a university after the Taliban-appointed minister of higher education stressed that filming living beings was a sin. According to exile medium Afghanistan International, the Taliban intend to turn state television stations into radio stations.³

Migration

According to reports by survivors, Iranian border soldiers seriously wounded or killed some 250 Afghan nationals who were attempting to cross the border between Afghanistan and Iran illegally on 13.10.24. Other sources speculate that the victims may have run across a mine field. The exact number of casualties is unclear.

According to information released by the Taliban on 19.10.24, 1,400 families entered Afghanistan in the space of one week in the context of the expulsions from Iran and Pakistan. According to information from the UNHCR, 733,000 Afghan nationals have entered Afghanistan from Pakistan since the beginning of mass expulsions from Pakistan in September 2023.⁴

Humanitarian situation

According to a report published by the UNDP et al., the poverty rate in Afghanistan has risen by 5.2 % since 2015/16. Children are particularly severely affected. According to new data in the Global Hunger Index, 30.4 % of the

population are malnourished and 5.8 % of children die before their fifth birthday. Afghanistan ranks 116th among 127 surveyed countries and is the second most severely affected country in Asia. On 17.10.24 the World Food Programme's national director for Afghanistan described Afghanistan as a "global hunger hotspot", pointing out that three quarters of the population are unable to afford adequate food.⁵

Côte d'Ivoire

Student associations dissolved in the wake of internal violence

On 17.10.24 the National Security Council (CNS) ordered the dissolution of all students' and pupils' associations, whose activities had reportedly been suspended two weeks previously. The student associations Union nationale des étudiants de Côte d'Ivoire (UNESCO) and Réseau étudiant du Privé et de l'Enseignement Technique et Professionnel (Respect) see the dissolution order as a violation of the freedom of association and are said to be considering an appeal to the constitutional court.

The measure is evidently aimed in particular at the powerful Fédération étudiante et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI). Two FESCI members were killed at the end of August and the end of September 2024 respectively, with both murders allegedly perpetrated by members. 17 students, including FESCI's current general secretary, are reportedly being held on remand at present in connection with the murders. The authorities are also reported to have carried out evictions at allegedly illegally occupied student hostels in which places were brokered via the associations. Some 5,000 students are said to have been evicted in Abidjan, Bouaké and Daloa. According to the CNS, many cutting and stabbing weapons and a "torture tunnel" were discovered in the student hostels.

The findings are reportedly being interpreted as evidence of the violence which allegedly prevails on the university grounds, which are controlled in part by FESCI. FESCI has a violent history to its name. This applies both to internal violence between various factions and also to the incitement of violence outside of the association through the mobilisation of political elites. Former FESCI general secretaries, such as Guillaume Soro or Charles Blé Goudé, went on to become prominent politicians.⁶

Cuba

Nationwide blackouts; hurricane makes landfall

There have been power blackouts all over the country since the island's largest coal-fired power station was unexpectedly shut down on 18.10.24. In the capital, Havana, the power supply was restored on 19.10.24, only for a second outage to occur some six hours later. In addition, hurricane "Oscar" reached Cuba on 20.10.24, providing for heavy rainfall and wind speeds of up to 120 km/h. The hurricane was subsequently downrated to a tropical storm. With regard to the blackouts, president Díaz-Canel stated that the government would not tolerate any disturbances and would crack down on any perpetrators, following attempts to disturb public order. Energy minister Vicente de la O Levy announced on 20.10.24 that the power supply would be restored for most Cubans on the evening of 21.10.24.

Power failures have been a regular, sometimes daily occurrence since 2021, due to the outdated and poorly maintained power grid. In addition to blackouts and shortages of foods, medicines and fuel, the country is also suffering from high inflation and a lack of foreign currency (cf. BN of 02.09.24).⁷

Democratic Republic of the Congo

UN: Approx. 1 billion people displaced in 2024

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, reported at a press briefing on 08.10.24 that some 940,000 people had been displaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2024. Noting that he had obtained this figure from humanitarian sources, he said that the total number of internally displaced people had thus risen to more than 6.4 million. He added that the Democratic Republic of the Congo was also the country with the highest level of food insecurity in the world, with 23.4 million affected. Observing that the country is among the five poorest in the world, he said that one in six people subsisting in extreme poverty in Africa south of the Sahara lived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Türk noted that the illegal exploitation of the country and the illegal trade in

natural resources had fuelled the conflicts in the east, which were plunging the population into ever greater poverty. In view of the humanitarian situation in the country, he also appealed to the Congolese president to attach the utmost priority to ending the conflict in the east.⁸

Ethiopia

Fighting in Oromia claims lives

It has been reported that seven civilians were killed in Sadika Karsa, Robe Didea District (Arsi Zone) on 10.10.24. Eight civilians are still missing. Witnesses have reported that government troops were searching for members of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). Hostilities between government troops and OLA rebels have been ongoing for some years. Such clashes regularly claim lives and displace civilians.⁹

Air strikes in Amhara

According to local media, the armed clashes are continuing in Amhara (cf. BN of 23.09. and 07.10.24). Government troops reportedly attacked Fano militias in the first half of October 2024, in particular from the air, in parts of Amhara, including Gercheche, Merawi, North Mecha, South Mecha and Achefer (Gojjam province, Metekel zone). Dozens of people, including many children, are said to have been killed and schools destroyed in drone attacks. No precise details are available regarding the timing of the attacks and the numbers of victims. One source speaks of up to 100 dead.¹⁰

Guinea-Bissau

Five people released from custody in trial relating to 01.02.22

On 17.10.24 an agency reported the release of five of some 50 people who are in custody in connection with the proceedings concerning the alleged attempted coup of 01.02.22 (cf. BN of 07.02.22, 14.02.22 and 08.01.24). The trial, which is taking place before an ad hoc tribunal, was reportedly resumed at the beginning of October 2024, following an adjournment since June 2024. The Supreme Military Court, which is superior to the tribunal, ordered the release of all those in custody on 19.07.24. In some instances, it ordered unconditional releases, while some detainees who had been formally charged were ordered to be released on parole. In response to this ruling, the general staff of the army arrested the three competent judges of the Supreme Military Court on 24.07.24 (cf. BN of 29.07.24). According to the latest agency report, they were released after two weeks.

A common supposition is that organised transnational drug crime is behind the events of 01.02.22. Guinea-Bissau's involvement as a transit state for drug smuggling was recently manifested once again in the biggest drugs haul in the country to date. More than 2.6 tonnes of cocaine were reportedly seized on 07.09.24. Citing the criminal investigation authority, reports in the media state that the drugs were on board an aircraft which arrived in the country from Venezuela. The Venezuelan authorities have reportedly denied that the aircraft was ever in Venezuela. The criminal investigation authority apparently received a tip-off from the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).¹¹

Iran

Mother of purportedly killed protester arrested

It was reported in the media on 17.10.24 that the mother of a demonstrator who died in protests in 2022 had been arrested. No information has been forthcoming from the security forces regarding the grounds for her arrest. The dead woman's family were reportedly subjected to pressure in September, when security forces prevented a ceremony to commemorate the second anniversary of the daughter's death.

According to a report by the British news channel BBC News, the 16 year-old daughter, Nika Shakarami, was allegedly subjected to physical and sexual abuse by security forces in the course of her arrest and died as a result. Iranian authorities disputed this portrayal, claiming that the girl committed suicide (cf. BN of 06.05.24).

In April 2024 it was reported that repressive measures had also been undertaken against the dead woman's sister for breaching the obligation to wear a head covering (cf. BN of 22.04.24).¹²

2024 Freedom on the Net report: Iran among the three most repressive countries

On 16.10.24 the human rights organisation Freedom House (FH) published its 2024 report on Freedom on the Net. According to this report, Iran is the third most repressive country after China and Myanmar with regard to internet freedom, among a total of 72 surveyed countries.

Cited factors contributing to the rating include the Iranian authorities' criminalisation in the run-up to the presidential election in June 2024 of all online content calling for protests and a boycott of the elections or expressing criticism of the candidates. According to FH, this was intended to increase turn-out and to legitimise the elections as a whole, despite an arbitrary selection of candidates and the disqualification of most potential candidates ahead of the election (cf. BN of 10.06.24).¹³

Repression of religious minorities

According to reports by human rights media on 18.10.24, a member of the Bahá'í religious community has been sentenced in Rasht (Gilan province) to two years' imprisonment and additional punishments, including a fine. The charges brought against the man reportedly related to his practice and advocacy of his religion. The Islamic Republic does not recognise the Baha'i faith as a religious minority. Members of the religious community have been subjected to systematic discrimination in Iran for decades.

Citing a Christian-influenced human rights organisation, it was also reported on 18.10.24 that three Iranian nationals who had converted to Christianity had been detained without any contact with the outside world (incommunicado) for more than three weeks since they were arrested by security forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the city of Nowshahr (Mazandaran province). The authorities are reportedly refusing their families access to legal representation. The three men were allegedly arrested back in December 2023, when a total of 17 people were detained in Nowshahr and the neighbouring city of Chalus. The information cannot be independently verified.¹⁴

Iraq

The struggle against IS

By its own account, the Iraqi army carried out an air strike against IS members in Kirkuk province on 17.10.24. Four IS members were killed. According to information from the Iraqi army, four other suspected IS members died in an air strike in Salah al-Din province on 20.10.24. A leading IS figure was allegedly among those killed.

Although territorially defeated since 2017, IS remains active in provinces which are disputed between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region. These provinces include Kirkuk, Salah al-Din and Diyala.¹⁵

Attack on office of MBC television station in Baghdad

Supporters of pro-Iranian armed groups in Iraq protested outside the office building of Saudi Arabian TV station MBC on 19.10.24. The station's offices were attacked by some 400 to 500 protesters. According to reports in the media, part of the building was set on fire.

Prior to the incident, MBC had mentioned individuals such as Osama bin Laden and also organisations from the Iran-led so-called "axis of evil", such as Hamas,

Hezbollah and armed Shiite militias in Iraq, in a report on terrorism in the Near East. On 20.10.24 the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) stated that MBC's broadcasting licence had been withdrawn for showing the mentioned report. The commission further announced that it would be taking legal action to stop MBC operating in Iraq.¹⁶

Lebanon

Armed conflict between Hezbollah and Israel

The Lebanese authorities have reported that at least 16 people died in Israeli air strikes on the municipal building in Nabatieh on 16.10.24. The city's mayor was reportedly among the dead. On the same day, the health ministry reported the first case of cholera this year. Only a week earlier, the WHO had warned that overcrowding in emergency shelters and hospitals was making outbreaks of diseases more likely.

On 18.10.24 the UN's monitoring mission in Lebanon (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL) issued a statement making it clear that it wished to keep the UN troops in the country. The UN mission currently has some 10,000 UN soldiers from 50 different countries in operation at 29 different positions in Lebanon along the border region with Israel. The Israeli government had repeatedly called for a withdrawal of the UN troops on the grounds that they were located in a war zone and that Hezbollah fighters were regularly taking cover behind them. According to UNIFIL, the UN soldiers have come under fire from the Israeli military on five occasions.

A report in an international daily newspaper on 18.10.24 states that the village of Mhaibib in the south of the country has been almost totally destroyed. Analyses of satellite images reportedly prove that around two dozen houses have been destroyed by what appear to have been controlled detonations. The Israeli military stated that it had dismantled a tunnel network of the Redwan Force, a special Hezbollah unit. According to reports in the media, the Mhaibib's residents had already left the village. Also on 18.10.24, Hezbollah released a press statement announcing the beginning of a new escalation in its fight against Israel.

On 19.10.24 a combat drone from Lebanon evaded the Israeli air defences and hit a building close to the prime minister's private residence in Caesarea, Israel. There were no casualties. On the same day, a total of around 180 projectiles were fired at Israel from Lebanon. According to Lebanese rescue workers, on 19.10.24 two people were killed when the car in which they were travelling was hit by what is presumed to have been an Israeli drone near to the Lebanese coastal city of Jounieh.

On 20.10.24 the Israeli air force carried out a series of air strikes all over the country on branches of the Al-Qard al-Hassan financial association. This association is said to be closely linked to Hezbollah. It has been subject to US sanctions since 2007. In Lebanon itself, Al-Qard al-Hassan is run as a charity organisation associated with Hezbollah which provides financial support for people who receive no assistance from the ailing mainstream banking sector. An Israeli army spokesman called on the people of Lebanon in Arabic to leave buildings in the vicinity of Al-Qard al-Hassan facilities before the air bombardment began. The organisation is reported to run some 30 branches throughout the country. Also on 20.10.24, the Israeli military stated that it had attacked a Hezbollah command centre and an underground weapons factory on the evening of 19.10.24.

According to reports in the media, more than 2,400 people have been killed as a result of the hostilities with Israel since October 2023.¹⁷

Montenegro

Final result of census published in Montenegro

According to current reports in the media, on 16.10.24 the Montenegrin statistical authority, MONSTAT, published the final results of the census which was carried out in December 2023. The results show a slight rise in Montenegro's total population of 0.6 % compared to the figures from the last census from 2011, to a current total of 623,633. The average age has risen by two and a half years, to 39.7. The ethnic breakdown also reveals slight changes: The share of all citizens who refer to themselves as Serbs has risen by more than 4 % compared to 2011; they remain the second-largest ethnic group in Montenegro, accounting for an approx. 8 % smaller share of the total population than the Montenegrins. According to MONSTAT, 41.12 % (2011: 45 %) of the population declared themselves to be Montenegrins, 32.93 % Serbs, 9.45 % Bosniaks, 4.7 % Albanians, 2.06 % Russians (marked increase coinciding with the beginning of the war in Ukraine) and 1.63 % Muslims. Just under 3 % declared no ethnic affiliation. When asked about their language, 36.2 % of respondents in the census answered that their native language was Montenegrin, while 43.5 % said their native tongue was Serbian. According to reports in the media, in the run-up to the census pro-Serbian parties in the governing coalition had announced that on completion of the census they may aim to initiate changes to the constitution regarding the status of Serbian in Montenegro.¹⁸

Nigeria

Kaduna State: Investigation into air strike on civilians

The Nigerian air forces stands accused of inadvertently bombing civilians in Kaduna State, northern Nigeria. This emerges from media reports citing people who live in the region concerned. At least 24 people reportedly died in the inadvertent bombing of a village in Giwa Local Government Area (LGA) in the north of Kaduna State on 27.09.24.

The incident is said to have occurred after an operation by the air force targeting active armed gangs and their hideouts in the region. There are reports that the air strike resulted from confusion as to the whereabouts of the actual targets. The military is investigating the incident.

A case of inadvertent bombing would not be the first lethal air strike by the military to kill civilians in recent times. According to reports in the media, it was in January 2024 that the Nigerian air force admitted responsibility for the first time for an inadvertent air strike which claimed civilian lives (cf. BN of 26.02.24).¹⁹

Palestinian territories / Israel

Gaza Strip: Current developments; humanitarian situation

According to information released by the Hamas-run health ministry on 15.10.24, at least 42,344 Palestinians have been killed and 99,013 injured in the Gaza Strip since the war began. The ministry does not officially differentiate between combatants and civilians. The figures cannot be independently verified. According to information released by the Israeli military on 15.10.24, a total of 353 members of the Israeli military have been killed and 2,345 injured since the series of ground offensives began.

Meanwhile, the war continues. The Israeli military has announced that it killed the leader of Hamas and the suspected mastermind behind the large-scale attack on Israel on 07.10.23, Yahya Sinwar, on 16.10.24.

According to information from the Hamas-run health ministry, at least 28 people, including a number of children, were killed in an air strike on a school in northern Gaza which was serving as a shelter on 17.10.24. The Israeli military has stated that the attack was aimed at members of Hamas and the so-called Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which they claim were operating from the school.

According to information from the UN, 84 % of the Gaza Strip was affected by evacuation orders on 15.10.24. The north of the Gaza Strip is particularly severely affected by a lack of relief supplies. All three hospitals in the north are running at extremely low capacity, due to a shortage of fuel, banked blood, medical materials and medicines for non-contagious diseases and on account of the continuing fighting in the region. No humanitarian food supplies have been able to reach the north since 02.10.24, as the border crossings there have remained closed.

The situation is escalating once again in the centre and south as well. 70 % of the population reportedly failed to receive their monthly food rations in September 2024. The complex security situation, fighting, looting, restricted access to certain areas and interruptions in the flow of supplies are reportedly still making it difficult to provision those in need. An analysis of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) indicates that some 133,000 people are currently experiencing the highest phase of food insecurity, denoting a "humanitarian catastrophe". This at least represents a fall compared to the 343,000 people who fell into this category in June 2024. In view of the decline in food aid, the IPC expects a renewed rise in the coming months, however.

In central Gaza, the second polio vaccination campaign has begun. The aim here is to vaccinate more than 92,000 children during temporary local pauses in the fighting which have been agreed with the Israeli military.²⁰

West Bank: Armed clashes

The increase in tension and violent clashes continues in the West Bank. 728 Palestinians have reportedly been killed since 07.10.23, for the most part members of armed groups. Two people have been killed in clashes with Israeli settlers. UN OCHA recorded a total of 32 attacks on Palestinian people and their property between 01.10. and 18.10.24. 23 Israeli nationals, including 16 members of the military, are reported to have been killed over the same period.²¹

Israel: Several killed in drone attack on military base

Four members of the military were killed and seven seriously injured when Hezbollah launched a drone attack on a military base in central Israel from Lebanon on 13.10.24. According to information released by the UN on 17.10.24, 16 Israelis have been killed since 07.10.23 in attacks by armed Palestinians from the West Bank.²²

Rwanda

Human rights violations in prisons and detention centres

Current reports in the press and from NGOs reveal serious human rights violations by Rwandan authorities in detention centres, including the torture of inmates. On 15.10.24, HRW criticised the lack of accountability on the part of Rwandan security services and those responsible in government. The HRW report additionally alleges that Rwanda "routinely" hinders investigations, including those conducted by international organisations such as the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross. A report by the Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research indicates that the country has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, at 637 prisoners per 100,000 head of the population (as per August 2023). Rwanda has been ruled by president Paul Kagame for three decades. NGOs accuse him of restricting the right to freedom of expression, the right to voice criticism and the right of political opposition.²³

Somalia

Attack in Mogadishu

At least seven people were killed and six injured in a suicide attack in a café in Mogadishu on 17.10.24. The attack took place close to the General Kaahiye Police Academy. Both civilians and members of the police force are reported to be among the dead. Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.²⁴

Sudan

Worsening of the humanitarian situation

According to the latest reports in the press, clashes have occurred once again between the rival forces of the Sudanese Army (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Humanitarian aid organisations are said to be leaving the region as a result. Local emergency relief facilities run by civilians have also been unable to contain the crisis. According to the UN, the military conflict has also caused the world's largest displacement crisis, with more than 11 million people having fled to refugee camps and neighbouring countries. The UN further reported at the beginning of October 2024 that famine and the outbreak of diseases such as cholera had further exacerbated the already critical humanitarian situation.²⁵

Syria

North-west: Escalation of violence

According to information from the UN's regional coordinator for humanitarian issues for Syria, at least 12 civilians were killed between 14.10. and 17.10.24 against the backdrop of the recent upsurge in fighting in the north-west of the country. In addition, a total of ten health facilities have been forced to discontinue their work.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Russian warplanes carried out a total of 28 air strikes on both military and civilian targets in rural Idlib and Latakia on 16.10.24. While military targets relating to the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, which controls large parts of Idlib, are said to have been hit, the Syrian Civil Defence organisation, which is also known as the White Helmets, has reported that a civilian furniture factory was also hit, killing ten employees and injuring 32. The bombardment by Syrian and Russian troops in areas of rural Idlib and Aleppo continues. According to a report by the media platform Syria TV, four civilian vehicles were attacked in Aleppo by drones loaded with explosives on 20.10.24.

In addition, armed clashes broke out between two factions of the so-called Syrian National Army, which controls the north of Aleppo. Tensions which had been rising for some weeks between the so-called Al-Sham Front and the so-called United Troops escalated into armed clashes on 16.10.24. On 17.10.24 the White Helmets brokered a truce to enable the evacuation of wounded civilians in the affected regions.²⁶

North-east: Shelling of pro-government bases

It has been reported in the media that three positions of the Syrian military in the towns of Khasham, Marat and Al-Tabiya were shelled from the areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) on 14.10.24. Additional Iranian positions in Hatlah and Huwayja Sakr are also said to have been hit.

Several media have attributed the attacks to the US military and/or the US-led coalition to fight IS. Two media portals reported that four civilians had been injured.²⁷

Türkiye

Fethullah Gülen dies in the USA

It has been reported in the press that the Islamic preacher and leader of the Gülen movement, Fethullah Gülen, died in a hospital in the USA at the age of 83 on 20.10.24. He is said to have suffered from dementia, diabetes and kidney failure. He had lived in Pennsylvania, USA since 1999.

Gülen was accused by the Turkish government under president Erdoğan of having been behind the attempted coup of 15.07.16. His movement was classified in Türkiye as a terrorist organisation. Fethullah Gülen always denied any involvement in the coup. The Turkish authorities continue to clamp down on suspected supporters of the movement. The Turkish justice minister stated in July 2024 that a total of 705,172 individuals had been investigated for suspected links to the Gülen movement since the attempted coup in July 2016. He said that as per July 2024, 13,251 people were either being held on remand or serving prison sentences handed down in trials relating to the Gülen movement.²⁸

Arrests of suspected members of the Gülen movement

According to reports in the media, on 08.10.24 the chief public prosecutor's office in Ankara issued arrest warrants for 39 people for alleged links to the Gülen movement, including serving and former military officers and former military cadets.

The suspects are accused of having communicated with their contacts within the Gülen movement via pay phones or so-called pre-paid landlines at locations such as kiosks, grocery stores and markets in various districts of Ankara. The so-called "pay phone investigations" are based on recordings of telephone conversations. The chief public prosecutor is proceeding on the assumption that a supporter of the Gülen movement used the same pay phone to call all of his contacts one after the other. When a suspected supporter of the movement appears in the call logs, it is assumed that other numbers which were called directly before or after this call also belong to people with links to the Gülen movement. The authorities do not have the actual contents of the relevant calls at their disposal, however.²⁹

Force 5.9 earthquake in Malatya province

It has been reported in the press that an earthquake of force 5.9 occurred on 16.10.24, with Malatya as its epicentre. According to urban development minister Murat Kurum in neighbouring Elazığ province, over 20 buildings were seriously damaged and 517 buildings suffered minor damage in the earthquake. In Malatya there are said to be 18 buildings with minor damage. Interior minister Ali Yerlikaya stated that no-one had been killed, but 187 people had sustained minor injuries. 43 of those injured were treated as in-patients at nearby hospitals.

Malatya was also hit in the earthquake on 06.02.23. In this earthquake, more than 53,000 people died in Türkiye alone, including over 1,000 in Malatya. According to the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), 120,000 people are still living in containers in Malatya province.³⁰

Ukraine

Civilian casualties

According to information from the responsible regional governor, two women were killed by a Russian drone attack in the Kherson region on 14.10.24. The Ukrainian authorities report that one person was killed by Russian shelling in the port of Odessa on the same day. According to information released by the regional military administration on 15.10.24, one person was killed by a Russian air strike in the Mykolaiv region.³¹

Course of the war and president Zelenskyy's "victory plan"

The competent governor stated on 16.10.24 that the evacuation of the city of Kupiansk (Kharkiv region) had been ordered, because the authorities were anticipating difficulties in maintaining supplies to the population there due to the advance of Russian forces. He stated that it was already impossible to guarantee restoration of the energy and water infrastructure by repair crews on account of continual Russian shelling. Consequently, some 7,000 people are to be taken to evacuation centres in Kharkiv. The evacuation order also applied to the small town of Borova in the Izium district (Kharkiv region). Similarly, the people remaining in Pokrovsk (Donetsk region) were also ordered to leave the city. On 16.10.24 the Ukrainian general staff reported intense fighting at the sector of the front in the village of Kurakhivka, near Kurakhove (Donetsk region). The staff stated that the Ukrainian positions were in danger of being encircled as a result of the Russian advance. It was reported in the media on 19.10.24 that a further exchange of prisoners entailing the return of 95 persons from each of the two warring parties had taken place on the previous day. The exchange was brokered by the UAE.

After president Zelenskyy's so-called "victory plan" had been declared to the Ukrainian parliament on 16.10.24, on the following days it was presented to the western allies. It comprises the following points: (1) unconditional invitation to join NATO; (2) strengthening of defence, including clearance of long-range western weapons for use on Russian territory and expansion of the war on Russian territory; (3) arming Ukraine as a means of deterrence, i.e. production and stationing of conventional weapons, investment by western armaments companies and adequate funding by western partners; (4) prevention of access to Ukrainian natural resources by the Russian side; (5) after the end of the war, deployment of war-tested and militarily experienced Ukraine as a security power for the security of Europe and NATO, including the possible replacement of US troops stationed in Europe. Initial reactions have already been forthcoming from within Ukraine and abroad: NATO secretary-general Rutte reacted reservedly to the idea of swift accession to NATO. Moscow criticised the plan as a "dictate of the USA" and an "attempt to draw the west into a direct war with Russia," noting that an end to the war would only be possible when Ukraine recognised the "futility of its policies". Former president Poroshenko's Ukrainian opposition faction criticised the plan as unrealistic, arguing that it did not set out any concrete steps but consisted solely of demands upon the country's partners without stating any measures of its own. Presidential advisor Serhiy Leshchenko stated on 16.10.24 that president Zelenskyy is being urged by US politicians from both parties to mobilise the country's 18- to 25 year-olds, a proposal which Zelenskyy rejected on 18.10.24. Under the current provisions, this age group is required to register for military service and is not allowed to leave Ukraine at the present time.³²

Energy infrastructure

In preparation for the third winter of the war, it was reported in the media on 15.10.24 that president Zelenskyy had discussed measures to protect the energy infrastructure with the competent ministers and energy utilities. Air defence and cyber warfare methods are to be more heavily involved in protecting the supply network, for example. Plans have reportedly also been elaborated for the fast repair of damage and for decentralisation of the energy utilities. Prime minister Denys Shmyhal stated on 15.10.24 that Ukraine had sufficient supplies of natural gas and coal to endure the winter.³³

Conference on mine clearing and poll among Ukrainian refugees on plans to return to their home country

It has been reported in the media that more than 40 countries convened for a conference in Switzerland on 17./18.10.24 to discuss measures for the humanitarian clearance of mines and residual munitions in Ukraine. In a statement they pledged their support with the "fast and safe restoration of agricultural land", the "economic and social re-integration" of victims and the production of mine clearing equipment in Ukraine. According to the media reports, mines and unexploded residual munitions have resulted in more than 1,000 casualties in Ukraine since 24.02.24, including 300 deaths. Hundreds of thousands of mines and other residual munitions are believed to be in the country. Ukraine has reportedly already cleared 35,000 km², also in order to enable the resumption of farming operations. While experts estimate that only 10 % of the surface area may be contaminated with munitions, they nevertheless recognise that the entire area must be scoured, which will affect the lives of more than six million people. The globally operative NGO Handicap International is reported to be carrying out training in the field on how to instruct people to assess risks "so as to enable them to live safely in an area until the mine clearers arrive." The government estimates the clearing costs at over EUR 30 billion.

In a poll conducted by the ifo Center for Migration and Development Economics among Ukrainian refugees in June 2024, a quarter of respondents stated that they do not intend to return to Ukraine in the long term. The institute

also notes that 35 % of respondents do wish to return as soon as their home country is safe again. 4 % stated that they are planning to return soon irrespective of the security situation, 11 % have already returned and one quarter of those surveyed are undecided. The longer the war goes on, the greater the percentage of refugees who can envisage a future outside of Ukraine.³⁴

Venezuela

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press: Shut-down of La Voz, Freedom on the Net report, revocation of passports

The temporary shut-down of the print newspaper La Voz, initially until May 2025, was ordered by the SENIAT tax authority on 03.10.24 on grounds of default.

At least 405 print media, as well as radio and television stations, have been closed in the past 20 years.

The 2024 Freedom on the Net report by Freedom House recently recorded numerous restrictions on the freedom of expression and freedom of the press in the digital domain as well. Negative factors mentioned in the report include both restricted access (costs of internet contracts, power failures) and the state censorship of independent news sources, e.g. through regular blocking of digital media websites. Deliberate disinformation and propaganda in favour of the government and campaigns aimed at discrediting the opposition are also reported. The report observes that personal data can be tapped via the government portal of the Patria system, which has to be used in order to access social benefits. Citing a number of sources, the report also criticises the government's VenApp in connection with data security breaches and use of the app as a surveillance tool or as an instrument to support repression measures in the wake of the 2024 presidential elections. Furthermore, the report notes that any comments critical of the government which are posted online may have legal consequences. This is borne out, for example, by arrests of ordinary users in the reporting period after they had voiced comments critical of the government in WhatsApp groups or on social media. This is seen to be increasingly narrowing the scope for online social debate. The report observes that fear-induced self-censorship is common practice.

In addition, on 13.10.24 the Venezuelan NGO Laboratorio de Paz reported in connection with an interview with the Financial Times that the passport documents of at least 40 media representatives and defenders of human rights had been declared null and void in the aftermath of the presidential elections. The report sees this as an effective means of intimidating critical voices which comes at comparatively little political cost while restricting such actors' room for manoeuvre substantially.³⁵

Supreme election council (CNE): CNE head Delpino discharged, investigations for treason ordered

On 17.10.24 the pro-government parliament discharged the pro-opposition head of the supreme election council (CNE), Juan Carlos Delpino, and appointed his previous deputy in his place. In the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election, Delpino had voiced criticism of president Maduro's alleged victory, citing a lack of evidence to substantiate his claim to power (cf. BN of 02.09.24). He also failed to attend the announcement of the election result. The parliament has additionally called on the chief public prosecutor's office to initiate investigations into Delpino, who is currently residing abroad, for treason.³⁶

Further arrests of foreign nationals

Interior minister Cabello (PSUV) announced on 17.10.24 that once again (cf. BN of 16.09.24) five foreign individuals, including three US nationals, one Bolivian and one Peruvian had been arrested on suspicion of conspiracy and/or terrorism.

In addition, the humanitarian organisation Danish Refugee Council (DRC) announced on 18.10.24 that one of its Colombian employees who had travelled to Venezuela to carry out project work had been arrested. No further details are known with regard to this incident, however.³⁷

Closure of two NGOs for LGBTIQ rights

Two NGOs (Venezuela Igualitaria and País Narrado) which had been championing the rights of LGBTIQ people have discontinued their activities in the country at least temporarily, on account of the prevailing economic and socio-political situation, the attendant narrowing of the scope for societal actors and the new NGO law (cf. BN of 19.08.24). In a statement on Twitter on 12.10.24, Venezuela Igualitaria announced that in discontinuing its activities

it was prioritising the physical and mental well-being of its staff in the current situation. The NGO also cites a shortage of financial resources. According to reports in the media, the founder of País Narrado asserts that championing human rights with regard to the most diverse issues presently entails substantial risks, including threats and attacks by the authoritarian government.³⁸

Yemen

Attack by USA on Houthi arms caches

On 16.10.24 the US military carried out air strikes on Houthi arms caches in Yemen.

These were reportedly the first such attacks to be carried out using B2 stealth bombers. The Houthis announced via the Al-Marisah news channel which they control that a response would be forthcoming. The Houthis have attacked some 80 merchant ships with drones and rockets since the beginning of the Gaza war in October 2023.³⁹

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

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