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Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

11 November 2019

Algeria

Protests continue

Six weeks before the planned presidential election on 12.12.19, popular protests continue, with the people demanding a totally new government and genuine reforms. They are calling for the election to be postponed so that new candidates can run on manifestos originating from the people. General Ahmed Gaid Salah sees the election as offering a way out of the current crisis and is keeping to the planned date. In recent weeks security measures have been stepped up, roads blocked, rail services to the capital interrupted and the internet obstructed to prevent the people from taking part in the demonstrations.

Benin

Dialogue to settle domestic political crisis leads to amnesty bill, amendment of the constitution

On 07.11.19 president Patrice Talon signed off a law providing for amnesty for all offences committed in connection with the protests which accompanied the parliamentary elections of 28.04.19. It applies to demonstrators and security forces alike and covers the period between April and June 2019. The amnesty has come in for criticism in view of the fact that at least four demonstrators were allegedly killed by security forces. Talon also signed off a bill to amend the constitution, covering aspects such as the staging of parliamentary elections, the funding of political parties, the appointment of a leader of the opposition and establishment of the office of vice-president. Parliament is now to enact several new laws in order to implement the bill.

The measures are the outcome of talks held from 10.12. to 12.10.19 between president Patrice Talon and nine parties, most of which are closely affiliated to the president, aimed at settling the domestic political crisis which has prevailed since the parliamentary elections of April 2019. A number of important opposition parties were not invited to the talks. Agreement was reached on 18 recommendations, on the basis of which a commission drafted corresponding bills.

Only a small number of parties allied to the president met the stringent conditions for admission to the parliamentary elections on 28.04.19. To all intents and purposes, this meant that all key opposition parties were excluded from the elections. This led to protests involving violence.

Bolivia

President Morales steps down

After 13 years in office, president Evo Morales announced his resignation on 10.11.19. He was evidently bowing to pressure from the military and police, who had called on him to resign after weeks of unrest. Morales sees himself as the victim of a coup, tweeting that the police had an illegal arrest warrant against him and that violent groups had attacked his home. Mexico's foreign minister, Marcelo Ebrard, has offered Morales asylum in his country, pointing out that 20 members of the Bolivian government and parliament have already sought shelter in the Mexican embassy in La Paz. Several ministers resigned along with Morales, including vice-president Álvaro García Linera, the president of the chamber of deputies, Víctor Borda, and the president of the electoral tribunal, María Choque Quispe.

The political tensions in the country were sparked by the presidential election on 20.10.19. As the votes were being counted, there was every indication that neither Morales nor the candidate fielded by the opposition alliance, former president Carlos Mesa, would win through in the first round. The election authority interrupted the count, however, declaring Morales the winner 24 hours later. Mass protests and clashes between supporters of the two camps ensued throughout the country, with at least three people killed and hundreds injured up to the end of last week. Morales still has many supporters, especially among the indigenous peoples. He eventually announced fresh elections, but the situation remained tense.

Burkina Faso

37 killed in attack on bus convoy

The Canadian mining company Semafo reported on 06.11.19 that suspected militant Islamists had attacked a convoy of five buses accompanied by a military escort which were transporting employees, customers and suppliers of Semafo around 40 km from the Boungou gold mine (Tapoa province, East region). According to official information, 38 people were killed and 60 injured. Interviews which Reuters has conducted with survivors of the attack indicate that the number of fatalities was substantially higher, however.

China

Internet surveillance

For the fourth year in succession, the US non-governmental organisation Freedom House has identified China as the country with the most severe restrictions on the internet. In this year's Freedom on the Net report, which was published on 05.11.19, Freedom House points to an unprecedented level of censorship in the People's Republic in connection with the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre (June 1989) and the protests in Hong Kong. The report states that China is a leading country in the development, application and export of tools to monitor social media.

The report examines freedom on the internet in 65 countries in which 87 % of all internet users worldwide live.

Hong Kong: Protests

The protest movement called a general strike on 11.11.19. In the early hours, demonstrators began blocking the underground and setting up road blocks in various parts of the city. Teaching was suspended at several universities. The police used tear gas against the demonstrators. In the Sai Wan Ho district a policeman shot at a demonstrator with live ammunition, seriously injuring him.

The movement had resolved to step up its protests following the death of a demonstrator. The victim, who fell from a multi-storey car park in unexplained circumstances in the course of violent clashes with police on 04.11.19, died of his injuries on 08.11.19. Clashes occurred between the police and demonstrators at vigils and protest marches held on the same day. Tens of thousands of people took part in a vigil on 09.11.19. Protests sparked by the death took place in Hong Kong shopping centres on 10.11.19, accompanied by violent clashes with the police.

Hong Kong: Knife attack on MP loyal to Peking

On 06.11.19 MP Junius Ho, who is known as a supporter of the central government, was the victim of a knife attack in his constituency of Tuen Mun during an election rally for the local elections which are to be held on 24.11.19. He was taken to hospital with injuries. Critics accuse Ho of having close ties to criminal gangs who have allegedly been involved in attacks on supporters of the protest movement.

DR Congo

25 ADF rebels killed

The army reported on 09.11.19 that 25 ADF rebels have been killed to date in the offensive launched on 30.10.19 against the ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) Islamist rebel organisation which originated in Uganda.

The ADF has been active for more than twenty years now along the Ugandan-Congolese border, particularly in the area around the city of Beni (North Kivu province). IS has claimed responsibility for various ADF attacks.

ICC sentences ex-rebel leader Ntaganda to 30 years' imprisonment

On 07.11.19 the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the The Hague imposed a sentence of 30 years' imprisonment on the former militia leader and former general of the Congolese army, Bosco Ntaganda, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The time which he has spent in custody since March 2013 pending trial before the ICC is to be deducted from this sentence. Ntaganda was the military leader of the Congolese rebel movement UPC (Union of Congolese Patriots) and its armed wing, the FPLC (Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo), which fought in Congo's northern province of Ituri in 2002/2003, recruiting fighters primarily from the Hema ethnic group. The ICC had found in its ruling on 08.07.19 that Ntaganda and other UPC leaders had jointly pursued the aim of destroying the Lendu ethnic group. He was also found to have been a direct perpetrator of crimes. He was found guilty on all 18 charges which had been brought against him, including murder, attacks on civilians, rape and pillage, committed in each instance as war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. An appeal has already been lodged against the ICC's guilty verdict. An appeal can be lodged against the sentence within 30 days.

Ethiopia

Prime minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Abiy threatens political rivals

The head of the Ethiopian government, Abiy Ahmed, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize a few weeks ago for his efforts to establish peace and reconciliation on the Horn of Africa and for the reforms in his own country, has launched a verbal attack on his political critics. Abiy put out a statement insisting that "We will continue uprooting the weed and taking care of the wheat. And we will not abandon the wheat because of the weed." Political observers have criticised his choice of words as racist rhetoric unbecoming a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Abiy's statement was evidently aimed at the Oromo activist and media entrepreneur Jawar Mohammed, who he holds responsible for the bloody clashes on 23.10.19 which left at least 86 people dead. The clashes followed on from protests by mainly young Oromo (so-called Qeerroo) in response to alleged police actions against Jawar (BN of 28.10.19). Jawar only returned to his native country from exile in the USA in mid-2018. Having initially supported Abiy's reform plans, he has recently taken an increasingly critical stance and enjoys broad support particularly among radical members of the Oromo - the largest ethnic group in the country, to which Abiy himself also belongs and which ultimately propelled him into office. The Qeerroo see their hopes of more influence, rights, land and jobs as having been frustrated.

India

Ruling in favour of Hindus in Ayodhya conflict

In the decades-old dispute over a site in Ayodhya which is considered sacred, the Supreme Court has ruled that the Hindus should be allowed to build a temple there. Muslims are to receive a separate site on which to build a mosque. Hindus revere the site as the place of birth of their deity Rama. In 1992, the Babri mosque dating from the 16th century which stood on the same site was stormed and completely destroyed by tens of thousands of Hindus. 2,000 people died in the ensuing unrest.

In view of the significance of this ruling, a ban on public assembly was imposed in the most populous northern federal state of Uttar Pradesh with its population of 200 million, schools were temporarily closed and security measures stepped up. At least 45 people had been arrested up to 10.11.19 on suspicion of propagating seditious content in social media.

Iran

Uprising against Iran in the Near East

The continuing serious protests in Iraq are increasingly targeting Iran directly. The aim of the protesters is to curb the regional influence of the Islamic Republic, whose leadership has been investing great efforts and sums of money in its Shiite power axis from Teheran across Baghdad and Damascus to Beirut for some years now. Since mid-October anti-Iranian actions have also been emerging in Lebanon. The demonstrators' demands for the sectarian system of proportional representation to be dissolved and for a government with competent experts to be appointed are also aimed at the claim to power of the pro-Iranian and Iran-backed Shiite Hezbollah.

Iraq

Death toll grows as protests continue

Protests continue in Iraq (cf. BN of 04.11.19). The main focus of the demonstrations remains in Baghdad and the southern and central provinces, in particular Babil, Basra, Dhi Qar, Karbala, Missan, Muthana, Najaf, Qadisiyah and Wassit, with isolated demonstrations also occurring in other provinces. Students joined the demonstrations once again on 10.11.19.

According to official Iraqi figures, at least 319 people have died in the anti-government mass protests in Iraq since the beginning of October. In a joint statement on 10.11.19, president Barham Salih, prime minister Adel Abdel Mahdi and parliamentary speaker Mohammed al-Halbusi undertook to fight corruption and work towards a reform of electoral law, noting that a review of the existing political system and the constitution was needed.

Tear gas grenades deployed

Iraqi security forces have been deploying military tear gas grenades since the second wave of protests broke out (cf. BN of 28.10.19). Human rights organisations allege that the grenades are thrown indiscriminately into crowds or aimed directly at demonstrators (head/chest height). Use of the grenades leads to breathing difficulties, culminating at worst in suffocation, and to skin burns.

Intermittent shut-down of the internet

According to a dpa release of 10.11.2019, the NetBlocks organisation has reported that the internet has been only partially accessible for almost a week. Only 20 to 35 per cent of users have reportedly had internet access for prolonged periods over the past month.

Measures against activists

On 05.11.19 a number of activists were arrested by Iraqi security forces in various cities and provinces, including Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, Karbala und Maysan. The security forces reportedly carried out the mass arrests without corresponding warrants.

The Supreme Judicial Council published a statement on 25.10.19 to the effect that Article 2 of the counter-terrorism act is to take effect in case of the destruction of or damage to public property or violence against security forces (UNAMI, 2nd report, p. 5).

Report by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq – UNAMI

On 05.11.19 UNAMI published a further report on the demonstrations in the period from 25.10. to 04.11.19, documenting part of the violence.

According to the report, initial findings indicate numerous instances of human rights violations and abuse, including lethal violence against demonstrators, the disproportionate use of tear gas and flash grenades, continued efforts to restrict media coverage of demonstrations, abductions and many arrests.

Following the protests in Baghdad and various provinces in central and southern Iraq from 01.10. to 09.10.19, mass demonstrations flared up again on 25.10.19 in protest against state corruption, unemployment and a lack of basic provisions, among other things. It is further reported that the demonstrators showed great frustration at the fact that people have been killed and injured as a result of disproportionate violence by the security

forces as well as wilful killings by armed groups during the earlier demonstrations. The demonstrators have additionally begun to call for fundamental changes to the political system, the report explains. In contrast to the earlier demonstrations, which primarily involved young working-class men and activists from civil society, these demonstrations witnessed growing participation by demonstrators from demographically diverse strata of society, including a significant number of women, older people, school pupils, professionals, students and teachers. It is reported that the main focus of the demonstrations remains in Baghdad and the southern and central provinces, in particular Babil, Basra, Dhi Qar, Karbala, Missan, Muthana, Najaf, Qadisiyah and Wassit, with isolated demonstrations also occurring in other provinces.

Syrian refugees

IOM reports that a total of 14,506 people crossed the border into Iraq between 14.10.19 and 05.11.19. The refugees are being sheltered at the camps in Bardarash, Domiz and Gawilan. All new arrivals are currently being bussed to the Gawilan camp in Ninive province.

Air raids by the Turkish air force

The Turkish air force flew air raids in the Sinjar region again on 04.11.19 and 05.11.19. The US Commission for Religious Freedom denounced the closeness of the air raids to civilian residential areas.

Kosovo

Final result of parliamentary election confirms change of power

The final result of the parliamentary election held on 06.10.19 (cf. BN of 09.10.19) was announced on 07.11.19, confirming the end of the predominant role played by president Hashin Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo's (PDK). The left-wing Vetevendosje movement (Self-Defence - LLV), which has been considered a radical force to date, became the strongest force, taking 26.2 % of the vote with its front runner, Albin Kurti. Another opposition party, in the form of the moderate conservative Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) polled 24.9 per cent with its front runner, the lawyer Vyosa Osmani.

Thaci's previously governing PDK was voted out of power. The party which evolved from the former UCK liberation army had largely dominated Kosovar politics since the country's split from Serbia in 1999.

Coalition negotiations nearing completion

Since the election the two winning parties, Vetevendosje (LLV) and LDK, have been negotiating on a coalition government to be led by Albin Kurti. With a combined total of 61 seats, they have an absolute majority and do not require any further coalition partners. Work teams have successfully concluded their meetings to harmonise the parties' manifestos for a future joint government. The party leaders, Albin Kurti and Isa Mustafa, are now expected to conclude a coalition agreement. The parties have agreed to form a government with less ministries and less deputy ministers. In addition, women are to make up 30 % of the cabinet. It is hoped that the new government will push through long overdue reforms. It remains to be seen whether and how progress will be made in the gridlocked dialogue with Serbia. To date, Vetevendosje under Albin Kurti's leadership has always been opposed to any compromises in dealings with Serbia.

Lebanon

Protests continue in Beirut and other cities

The protests which have been going on since 17.10.19 are continuing, despite Saad Hariri's announcement that he was stepping down (cf. BN of 04.11.19). President Michel Aoun has reportedly requested Hariri to stay in office until a new prime minister has been elected. Pupils and students joined the demonstrations on 06.11.19. Roads and entrances to public buildings, ministries or state enterprises which are considered corrupt have been blocked in various parts of the country in a show of civil disobedience.

On 08.11.19 Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report on disturbances, the use of force and arrests during the protests. The situation has remained largely peaceful to date.

Libya

Fighting in the south of Tripoli

There have been repeated reports of artillery fire and bombing raids on Wadi Rabea, Souq al-Khamis and other parts of Tripoli, with civilians among the casualties (including two on 10.11.19).

Alleged involvement of foreign states

Al Jazeera announced on 09.11.19 that a new UN report to be published in December refers to repeated breaches of the arms embargo which the Security Council has imposed against Libya. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, Jordan and Sudan are said to be named explicitly in the report, according to which the UAE is allegedly supplying Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) above all with drones and air defence systems and Sudan has sent some 1,000 militiamen to secure Benghazi and Al-Jufra so as to free up troops for the offensive on Tripoli.

Russia denies presence of mercenaries

Following repeated accusations that have appeared in various media, including articles in the Washington Post and the New York Times, to the effect that around 200 Russian mercenaries are fighting on Haftar's side in Libya, the Russian foreign ministry denied any knowledge of the matter on 07.11.19. The claims arose after the bodies of suspected Russian nationals were found among members of the LNA who were killed in the fighting around Sabea.

Morocco

Death sentence confirmed

A court of appeal has upheld the death sentences on the three principal defendants found guilty of murdering Scandinavian backpackers. In the case of the fourth defendant, another court of appeal has similarly commuted the sentence of life imprisonment into a death sentence.

While the death sentence is imposed in Morocco, it has not been executed since 1993, owing to a moratorium.

Recognition of illegitimate children

The interior ministry is seeking to simplify the entry of illegitimate children in the civil register. They are estimated to number around 83,000. Registering children from marriages solemnized by religious ceremony only and without a civil marriage certificate has been difficult to date. Unregistered children can already encounter difficulties when seeking to register for schools, for example.

Pakistan/India

Indian Sikh pilgrims visit shrine in Pakistan

On 10.11.19 the first 700 Sikh pilgrims from India enjoyed visa-free passage through the corridor to their shrine in Kartarpur, Pakistan. Among them was India's former prime minister, Manmohan Singh. The corridor connects the Dera Baba Nanak shrine on the Indian side with the Darbar Sahib gurdwara on the Pakistani side, where the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, is said to have spent the final years of his life (cf. BN of 16.09.19).

Russian Federation

Jehovah's Witness sentenced to prison term

On 05.11.19 a court in the Siberian city of Tomsk sentenced Sergey Klimov to six years' imprisonment as an organiser of an extremist organisation. Klimov had denied leading the local association of Jehovah's Witnesses and cited the religious freedom which is guaranteed in the constitution. Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned as a so-called extremist organisation in Russia since April 2017. In addition, the Russian Orthodox church, which is the de facto state church, opposes the proselytising Jehovah's Witnesses as a heretical sect.

Somalia

Five suspected Islamists executed in Somalia

Five suspected terrorists were publicly executed in the semi-autonomous Puntland region on 07.11.19. A military court in the port of Boassaso had found the the men, aged between 19 and 39, guilty of having killed dozens of soldiers and police officers. Four of those executed allegedly belonged to Al-Shabaab, the fifth to Islamic State.

The death penalty is imposed in Somalia above all by military courts. According to Amnesty International, 13 people were executed in Somalia last year - half as many as in 2017.

Syria

US forces in Deir ez-Zor and Hasakah

US president Donald Trump announced on 01.11.19 that a troop presence would be maintained to secure the oil fields in the territories in north-east Syria which are under the control of the allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). On 07.11.19 a Pentagon spokesperson added that the local administration would pursue oil production and stated that the US mission of around 500 to 600 soldiers would serve to protect the strategic source of revenue for the allied SDF as well as securing the remaining SDF territory in broader terms.

The largest oil fields in this territory are situated to the east of the Euphrates in Deir es-Zor, which has a majority Arab population and where support for the Kurdish-dominated administration is not particularly strong. To date, the SDF administration has sold the oil at local level or to the Syrian central government in Damascus.

Turkey standing by resettlement plans

During a press conference in Budapest on 07.11.19, Turkish president Erdoğan reiterated his wish to provide up to two million Syrian refugees who are currently in Turkey with a new home in the occupied territories in northern Syria as soon as these are freed of Kurdish militias. One week previously he had announced his intention to build one or more towns for Syrian refugees between Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn. Turkish state media spoke of an investment project totalling 26 billion US dollars.

The Turkish government claims that the USA and Russia are currently failing to keep to their promises to keep their Kurdish partners out of the 30 km-wide border territory. The USA and Russia counter that the agreement is largely working.

Turkish-occupied territories: Clashes with civilian population

Clashes with civilians have occurred during joint patrols by Russian and Turkish units. In many places, Kurdish demonstrators threw shoes and stones at the armoured vehicles, which responded by shooting tear gas into the crowds. A demonstrator died on 08.11.19 when a Turkish military vehicle allegedly drove through a demonstrating crowd.

A member of staff of the UN special envoy for Syria noted on 08.11.19 that approx. 200,000 had been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of the Turkish offensive around one month ago. She said that almost half of these people were currently still living in refugee camps and other emergency accommodation. 92 civilians have reportedly been killed to date in the course of the military operation Peace Spring.

Attacks in and around Tal Abyad

A car bomb exploded at a market in the border town of Tal Abyad on 02.11.19. At least thirteen people are reported to have died, with more than 30 injured. The victims included both fighters belonging to Turkey's Arab allies and civilians. The Turkish government blamed the attack on the Kurdish YPG militia.

On 10.11.19 at least eight people died in Suluk, a village to the south of Tal Abyad, when a lorry exploded outside a baker's.

Bombing in Idlib causing many civilian casualties

On 08.11.19 a UN spokesperson called on Russia and the Assad government to end the fighting with the opposition in Idlib's residential areas. He said that more than 60 medical facilities had come under fire in the

past six months alone. At least twelve people died last week in attacks on a school, a hospital and several residential buildings. Almost 40 people were injured.

Tajikistan

17 killed in attack on border post in Tajikistan

At least 17 people were killed in an attack on a guard post at the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan some 50 kilometres from the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, on 06.11.19. According to the Tajik authorities, the dead comprise 15 attackers, one soldier and one police officer. The interior ministry has reported that four attackers were arrested. A group of around 20 masked men attacked the post at the border with Uzbekistan in the early hours of 06.11.19. The ministry published pictures of several dead bodies lying alongside burned-out vehicles. The authorities have blamed the attack on fighters of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist militia from Afghanistan. Tajikistan is situated on the border with Afghanistan and is the poorest of the former Soviet republics. The conflict-riven country has been under authoritarian rule by Emomali Rachmon since 1992. Back in mid-September 2019, four people were killed and many injured in a border clash between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Tanzania

Ban on marriage under 18 upheld

The Supreme Court in Dar es Salaam has rejected a petition from the government for the minimum legal age for marriage to be lowered from 18 to 14. This follows on from a ruling by the court in 2016 which found marriage under the age of 18 to be unconstitutional and instructed the government to raise the minimum age for marriage to 18. The public prosecutor's office appealed against the ruling, however, seeing it as a threat to traditional and religious values. The court upheld the decision on the grounds that it was discriminatory to marry off girls aged under 18. The government now has one year to adapt the laws to the ban.

Tanzania has one of the highest rates of early marriage worldwide. Around one in three girls are married off before their 18th birthday. In some regions they are under eleven years of age when they marry.

Thailand

Escalation of violence

15 people, including security personnel, were killed and several injured in an attack on the town of Lam Phaya in Muang district in the southern Thai province of Yala last week. So-called "defence volunteers" provide protection in the face of the tense situation in the border territory.

Yemen

Accord between government in Yemen and separatists in the south

After months of fighting, Yemen's internationally recognised government and the separatists of the Southern Transitional Council (STC) have agreed on a peace plan and power sharing. The UN special envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths, said on 05.11.19 that the accord was an important step towards a peaceful solution to the Yemen conflict.

A government comprised of ministers from the two parties to the conflict in equal shares is to be formed in the next 30 days. In return, the separatists' military units are to place themselves under the command of the defence ministry within two months. The separatists are also to be involved in the UN's future peace negotiations for Yemen. The accord further provides for both the government troops and the STC fighters to withdraw from the area around the port of Aden. Currently serving as the temporary seat of the Yemeni government, the city fell under the control of the STC in August. Up until this point, the STC had been fighting alongside the

Yemeni government against the Houthi militias. In future, Saudi troops are to provide for peace and security in the city.

Saudi Arabia holding talks with Houthi rebels

Saudi Arabia has reported that it is holding talks with the Houthi rebels in Yemen in order to bring the war to an end. This is the first official confirmation of a dialogue between the two sides.

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