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# Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Algeria – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

## 17 March 2025

### **Three Algerians and two Frenchmen sentenced for proselytising**

On 11.03.25, the Tizi Ouzou Court of Appeal confirmed the first-instance judgement against several defendants who were sentenced to two years' imprisonment without probation and a fine of DZD 100,000 each (approx. EUR 687, as of 17.03.25) on the charges of "inciting a Muslim to change religion" and "attacking national security".

Two other defendants were acquitted of the charge of "inciting a Muslim to change religion" but were instead sentenced to a fine of DZD 20,000 for "illegally harbouring a foreigner without prior registration".

The media reports do not provide any information about the religion of the accused, but they are presumed to be Christians.<sup>1</sup>

### **New charges in the trial against Boualem Sansal**

According to media reports, the French-Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, who was arrested at Algiers airport on 16.03.25, was brought before a judge on the morning of 13.03.25. The charges against Sansal, who is accused of offences such as undermining the integrity of state security under Article 87 of the penal code, have reportedly been extended to include espionage.

The reasons for Sansal's detention were not clearly explained by the authorities. Observers suspect that the reason for the judicial action was a recently published interview he gave to the French media outlet *Frontières*, which is associated with the right-wing political spectrum centred around *Éric Zemmour* and whose strategic committee Sansal belongs to. In it, he commented on the issue of borders and sovereignty claims in the territories of Algeria and Morocco and in the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Sansal, who is 80 years old and is seriously ill, went on hunger strike in mid-February after his lawyer was refused a visa to enter the country. Sansal had been pressurised by the Ministry of Justice to find a "non-Jewish" lawyer.

In the recently published report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Algeria is criticised, among other things, for the fact that several activists and journalists have been imprisoned in recent years on the basis of vague anti-terrorism laws.<sup>2</sup>

## 31 March 2025

### **French-Algerian writer sentenced to five years in prison**

Boualem Sansal was sentenced to five years in prison without parole and a fine of DZD 500,000 (approximately

EUR 3,500 as of 31.03.25) at the criminal court in Dar al-Beida near Algiers on 27.03.25 after a summary trial in which he was denied contact with his French lawyer.

Sansal was arrested at Algiers airport on 16.11.24 when he entered the country and has been held in custody ever since (cf. BN of 17.03.25). The public prosecutor's office accuses the writer, who is considered to be an outspoken critic of the Algerian government, of undermining the country's national security due to statements he made in an interview and demanded a prison sentence of 10 years at the opening of the trial on 20.03.25. European governments and supporters of Sansal have criticised the trial, claiming the sentence was politically motivated.

Various media had indicated that Sansal could potentially be pardoned by President Tebboune at the end of Ramadan but said that Sansal would have to refrain from appealing the judgement.<sup>3</sup>

## 28 April 2025

### **Diplomatic tensions escalate, new law governing general mobilisation**

Algeria's government adopted a new law on 20.04.25 governing the general mobilisation of the population. The law is said to aim to facilitate the application of Article 99 of the constitution, which permits the rapid, coordinated mobilisation of all national forces in the event of a major crisis such as an armed conflict or a foreign aggression, a threat to national sovereignty, a domestic crisis, or a natural disaster.

According to critical media reports, the law would, in concrete terms, enable the government to mobilise reservists, but also to crack down on civil liberties, gear the economy to meet war ends, and allow the state to dispossess individuals. The step is thus said to aim above all to stoke fears of foreign threats among the Algerian people and block the road to the return of mass protests emulating the 2019 Hirak movement. The timing of the law's adoption, after its reading in Parliament back in October 2024, has sparked criticism in some quarters, since the government of head of state Abdelmadjid Tebboune is currently confronted by multiple diplomatic conflicts, particularly with Morocco and France, but also with the military government of neighbouring Mali to the south, and the latter's allies in the neighbouring Sahel zone.

For almost 50 years, Algeria and Morocco have been fighting over Western Sahara, an area in the south of Morocco over which both Rabat and the Algeria-backed pro-independence Polisario Front claim sovereignty. After US President Trump recognised Morocco's claim to sovereignty of the territory during his first presidency in return for the normalisation of the country's relations with Israel, Algeria regards itself as being increasingly isolated in the conflict at international level. The situation has remained tense since the ceasefire between the parties to the conflict was broken in November 2020, after Moroccan forces had been stationed in a buffer zone in the far south of Western Sahara in order to drive out Polisario fighters who were blocking the only road link to Mauritania, a route which is important for regional trade with western Africa. Algeria thereupon referred to Morocco as a "Zionist regime", closed its airspace for Moroccan flights, and started requiring visas from all Moroccan nationals.

The Western Sahara conflict has also overshadowed the country's relationship with France since July 2024, after Emmanuel Macron confirmed his support for Morocco's autonomy plan for Western Sahara in a letter to King Mohamed VI, and recognised the kingdom's sovereignty over the territory. The Algerian government thereupon recalled its ambassador from France, and accused the French government of spreading "lies" about the region's colonial history. The conviction of French-Algerian author Boualem Sansal (cf. BN of 17.03. and 31.03.) following his arrest last November, and the tit-for-tat expulsion of twelve diplomats, constitute the latest escalation in this diplomatic crisis after a number of other incidents.

The traditionally conflict-laden relations not only with Morocco and France, but also with southern neighbour Mali, are at a historic low, following on from the downing of a Malian drone near Tin Zaouatine that had allegedly entered Algerian airspace there. After Algeria had accepted responsibility for the downing, the Malian military government reacted in a coordinated step with its close allies Niger and Burkina Faso in the sense that all three Sahel Alliance (AES) members recalled their ambassadors from Algeria. Algeria immediately reciprocated. A day later, both Mali and Algeria closed their airspace to one another's aircraft. Mali's governing junta furthermore withdrew from the

joint Sahel staff (Comité d'Etat Major Opérationnel Conjoint - CEMOC), which had been formed by Algeria, Mali, Niger and Mauritania in April 2010 to coordinate efforts against al Qaeda's affiliate AQIM.<sup>4</sup>

## **12 May 2025**

### **Two international arrest warrants issued for French-Algerian writer Kamel Daoud**

The initial complaint against Daoud was submitted back in November 2024 by Saâda Arbane, a survivor of the Algerian civil war, accusing the writer and his psychiatrist wife Aicha Dahdouh of having used her personal story without her consent for his novel "Houris". In 2024, Daoud won the Prix Goncourt, France's highest prize for literature, for the novel, which centres on the civil war between the government and Islamists in the 1990s. The novel, banned in Algeria, tells the story of a young woman who loses her voice when an Islamist cuts her throat as she has to watch her family being massacred during the war. The first international arrest warrant was already issued against the writer in this connection in March.

The second complaint was submitted by the National Organisation for the Victims of Terrorism, which accuses the author of misrepresenting the events of the so-called "Black Decade" of the Algerian civil war in his book. It bases this on the 2005 "Law on national reconciliation", which was adopted under the then regime of president Bouteflika and provided for between three and five years' imprisonment for anyone "who through statements, writings or other acts exploits or instrumentalises the wounds of the national tragedy in order to harm the institutions of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria, to weaken the state or injure the honour of its honourable representatives, or is detrimental to the reputation of Algeria at international level."

Daoud's publisher Gallimard defended the writer and his wife, saying that they had been the victims of an orchestrated campaign following the banning of the book in Algeria. The French foreign ministry stated that Kamel Daoud was "a renowned and respected author", and that France was committed to freedom of expression. The activities of the Algerian judiciary against Daoud are taking place against the background of a diplomatic crisis between Algeria and France which has been escalating for some time, and of the only recent conviction of Franco-Algerian author Boualem Sansal for his statements on the colonial history of the Maghreb in an interview with a French media outlet (cf. BN of 31.03. and 28.04.25).<sup>5</sup>

## **19 May 2025**

### **Implementation of capital punishment for drug offences announced**

Against the background of a major increase in consumption and in volumes of narcotic drugs seized in recent years, the government announced that it would be stepping up the war on drug trafficking by toughening the penalties provided for such offences.

A draft law which has already been debated in April by the National People's Assembly's committee for legal affairs, administration and freedoms provides for the introduction of the death penalty for particularly serious cases, for instance with regard to the involvement of minors in drug rings, selling drugs near sensitive facilities (schools, hospitals), or trafficking in synthetic drugs and strong narcotics.

At a parliamentary debate on the law on 13.05.25, minister of justice Lotfi Boudjemaa stated that given the scale of the problem, the government considered it to be necessary in this context to "activate" the death penalty, on which there has been a moratorium since 1993. He added that "the sword of justice" would "reach out and cut off the heads of these criminal networks".<sup>6</sup>

## **02 June 2025**

### **Three former Algerian presidential candidates sentenced to ten years in jail**

On 26.05.25, a court sentenced businesswoman Saida Neghza, former minister Belkacem Sahli, and the relatively unknown head of a veterinary products laboratory by the name of Abdelhakim Hamadi, to ten years in jail each for alleged corruption. The sentenced persons were also fined about €6,700.

The three defendants had all hoped to stand in the presidential elections in September 2024, something which the

Algerian constitutional court had however ruled out even before the election, accusing them of buying sponsorship from elected officials. The prosecution said that 50 elected representatives had admitted at the time to receiving money for their support, and some ten intermediaries had admitted having collected money intended for them. Along with the three rejected candidates, about 70 others, including three sons of Saida Neghza, local elected officials, as well as members of an employers' organisation, were sentenced to between five and eight years in jail in the trial, amongst other things for "interference", "abuse of office", "obtaining cash gifts", "promising votes", and "fraud". The three defendants left the court free for the time being, according to media reports, and have ten days to appeal the decision.<sup>7</sup>

### **Opposition politician sentenced to one year's imprisonment for criticising mismanagement**

Algerian media reported on 31.05.25 that Naïma Abbad, national secretary and coordinator of the Jil Jadid party in Tipasa province, had been sentenced to one year's imprisonment without probation as the result of a complaint lodged by the president of the municipal council of her home municipality Fouka. Naïma Abbad was said to have previously complained about corruption and mismanagement in Fouka in videos which she had posted in social media.<sup>8</sup>

## **30 June 2025**

### **USA: Congress representatives call for the Polisario to be designated as a foreign terrorist organisation**

A bipartisan bill introduced in the US congress seeks to designate the Polisario Front as a "foreign terrorist organisation" (FTO). Even if the bill passes, under US law the final decision on designation however rests with secretary of state Marco Rubio. To persuade him, and congress, of the bill, the document emphasises the Polisario's ties to Hezbollah and Iran, as well as threats of terrorist attacks against foreign interests in Western Sahara posed by the group.

If the "Polisario Front Terrorist Designation Act" were to be adopted, this could potentially have far-reaching consequences for the secessionist movement headquartered in the Algerian Sahara near Tindouf, which since decolonisation has been demanding an independent state on the territory of former Spanish Sahara, as well as for its supporters, above all the Algerian state. This would serve to shore up Algeria's increasing diplomatic isolation (cf. BN of 28.04.25) with regard to the disputed Western Sahara region, albeit the implications for the protracted conflict between Morocco, on the one hand, and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front, on the other, cannot yet be foreseen.

Presumably as a reaction to the political developments, the Polisario Front launched five projectiles at the town of Es-Smara on 27.06.25, but without causing any damage. Since the end of the ceasefire in November 2020, the Polisario Front has carried out several sporadic attacks in the buffer zone to the east of the Moroccan security wall which goes through the entire Western Sahara territory. In October 2023, a similar attack in Es-Smara cost the life of a civilian and wounded three others, according to an official summary published at that time. The most recent attack by the Polisario on targets in Morocco took place in November 2024 near Al-Mahbès.<sup>9</sup>

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