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Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

29 April 2019

Afghanistan

UNAMA Quarterly Report on civilian victims

On 24 April 2019, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan UNAMA published its first quarterly report for 2019 on civilian victims in the conflict. For the first three months of the year, UNAMA documented 1,773 civilian casualties (581 deaths and 1,192 injured). This represents a 23 percent decrease in overall civilian casualties, driven by a decrease in suicide attacks. Anti-government elements, in particular Taliban and IS, were responsible for the majority of civilian casualties (963 civilian casualties, of them 227 deaths and 736 injured). Pro-government forces were responsible for 608 civilian casualties (305 deaths, 303 injured). UNAMA is concerned by the high number of civilian casualties from aerial and search operations. Most affected were people living in Kabul, Helmand, Nangarhar, Faryab and Kunduz provinces (in that order).

Attack on communications ministry

On 20 April 2019, unidentified gunmen attacked the communications ministry in the capital of Kabul. At least seven civilians and three soldiers lost their lives, apart from at least four of the attackers; three further civilians were injured. At the time of the attack, over 2,000 people were in the building, which is close to the Presidential palace and the Serena hotel; they were all evacuated safely. On 21 April, IS militants claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 22 April 2019, security forces confiscated a vehicle laden with explosive devices and arms in Sarobi district. The military material was intended to be used in a further attack in the capital.

Taliban hostages rescued

On 26 April 2019, the Afghan interior ministry stated that Afghan forces have rescued 53 people from a Taliban prison in southern Zabul province. On 24 April, ten people were freed from a Taliban prison in Qarabagh district of Ghazni province.

Attempted attack on private university in Kabul

On 25 April 2019, a suspected militant placed an improvised explosive device in the private Jahan university in the vicinity of Kart-e-Naw area in the 8th police district of the city. The bomb went off prematurely, killing the attacker and wounding three others.

Grand council convention

On 29 April 2019, the Loya Jirga ('grand council') was opened in Kabul, where more than 2,500 delegates will be discussing the framework for negotiations with the Taliban for four days. The Taliban had been invited to attend the consultative assembly, but they had sent no delegates. The Loya Jirga consists of the members of the national assembly and the chairpersons of the provincial and district councils. According to the Afghan constitution, the Loya Jirga is the highest manifestation of the will of the people; it is convened, among others, on issues of highest interest to the country. Being a predominantly advisory organ, the decisions of the Loya Jirga are not binding. President Ghani appointed former mujahideen leader Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf to chair the assembly.

Algeria

Continuing anti-government protests

On 26 April 2019, people gathered for the tenth time in protest against the government. They demand radical changes and the resignation not only of the complete ruling elite and all close aides of former President Bouteflika, but also of transitional President Bensalah and prime minister Bedoui. The president of the constitutional council, Taieb Belaiz, has meanwhile resigned. Algeria's supreme court has initiated investigations against former energy minister Chakib Khelil and some influential businessmen including Issad Rebrab, head of the Cevital company and one of the wealthiest figures in Africa, tycoon Ali Haddad, owner of Algeria's largest building companies, and some members of the highly influential Kouninef family. Also, former head of government Ouyahia and finance minister Loukal have been summoned to appear in court on charges of accepting advantages and waste of public funds.

Benin

Parliamentary elections

Voter turnout was low in the parliamentary elections held on 28 April 2019, with only candidates of two parties allied with President Patrice Talon in competition (Union progressiste, Bloc républicain). After the electoral commission had excluded several opposition parties due to incomplete voting documents, these parties had called upon their supporters to boycott the elections. On election day, access to the internet and to social media was blocked. On 26 April 2019, Amnesty International had voiced concern about the arbitrary detentions of activists and journalists and about violent attacks on peaceful demonstrators by the security forces in the run-up to the elections. The final election results have not yet been published.

Cameroon

Boko Haram attacks leave 20 dead

In the night to 28 April 2019, members of the Islamist Boko Haram terror group attacked the location of Fofia near Lake Chad (Region Extrême-Nord, Département Logone et Chari, Commune Blangoua). The attack was fended off by soldiers of the Multinational Joint Task Force MNJTF. A Cameroonian marine soldier and three civilians were killed in the incident.

On 22 April 2019, Boko Haram fighters killed at least seven people in the town of Blangoua (Region Extrême-Nord, Département Logone et Chari). Also, they injured several individuals and burnt down houses before retreating from the town.

In the night to 18 April 2019, at least nine individuals lost their lives in the village of Tchakamari (Region Extrême-Nord, Département Mayo-Sava, Commune Kolofata) when Boko Haram militants torched their houses. The insurgents also stole the cattle and other valuables of the villagers.

Chad

Fight with Boko Haram claims 70 lives

On 14 April 2019, an attack by the terrorist Boko Haram organisation at a military position in Kaiga Kindjiria (near the border with Nigeria and Cameroon) killed 63 Islamist fighters and 7 soldiers. 15 more soldiers were injured, some of them severely, army spokesman Azem Bermendou Agouna stated on 15 April.

China

Hong Kong: Protest

On 28 April 2019, thousands took to the streets to protest against a new extradition law and against the sentencing of the 'umbrella movement' leaders (see below). The new law would allow suspects to be sent to mainland China for trial upon request of the Chinese authorities. Critics fear that this would lead to human rights violations. The judiciary system of the People's Republic does not meet international standards and is

not independent. Also, politically motivated convictions of dissenters are not uncommon. Police says that over 22,000 people participated in the protest marches; the organizers put the figure at around 200,000.

Hong Kong: Umbrella movement activists convicted

After a Hong Kong court had found guilty nine activists of the so-called umbrella movement of disrupting public order on 9 April 2019 (see BN of 15 April 2019), the verdicts were handed down on 24 April. Sociology professor Chan Kin-man and law professor Benny Tai Yiu-ting were sentenced to 16 months in prison each, lawmaker Shiu Ka-chun and the party leader of the League of Social Democrats Raphael Wong received eight months prison terms each. The delivery of lawmaker Tanya Chan's judgement was postponed because she is in need of medical treatment. The other defendants received probationary sentences or are subjected to a community service order.

DR Congo

IS claims its first DRC attack

On 18 April 2019, IS claimed its first attack on government soldiers in DRC via their Amaq news agency, declaring the Democratic Republic of the Congo as the 'Central Africa Province' of its caliphate. Figures are varying across reports about the attack launched on 16 April in Bovata village near the town of Beni (eastern North Kivu province), where two to eight soldiers were killed and one civilian was apparently killed or injured. Locals say that the attack was launched by the Islamist rebel group ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) which has been active in the region for two years. There seem to be loose ties between ADF and jihadist groups.

Egypt

Constitutional amendments approved

In a three-day referendum held from 19 to 22 April 2019, the Egyptian citizens were invited to decide on amendments to the constitution which had already passed with a two-third majority in parliament on 16 April 2019. The amendments include the implementation of a second chamber for parliament, an increase of the military's influence on the judiciary and an extension of the presidential term of office from four to six years. Hence, President al-Sisi would be able to stay in power until 2030. The amendments were approved with 89 percent voting in favour, with a voter turnout of 44 percent.

Eritrea/Ethiopia

Eritrea shuts all border crossings with Ethiopia

Ethiopian media report that on 22 April 2019, Eritrea closed the last remaining border crossing to Eritrea (Debay Sima/Bure near Assab). Only four days before, the border crossing near Omhajer had been shut. The Eritrean government has given no official statement. Ethiopia has expressed surprise at the move.

Background

Following the rapprochement with Ethiopia, trade relations and goods supplies were taken up, in particular from Ethiopia to Eritrea. In September 2018, three border crossing points were opened towards Ethiopia (Debay Sima/Bure, Serha/Zalambessa and Ksadika/Rama). In the beginning of January 2019, Omhajer/Humera was the fourth border crossing point to be opened. However, already shortly before the turn of the year there were reports of the closure of Serha and Ksadika crossing points. Now, the situation between the two countries is similar to that before the peace process. However, flight connections between Addis Ababa and Asmara are still available.

Iran

Supreme Leader appoints new Pasdaran commander

On 21 April 2019, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei appointed Hossein Salami as the new head of the revolutionary guards Pasdaran. Major General Salami replaces Mohammad Ali Jafari, who had wanted a change, Ayatollah Khamenei's statement continued. Ali Jafari will now be head of the social and cultural section of the revolutionary guards. There is no definitive rule governing the term of office of a Pasdaran commander. So far, the office has changed every ten years, with Major General Jafari's ten-year term ending two years ago. Ayatollah Khamenei had then extended his term for another three years.

Protests against dismissal of popular IRIB commentator

More than 1,000 Iranian journalists have signed a petition to Abdolali Ali Asghari, head of Iran's state-run broadcaster IRIB, complaining about the cancellation of the '90' programme and the dismissal of its anchor man Adel Ferdosipour. '90' has been on air for 20 years now and is considered to be the most popular programme in the country. Adel Ferdosipour became famous for his critical remarks on politics in the programme.

Anti-hijab protester detained

On 10 April 2019, Yasaman Aryani was detained in Tehran in relation to a video that went viral on International Women's Day showing women peacefully protesting in a Tehran subway station against the obligation to wear a headscarf.

Iraq

Security situation

Security-related incidents continue to occur in the country. On 27 April 2019, two IS insurgents were killed in an airstrike against a hideout in the al-Zour area of Diyala province. Also in this province, a civilian was killed and another one wounded in an attack launched by IS fighters. In Salahaddin province, a civilian was killed in a bomb attack.

On 26 April 2019, Iraqi security forces killed a suspected suicide bomber in Mosul.

On 25 April 2019, two civilians were killed by terrorists in al-Garn (south of Mosul), the Iraqi police reported. On the same day, a civilian was wounded when a bomb detonated in Khanaqin district, Diyala province. Also on 25 April, 16 IS fighters were killed in a security operation in Kirkuk province, a spokesman of the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service reported; 21 hideouts and 14 undergrounds tunnels were destroyed in the operation. In another incident in Kirkuk province on the same day, three policemen were wounded when a roadside bomb was detonated.

On 24 April 2019, three Iraqi security officers were killed and four others wounded in Salahaddin province when IS fighters attacked a joint checkpoint of police and paramilitary tribal fighters.

IS militants appear to be spurring reconstruction in Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salahaddin provinces. Also Baghdad province seems to be targeted; at the present time, however, only minor security-related incidents are registered, mainly in the province's northern, southern and western peripheries.

Iraq's Yazidi supreme spiritual council on the return of Yazidi IS hostages and their children

On 24 April 2019, the Yazidi supreme spiritual council announced that they were ready to embrace all Yazidi women and their children returning from IS prisons to their community. A delegation of Yazidi clerics will be sent to Syria in order to take back the people concerned, the statement continued.

On 27 April 2019, the council published an addendum to the statement, saying that it will not embrace the children of women and girls raped by IS men, but only children born to two Yazidi parents and abducted from Sinjar in August 2014 by IS militants.

According to media reports, the amendment to the first statement was made following resistance within the Yazidi community and in view of the legal consequences which had not been taken into account before. According to existing Iraqi law, children with one Muslim parent are to be registered as Muslims.

Kosovo

Kosovo repatriates more than 100 IS fighters

On 20 April 2019, Kosovo brought back over 110 of its citizens from north Syria including jihadists who had joined the IS terror group, among them four suspected IS fighters, 32 women and 79 children. Apparently, the four fighters were immediately arrested. Indictments against them and against ten women will follow; membership in a terrorist organisation is punishable by up to 15 years in prison. The civilian returners were brought to a camp near Pristina where they will participate in reintegration programmes.

The return was organised with the support of the United States. According to police information, there are still 30 Kosovan fighters, 49 women and 8 children in Syria. With regard to the total population, Kosovo is the European country from which most foreign IS fighters come. In total, about 300 Kosovo nationals have joined the IS in Syria and Iraq since 2012. Around 70 individuals have been killed. Some 120 have already returned and were arrested immediately upon arrival.

Libya

Fighting in Tripoli

The offensive on Tripoli of the LNA (Libyan National Army) under Khalifa Haftar which started on 4 April is continuing, with drone and aircraft strikes occurring almost daily. However, the origin of the drones is unclear. Fighting is reported from all southern quarters and suburbs of Tripoli; also, the road to the airport and the international airport itself, which has been closed down for a long time, are the daily scene of combat.

According to information provided by the WHO on 24 April 2019, at least 278 people have been killed and more than 1,300 wounded in the clashes. These figures must be regarded as a reliable lower limit; the actual number of fatalities is probably much higher.

Municipal elections in Sabha

On 27 April 2019, municipal elections were held in the southern city of Sabha in comparative calm. The local elections for Sabratha and Surman, originally scheduled for the same date, were called off since these two municipalities are presently occupied by General Haftar's troops. The eastern government, allied to the LNA, has repeatedly installed military governors appointed by General Haftar.

Mali

Mali government resigns

On 18 April 2019, Mali's Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maiga and his whole government resigned, preceding a vote of no confidence scheduled for 19 April 2019, initiated by the government faction and parts of the opposition. No official reason was given for the resignation. Recently, the government had been the target of criticism due to the strong increase in violence in the central parts of the country. In the beginning of April, the capital of Bamako had been the scene of mass protests demanding Maiga's resignation. Due to the continuing violence, it had become evident that a clear parliamentary majority would vote in favour of his dismissal. Already on 22 April 2019, President Keita nominated former finance minister Boubou Cissé as the new head of government and entrusted him with the formation of a new government. The appointment of Boubou Cissé, who does not belong to any political party, prompted differing reactions from the political and religious groups in Mali.

Soldiers killed in attack

On 21 April 2019, eleven Malian soldiers were killed in an attack launched by suspected jihadists on a security post in the central town of Guiré, several other soldiers were injured. A representative of the security forces told AFP news agency that the perpetrators had come from the forest of Wagadou with motorbikes and small trucks. The forest has been a retreat area for Islamist groups for years now. Security forces burnt down some of the vehicles and confiscated some others. About 15 insurgents were killed in the incident.

Already on 20 April 2019, one UN soldier was killed and four others wounded in a bomb attack in the centre of the country.

Moldova

Difficult process of government formation

Even more than two month after the parliamentary elections of 24 February 2019, no new government has been installed. The three main parties, i.e. the pro-Russian Socialist Party of Moldova PSRM, the centre-left Democratic Party of Moldova PDM and the pro-European bloc ACUM, have not yet concluded negotiations. If no agreement is reached until June, new elections will have to be held.

Moldova, with a population of approx. 3.5 million, is one of the poorest countries in Europe. One in four adults work abroad, either in the EU or in Russia.

Morocco

Contractual teachers' sit-in protest dissolved

For some weeks now, contractual teachers have been staging protests demanding job security and full civil service benefits. They do not enjoy the benefits of health and pension insurance and are not paid by the state, but by the schools. In the night to 25 April 2019, they started a sit-in strike in front of the parliamentary building in Rabat. The strike was dissolved by security forces with water guns.

Protest rally against long-term imprisonment for Hirak protesters

On 21 April 2019, a rally was staged in Rabat against the long prison sentences handed down to the Hirak activists. The protesters want to prevent that the activists' fate falls out of sight and hope for a pardon by King Mohammed VI, as the defendants had stood up for economic and social improvement in the Rif region.

Background

On 26 June 2018, several activists of the Hirak movement in northern Rif region had been sentenced to prison terms for endangerment of public security by a court in Casablanca. Their leader Nasser Zafzafi and three other activists received 20 years in jail each. An appeal court confirmed the verdicts on 6 April 2019 (see BN of 8 April 2019).

Starting in autumn 2016 and throughout 2017, the Hirak movement members launched protest rallies in the rural northern region of Morocco which is mainly inhabited by the ethnic Berber minority, demanding improvement of the dire economic and political situation and social justice in the region. In the course of the protests, several clashes occurred between demonstrators and security forces.

Myanmar

Journalists still in detention

On 18 April 2019, the government announced the release of prisoners as part of its annual amnesty marking the country's traditional Buddhist new year. President Win Myint stated that the pardons were granted on humanitarian grounds. 16 foreign prisoners were pardoned and would be deported, he said, while 9,535 local prisoners were to be released. Bo Kyi, a representative of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported that the two jailed Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who had received a seven-year sentence, were not among those being pardoned. They had reported on the killing of ten members of the Rohingya minority (see BN of 3 September 2018). On 15 April, they were honoured with the Pulitzer Prize for their investigation. Additionally, they were nominated as laureates for this year's UNESCO Press Freedom Prize which will be awarded on 2 May. On 23 April, the supreme court rejected the final appeal of the two journalists.

Nigeria

39 Boko Haram militants killed

On 16 April 2019, troops of the Multinational Joint Task Force MNJTF killed 39 Boko Haram terrorists who attacked them near the location of Cross Kaura (Borno State, Kukawa Local Government Area), the MNJTF spokesman Col. Timothy Antigha stated. 20 soldiers were wounded in the battle.

North Macedonia

Run-off vote for President

In the first the round of presidential elections held on 21 March 2019, neither of the two candidates was able to secure the necessary majority. Hence, a run-off is scheduled for 5 May 2019 between Stevo Pendarovski of the ruling Social Democratic Union SDSM and his independent rival Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, who is supported by the nationalist opposition party VMRO-DPMNE. In the first election round, both candidates had gained between 42 and 43 percent of the votes.

The elections are also seen as an important indicator for Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, who had negotiated the agreement on the change of the country's name with Greece and secured the votes necessary to endorse the constitutional change required for this (see BN of 14 January and 18 February 2019). The name-change remains controversial and had dominated the election campaign. Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova's campaign slogan 'Justice for Macedonia – the Fatherland Calls' stepped up her criticism of the agreement. At the same time, however, she pledged to adhere to international agreements.

Pressing issues such as the exodus of young people, the shortcomings of the education and health system or the dire economic situation had played almost no role in the election campaign.

Pakistan

Bus passengers killed

On 18 April 2019, at least seven people were killed in an attack on a bus running between Balochistan's capital Quetta and the port city of Gwadar, when unidentified gunmen in camouflage uniform raided the bus in Makran region. There were also Pakistani security officers among the passengers. The newly formed Baloch Raji Ajoji Sangar BRAS has claimed responsibility for the attack. It is an alliance of the three separatist movements Baloch Liberation Army BLA, Baloch Liberation Front BLF and the Baloch Republic Army BRA.

Prime Minister Khan visits Iran

On 22 April 2019, Pakistan's Premier Imran Khan and Iran's President Hassan Rouhani announced at a press conference in Tehran that they would take joint measures against both Islamist and terrorist groups mainly active in the Baloch-dominated border area between the two countries. They also announced the expansion of trade ties. Prime Minister Khan stressed that peacekeeping in Afghanistan is of vital importance. Pakistan and Iran have accepted approximately 3 million Afghan refugees each.

Russian Federation

Putin critic condemned

On 23 April 2019, Yury Kartzhev received a fine of 30,000 roubles (approx. 420 Euro) for two posts in the social media network Vkontakte. He is the first critic of President Putin who was sentenced under the new media law adopted in March 2019. The regional court in the town of Chudovo found that his posts had offended human dignity and public morale and showed disrespect for the society and for the Russian state and its officials. Apparently, the posts had been written shortly after the entry into force of the new law on 31 March. In the beginning of March, the Russian State Duma had approved an amendment increasing the penalties for publishing offending or false information by online media or private individuals. Offending Russian officials, state symbols and the Russian society is now punishable by fines of up to 100,000 roubles (approx. 1390 Euro); in case of repeated offences, prison terms of up to 15 days are provided for.

Somalia

Protests in Mogadishu

On 13 and 14 April 2019, security forces apparently killed four protesters during rallies in Mogadishu. The protests were sparked after a rickshaw driver and his passenger had died. Repeatedly, policemen are believed to have been responsible for the death of rickshaw drivers who are suspected to support al-Shabaab.

Attacks and fights

On 17 April 2019, at least four individuals died in two bomb attacks launched by al-Shabaab militants against a Mogadishu police station and a hotel. On 24 April, an explosion caused several deaths in Bosaso in the Bari region of Puntland. The Somali faction of IS has claimed responsibility for the incident.

On 15 April 2019, a roadside bomb hit a military convoy with Kenyan troops on its way from Ras-Kamboni to Bur-Gabo (Lower Jubba region). Al-Shabaab has taken responsibility for the attack in which at least 15 soldiers appear to have been killed. Al-Shabaab has also claimed responsibility for an attack against Ethiopian soldiers near Hudur city (Bakool region), which apparently claimed 6 lives on 14 April 2019. Also on 14 April, the deputy IS commander Abdihakim Dhuqub was reported to have been killed in an air attack of the US African Command AFRICOM in Somalia's Puntland State. On 27 April, AFRICOM stated that its special forces had killed three IS terrorists in another airstrike in northern Somalia.

Sri Lanka

Terror attacks

According to the latest official reports, 253 people died and between 149 and 485 others were injured in terrorist attacks launched on 21 April 2019 at various locations including St Anthony's Shrine in Colombo, Zion Church in Batticaloa, St Sebastian's Church in Negombo and other places, among them luxury hotels. Several sources say that the authorities had been warned of imminent attacks already weeks before.

On 11 April 2019, leading Sri Lankan security representatives apparently received information that the Islamist terror group National Tawheed Jamaat NTJ was planning suicide attacks possibly targeting catholic churches and representations of the Indian government in Sri Lanka. This was denied by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe. The Daily Mirror reports that the Prime Minister had not been invited to any meeting of the national security council in the last four months.

State of emergency

Following the attacks, for which not only the NTJ terror group, but also Jammiyathul Millathu Ibrahim JMI were held responsible, President Sirisena declared a state of emergency on 22 April 2019.

As yet, more than 100 individuals are reported to have been arrested. Apparently, the authorities knew the whereabouts of important NTJ members, as they were surveilled by the security services. An official confirmation was given for the identities of Inshaf I. and his younger brother Ilham I., sons of well-known businessman Mohammed Yusuf I., who was arrested on suspicion of supporting his sons.

On 26 April, another bomb was apparently detonated in a luxury mansion by one of the brothers' wife. In the incident, the perpetrator herself, her two children, another family member and three policemen lost their lives. Apparently, NTJ leader Mohammed Zaharan Hashim participated in the attack at the Shangri-La hotel, which was carried out by one of the brothers. President Sirisena held Prime Minister Wickremesinghe responsible for the authorities' failures. On the weekend, the father and two brothers of Zahran Hashim blew themselves up to escape arrest. More family members, including 6 children, were killed in the incident; the security forces found 15 dead.

Due to the state of emergency, it is forbidden to wear any kind of face covering in public. The ban imposed on 29 April 2019 will remain in force until further notice.

Sudan

African Union concedes more time for transition to the Sudanese military

At a special summit held in Cairo, the African Union AU conceded more time to the Sudanese military council for handing over power to a civilian government after the coup (see BN of 15 April 2019). Originally, the AU had urged the military council to hand over power already by the end of April, otherwise the country's membership in the AU would be suspended. In the meeting in Cairo, the international community was urged to support the Sudanese economy and the political change.

In mid-April, the military had ousted President Omar al-Bashir and taken over power after ongoing mass protests. Since then, the generals have been negotiating with the opposition over the formation of a transitional government. On 28 April 2019, the establishment of a joint advisory committee was agreed in order to find a way out of the political crisis. Before, the negotiations had come to a halt, as the protesters (led by the trade union SPA, Sudanese Professionals Association) were demanding the immediate transfer of

power to a transitional civilian government, while the military announced a transitional period of 2 years, after which power would be handed over to an elected government.

Syria

Explosions in Idlib province claim fatalities

On 24 April 2019, a blast in a residential area of the town Jisr al-Shughour killed at least 15 individuals and injured at least 35 more. The cause of the explosion is still unknown. The province is the last rebel-held region in Syria.

Turkey

Local elections in Istanbul

On 17 April 2019, the Turkish electoral commission confirmed the victory of the opposition's mayoral candidate Ekrem Imamoğlu in the local elections in Istanbul.

Attack at opposition leader Kiliçdaroğlu

On 21 April 2019, the leader of the largest opposition party CHP Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu was attacked by angry crowd during a funeral for soldiers who had died in a battle against the PKK. Obviously, the crowd sympathized with the AKP. The incident appears to be connected to the AKP's loss of the Ankara and Istanbul mayor's posts. Kiliçdaroğlu was brought to safety in an armoured vehicle and said he was unhurt.

New wave of arrests

On 26 April 2019, the Turkish judiciary issued arrest warrants against more than 250 soldiers and policemen suspected to adhere to the banned Gülen movement. Anadolu news agency reports that there have been already 127 arrests.

Ukraine

Volodymyr Zelenskiy wins presidential election

The challenger Volodymyr Zelenskiy won the presidential election held on 21 April 2019, securing 73 percent of all votes cast, ahead of incumbent President Petro Poroshenko on 24 percent. The 41-year-old actor has achieved the best result ever in a presidential election since the country's independence. He announced his intention to stay in office for only one 5-year term and to continue the peace talks with Russia brokered by Germany and France. Like his predecessor Poroshenko, Zelenskiy had also announced to seek Ukraine's membership in the European Union.

Dispute with Russia on passport rules

On 24 April 2019 Russia's president Putin signed a decree that makes it easier for those living in eastern Ukraine's separatist territories to access a Russian passport. On 27 April, he announced that Russia considered to grant all Ukrainian citizens easier access to the Russian citizenship, not only those of the Luhansk and Donetsk republics. In response, the new Ukrainian president Zelenskiy announced to grant Ukrainian citizenship to Russian nationals.

Venezuela

Distribution of relief goods by the Red Cross

After the Maduro government had allowed the delivery of 24 tons of humanitarian goods by the Red Cross (mostly pharmaceuticals and basic medical supplies), the distribution started on 18 April 2019. There have been no reports on disruptions of the distribution process.

Power outage

Power rationing is still in place until 30 April 2019, with every city receiving 4-6 hours of electricity supply per day, depending on its location.

Western Balkan Countries

Western Balkans Conference in Berlin

At the initiative of German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Emmanuel Macron, a meeting with top representatives from the Western Balkan Countries and the European Commission takes place on 29 April 2019. The aim of the conference is to discuss the European perspective of Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also, efforts will be made to restart the stalled normalisation process between Serbia and Kosovo. The main topic will probably be the controversial territory swap between the two countries (see BN of 4 March 2019 and of 27 August 2018). Border corrections along ethnic lines are under discussion, considering the exchange of Kosovo's northern part with its mainly Serb population with the south Serbian area of Presevo mainly inhabited by ethnic Albanians. So far, this plan has been supported by the United States and also by the European Union, although in actual fact, it is contrary to their principles. Germany is the only country that has argued against new borders.

Yemen/Ethiopia

Refugees stranded in Aden

Apparently, thousands of refugees and migrants, mainly from Ethiopia, are being detained in the city of Aden by local security authorities for illegal entry into the country. They are being held in a football stadium with insufficient sanitary, water and food provision. On 24 April 2019, the detainees started a hunger strike in protest against these conditions. In the first three months of 2019, more than 36,000 migrants from Africa came to Yemen, which is a stop-over place on the long route to Saudi-Arabia and the other Gulf states. On 13 April 2019, a boat carrying 70 Ethiopians heading for Yemen capsized in the Red Sea; all boat refugees drowned.

Yemen

Yemen war death toll around 70,000

According to information provided by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ACLED, the civil war in Yemen has claimed the lives of around 70,000 people since the beginning of 2016. In the last five months alone, 10,000 people have been killed. While the situation in Hodeida has somewhat improved due to peace efforts by the United Nations, fatalities are increasing in other areas like Taizz and Hajjah, ACLED stated.

Attacks and combat actions

Between 19 and 23 April 2019, heavy fights occurred between rivalling militias in Taizz governorate, killing five people and injuring another 91, the organisation Doctors Without Borders says. Also in al-Dhali governorate, the situation remains tense. Apparently, fights between pro-government forces and Houthi rebels have claimed dozens of lives.