



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Tunisia – July to December 2023

31 December 2023

10 July 2023

Migrants taken to the border with Libya and Algeria against their will

According to media reports, between 02.07. and 06.07.23, the security authorities used force to bring hundreds of African migrants to remote desert regions on the border with Libya and Algeria. According to human rights organisations, the conditions there are very difficult, as those affected have hardly any access to shelter or food. The expulsion of the migrants was preceded by arrests by the security forces in the Tunisian coastal city of Sfax. Tensions between locals and migrants have been mounting for months in Sfax, from where many migrants travel illegally to Europe in boats. On 03.07.23, a Tunisian man died of injuries sustained during violent riots between the two groups. The security authorities then initiated investigations and arrested 37 migrants who were allegedly involved with the man's death. In addition, buildings and vehicles were damaged in night-time clashes between locals and migrants on 04.07. and 05.07.23.

17 July 2023

Political dissidents released five months after arrest

On 13.07.23, according to media reports, a court released Chaïma Issa and Lazhar Akremi, who had been arrested in February 2023 along with numerous other political opposition figures for allegedly conspiring against state security. The politician Chaïma Issa is a member of the opposition alliance National Salvation Front (Front de Salut National). The lawyer Lazhar Akremi served as a minister after the Tunisian revolution in 2011 and is considered a prominent critic of incumbent president Kaïs Saïed.

07 August 2023

The Arab world's first female prime minister sacked

As reported on 02.08.23, President Kaïs Saïed has dismissed Prime Minister Najla Bouden Romdhane, who had been in office since October 2021 (cf. BN of 04.10.21). He replaced her with former high-ranking central bank employee Ahmed Hachani. No official reasons were given for the change at the head of government. It is assumed that the continuing tense economic and social situation, especially the shortage of subsidised bread in several regions, triggered the replacement.

The government has little political leeway, as President Saïed has ruled by decree since coming to power on 25.07.2021 (cf. BN of 26.07.21).

04 September 2023

Opposition politician placed under house arrest

As various media reported on 03.09.23, a prominent representative of the Ennahdha party, Abdel Karim Harouni, was placed under house arrest once again. The National Salvation Front, Tunisia's main opposition coalition, which includes Ennahdha, said that Harouni had been under house arrest since 02.09.23, a day before he was due to attend a meeting in preparation for the party congress scheduled for October.

Opposition parties criticised the arrests of their representatives as politically motivated. Local as well as international human rights groups have called on the authorities to release the prisoners.

25 September 2023

Cartoonist briefly arrested

According to media reports, the cartoonist Tawfik Omrane was taken into custody on charges of insult on 21.09.23 and interrogated for several hours. One day later, the cartoonist was released, but he will have to appear in court on 25.09.23.

Omrane, who is also known for his caricatures of President Kais Saïed, had published caricatures of head of government Ahmed Hachani on social media at the beginning of August 2023, criticising his choice for the post of head of government.

09 October 2023

Further opposition figures arrested

It has been reported in the media that Abir Moussi, leader of the socialist Free Destourian Party (Parti Destourien Libre - PDL), which is one of the largest opposition parties, was arrested on 03.10.23 and only released after 48 hours. According to the official explanation, the arrest took place in order to prevent Moussi from pursuing his alleged aim of causing chaos. More than 20 leading political figures have been detained at least temporarily since the spring after voicing criticism of Tunisian president Kaïs Saïed.

23 October 2023

Historical synagogue set on fire

On 17.10.23 a pro-Palestinian protest in the town of El Hamma against Israel's military attacks in the Gaza Strip is reported to have culminated in several hundred people setting fire to a disused synagogue. The historical Jewish site was reportedly seriously damaged, but no-one was harmed. Although there is no Jewish community in this Tunisian town, the synagogue was a pilgrimage site for people of the Jewish faith.

27 November 2023

Trade union members arrested

According to reports in the media, the regional trade union secretary and three other members of the trade union congress Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) were arrested in Sfax on 20.11.23. The UGTT alleges that the arrests were intended to weaken the union and to intimidate its members. The UGTT has repeatedly protested against the course pursued by president Kaïs Saïed, most recently in the wake of the arrests on 22.11.23.