



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Togo – January to June 2023

30 June 2023

02 January 2023

Restructuring of the security services

President Faure Gnassingbé has replaced the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces and dismissed the Minister of the Armed Forces. This is according to media reports referring to information provided by Gnassingbé on 22.12.22. In addition, the Ministry of the Armed Forces will reportedly now once again be directly attached to the presidency. Observers assume that the measures are related to the deterioration of the security situation in the north of the country. The border regions with Burkina Faso have been the target of repeated attacks for over a year (cf. BN of 06.12.22), and a security emergency has been in effect for the Savanes region since June 2022 (cf. BN of 20.06.22). In the coastal countries of Togo, Benin, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, there are fears that extremist groups operating primarily in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger could extend their radius of action to their national territories.

20 February 2023

Deadly attack in the north

According to media reports, unidentified assailants killed around 30 civilians in the northern prefecture of Kpendjal on 10.02.23. The crime scene is in the Savanes region bordering Burkina Faso, where a security emergency has been in effect since June 2022 (cf. BN of 20.06.22). No official information is available on the details of the violence. According to a media report, members of the Togolese armed forces managed to track down and kill about 10 of the assailants. Against the background of the threat situation in the north (cf. BN of 06.12.22), President Faure Gnassingbé undertook a restructuring of the security authorities at the end of 2022 (cf. BN of 02.01.23).

27 February 2023

USA warns against travel to the north

According to media reports, on 21.02.23, the US State Department issued a travel warning for northern areas near the borders with Burkina Faso and Benin. Specifically named are the towns of Sokodé, Bafilo and Mango near the border with neighbouring Benin. A current directive for US foreign mission personnel also prohibits travel north of the city of Dapaong as well as to the prefectures of Kpendjal and Kpendjal-Ouest, located in the far north of Togo. The background to these measures are relatively frequent acts of violence by militant and criminal groups in the region in recent times. For example, unknown assailants killed around 30 civilians in the prefecture of Kpendjal on 10.02.23 (cf. BN of 20.02.23).

20 March 2023

Two journalists sentenced to three years in prison

On 15.03.23, a court in the capital Lomé sentenced the journalists Ferdinand Ayité and Isidore Kouwonou in absentia to three years' imprisonment and a fine of CFA francs three million (approximately EUR 4,600) each. According to media reports, they are accused of public contempt of authority and propagating falsehoods on social networks. Ayité is the publisher and Kouwonou the editor-in-chief of the magazine L'Alternative. The charges followed complaints by two ministers over statements made in a programme broadcast on YouTube in late 2021. The verdict was handed down in absentia as the current whereabouts of the two journalists are unknown. Organisations for the protection of journalistic work criticise the verdict.

17 April 2023

Parliament extends state of emergency for another twelve months

On 06.04.23, the Togolese parliament decided to extend by another twelve months the state of security emergency in the Savanes region, which had originally been imposed on 13.06.22 (cf. BN of 20.06.22 and 12.09.22). In the north of the country, militant groups have been carrying out deadly attacks since November 2021 and particularly since May 2022, increasingly against Togolese military personnel (cf. BN of 15.11.21, 16.05.22, 23.05.22, 30.05.22, 20.06.22, 18.07.22, 06.12.22 and 20.02.23). According to one media report, neither the government nor the army have commented on the security situation in the north since August 2022.

24 April 2023

Six civilians killed in Savanes region

According to media reports, six civilians were killed in an attack in the village of Waldjouague in the Savanes region near the border with Burkina Faso on 20.04.23. The media classified the attack as a terrorist act. In the north of the country, there has been an increase in deadly attacks since November 2021 and especially since May 2022 (cf. BN of 15.11.21, 16.05.22, 23.05.22, 30.05.22, 20.06.22, 18.07.22, 06.12.22 and 20.02.23). A state of emergency has been in effect in the Savanes region since 13.06.22 (cf. BN of 20.06.22, 12.09.22 and 17.04.23).

08 May 2023

President comments for the first time on armed attacks in the north

In an interview of 27.04.23, President Faure Gnassingbé commented on the security situation in the north of the country. So far, the government has hardly given any information on this issue. According to President Gnassingbé, the armed attacks have so far claimed the lives of around 40 victims among defence and security forces and around 100 victims among civilians, with half of the civilian victims being non-Togolese nationals. At least 27,000 Burkinabe nationals have fled across the border to Togo in recent years.

Improvement in the area of freedom of the press

In the Press Freedom Index published on 03.05.23 by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Togo has moved up 30 positions from 100 (in 2022) to now 70 out of 180. However, with a score of 63.06 out of 100, the country is still categorized as having 'identifiable problems' (score in 2022: 57.17). RSF noted that in case of insubordinate reporting, journalists in Togo face legal proceedings, intimidation, and violence, for example from the media regulator HAAC or the police.

12 June 2023

Journalist detained for several days

On 30.04.23, journalist Edouard Kamboissoa Samboe was briefly detained by the army in the north of the country. This was reported in the media in May 2023. A report by the Committee to Protect Journalists said on 10.05.23 that members of the Togolese armed forces arrested Samboe, who runs the news website Laabali, because he wanted to report on the aftermath of the alleged terrorist attack of 20.04.23 on the village of Waldjouague (cf. BN of

24.04.23). Reportedly, Samboe himself stated that he was taken to a nearby army base and interrogated there. His phones and computer were confiscated and the audio and video recordings he had made that day were erased. He was then taken into the custody at the gendarmerie station in the northern Togolese town of Dapaong and released on 02.05.23 after signing a document promising not to return to the area without first informing the authorities. His telephones and computers were subsequently returned to him. According to the latest Press Freedom Index for Togo, Reporters Without Borders had recently noted an improvement in press freedom (cf. BN of 08.05.23).

19 June 2023

ISS: Measures to counter the threat in the north

An article published online on 12.06.23 by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) highlights the cooperation between the security authorities and civilians in Benin and Togo in the fight against terrorism in the north of both countries. Attacks by violent groups are on the increase, particularly against civilians in Benin and Togo (cf. BN of 24.04.23 and 22.05.23).

According to the ISS, the authorities of both countries have so far already taken counter-measures based on the support of civilians. However, it is important to ensure that this support does not put cooperating civilians at risk, especially if the situation deteriorates further. The ISS calls on the security authorities to protect their civilian sources of information without compromise in order to strengthen the link between the state and the people, which is essential in the fight against extremism.

In the coastal states of Togo, Benin, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, there are fears that extremist groups, mainly active in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger could extend their sphere of action to their national territories.

Joining the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh

Togo joined the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh on 08.06.23. This is according to a media report and a statement by the EU Special Representative for the Sahel. Togo's accession is a welcome step in the joint fight against terrorism in Africa, the statement said, adding that Togo plays an important diplomatic role in Africa and its cooperation with the EU is also solid and productive. Since November 2021 and especially since May 2022, there have been deadly attacks by militant groups in northern Togo (cf. BN of 24.04.23). The Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, a partnership of 86 governments and institutions, is combating the influence and activities of the IS terrorist organisation.