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Group 22 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

5 September 2016

Afghanistan

Armed confrontations

The fighting, attacks and ambushes continue in some cases killing and injuring also civilians. According to media reports the following provinces were particularly affected last week: Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Farah, Paktia, Paktika, Logar, Ghor, Ghazni, Uruzgan, Helmand (where at least four hospitals had to be closed down because of the fighting).

Targeted attacks

The shooting of a previously kidnapped senior administrative officer of Baraki Barak district in the central province of Logar by the Taliban was announced on 29 August 2016. Two civilians died in road mine explosions in Shindand district in Herat province (west). In the southern province of Uruzgan five travellers were abducted by the Taliban on a rural road. Five policemen died in a bomb attack in Kunduz (Khandabad district). The Taliban shot two brothers in Nawa district in the southern province of Helmand. Allegedly they had no direct link to the government (one a farmer and the other one a taxi driver), but a third brother is a policeman. Reportedly also a school teacher and three butchers were shot by the Taliban in the same district in recent days. Yet another bomb attack happened in Nawa district killing six civilians.

Three Afghan soldiers died in the explosion of a road mine in Nimroz (south) on 30 August 2016.

A bombing in the capital of Faryab province (north) claimed the lives of a policeman and a civilian on 31 August 2016.

On 01 September 2016 five Afghan secret service officers died in a bomb attack in Logar (centre).

Taliban take control of district

According to reports of Afghan government circles and the Taliban, the latter took control of Omna district in the eastern province of Paktika on 04 September 2016.

Iraq

Suicide bombing

On 28 August 2016 five attackers stormed a wedding ceremony near the city of Kerbala, about 80 kilometers south of Baghdad. One of the attackers blew himself up killing at least 18 people and wounding 26. The terrorist militia IS claimed responsibility for the attack.

Explosions in Baghdad

The media reported that the capital Baghdad was hit by several explosions on 02 September 2016 in which at least ten people were injured according to the news website Almada Press.

Protests against corruption

Thousands of followers of the Shia cleric Muktada al-Sadr responded to his call for a nationwide two-day strike and stopped work on 4 September 2016 in protest against rampant corruption and to increase the pressure on the government.

Pakistan

Suicide bombings targeting Christians and court houses

On 02 September 2016 at least four suicide bombers of a section of the Pakistani Taliban attacked a Christian district of Peshawar. According to reports a security officer stopped the attackers in front of the Christian district and was shot. An intensive fire exchange between the attackers and security forces followed during which one civilian might have been killed.

On the same day there were several explosions in front of the district court of Mardan. An assassin threw a hand grenade into the crowd at the entrance and then blew himself up. Reportedly there were 13 casualties and 50 wounded. A Taliban splinter group, Jamat ul-Ahrar, claimed responsibility.

Turkey

Investment programme of several billion for Kurdish areas

The government adopted a multi-billion investment programme for the regions most affected by the escalating Kurdish conflict in the country's east and south-east. The government plans to invest three billion euros in the region.

Fighting in eastern Turkey

The confrontations between the Turkish army and the PKK continue in the south-east. The Turkish air force again bombed suspected PKK positions on 02/03 September 2016 and allegedly killed up to 100 PKK fighters. Also at least 15 Turkish soldiers are said to have died in the fighting and 28 were wounded.

Syria/Turkey

Successful offensive against IS in Syria

Syrian rebels supported by Turkish tanks and fighter planes conquered the last areas held by IS between the northern Syrian cities of Jarablus and Asas on the Turkish border. This is reported both by the Syrian Human Rights Observatory and the Turkish official news agency Anadolu. On 03 September 2016 the Turkish army had foraged across the border into Syria with 20 tanks for its operation „Euphrates Shield“.

Syria

Rebels in Aleppo under siege again

The rebel-held eastern districts of Aleppo have been encircled again since 04 September 2016 after government troops won back territory. The Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that government troops advanced south of the city and cut off the supply corridor to the rebel-held districts.

Series of attacks

In what seemed to be a coordinated series of bombings in Tartus, Homs, Hassakeh, and the outskirts of Damascus on 05 September 2016 16 people died and 40 were injured according to media reports.

Ceasefire – no breakthrough at G20

In their talks in the margins of the G20 summit in Hangzhou the foreign ministers of the US and Russia so far failed to come to an agreement on a ceasefire in Syria and a common approach for solving the conflict.

Yemen

16 civilian casualties after air strike

The rebels informed that at least 16 civilians died in an air strike in the north.

Israel/Palestinian Autonomous Areas

Palestinian broadcasting station closed down

Israel closed down a Palestinian radio station in the south of the West Bank for three months. An army spokeswoman said on 31 August 2016 that the Sanabel Radio Station had incited to violence and acts of terrorism against Israel and had glorified such violence. This is the third Palestinian radio station which Israel closed down in recent months. There are more than 50 private and public radio and TV stations in the Palestinian area.

Somalia

Attack on Mogadishu Hotel

When a lorry loaded with explosives blew up in front of the SYL hotel in Mogadishu on 30 August 2016 at least 20 people lost their lives and 30 were wounded, most of these victims were civilians. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack which was the third one on the SYL hotel in one year.

UN perceives progress

According to the UN Special Envoy for Somalia, Michael Keating, the country has made great progress in recent years. The UN perceive indications for an improvement of the situation in particular in the reconstruction of public institutions. They consider 2016 a key year because parliamentary and presidential elections are scheduled for September and October.

South Sudan

Government accepts additional UN soldiers

After a visit of members of the UN Security Council and the threat of an arms embargo President Salva Kiir on 04 September 2016 consented to the deployment of another 4,000 UN soldiers as reinforcement for the 13,000 man-strong UNMISS peace force. He had previously rejected their deployment as an interference with South Sudan's sovereignty. The Security Council criticized the working conditions for UNMISS, because of obstructions to patrols, the protection of civilians and the distribution of food.

Machar in Sudan

According to a Sudanese government spokesman former vice-president and rebel leader Riek Machar, who had first fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, is currently staying in Sudan for medical treatment. Already in the 1990s Machar had allied with the Sudanese government, when he was leading a militia that opposed the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) of South Sudan. In 1997 he agreed a separate peace with Khartoum and was appointed to a senior government post. In 2002 he rejoined the SPLA/M.

Gabon

Presidential elections: Unrest follows the announcement of election result

The election result published on 31 August 2016 proclaimed the incumbent Ali Bongo Ondimba (Gabon Democratic Party – PDG) as the winner of the elections held on 27 August 2016 by a margin of less than 6,000 votes ahead of his opponent Jean Ping (Gabon Progress Party - GPP). Already prior to the result's publication Ping had declared himself the winner and accused the presidential camp of election fraud. The EU election observers also doubted the result. After the result was announced on 31 August 2016 protests and clashes erupted in the capital Libreville and other cities. In Libreville protesters set the parliament building on fire, the police responded by storming the opposition headquarters. Reportedly at least two people were killed. The interior ministry said that about 1,000 people were arrested. The German Foreign Office informs that the situation is calm now and public life in Libreville is largely back to normal.

Ali Bongo has held office since his election victory in 2009 that was also charged with accusations of fraud and violence. He succeeded his father Omar Bongo who was in office since 1967. Although Gabon counts as

one of the richest countries in Africa because of its wealth of natural resources (including oil), one third of the roughly 1.8m inhabitants is living below the poverty line. So far Gabon had been considered a stable country in central Africa.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Negotiations about elections

On 01 September 2016 the government and representatives of the opposition and civil society took up negotiations about presidential elections. Most of the major opposition parties boycotted the talks. Before the talks started, opponents of the talks and police clashed violently in the capital Kinshasa.

In August 2016 the election committee had proposed to postpone the elections originally scheduled for November 2016, claiming that the registration of voters could not be completed before July 2017. His opponents accuse President Joseph Kabila of clinging to office. His second and thus last term in office allowed under the constitution will end with these elections.

Zimbabwe

Manifestations banned

After the protests of 26 August 2016 (see Briefing Notes of 29 August 2016) the government on 01 September 2016 banned all manifestations in the capital Harare for the next two weeks. Forthwith the opposition postponed a large rally planned for 02 September 2016 for two weeks.

Uzbekistan

Death of President Karimov

On 02 September 2016 state TV officially announced the death of the president. Karimov succumbed to a cerebral haemorrhage on 02 September 2016. He was buried in his home town Samarkant according to Muslim traditions on 03 September 2016. Karimov has never named a successor. The head of government Shavkat Mirziyoyev and finance minister Rustam Azimov are considered to be potential successors. The population fears that difficult times are ahead. Karimov led Uzbekistan since the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989 and had declared its independence on 01 September 1991. Due to his death events commemorating the 25th anniversary of independence were cancelled or postponed indefinitely.

Kyrgyzstan

Attack on Chinese embassy

On 30 August 2016 a car bomb exploded in front of the Chinese embassy in Bishkek. Reportedly there was one casualty and three Kyrgyz embassy staff members were wounded. It is assumed that the attack was committed by Uighur separatists.

Serbia

Refugees on the Balkan route

About 200 migrants are entering Serbia daily. According to official statements about 4,400 migrants are currently staying in the country, about 3,000 of them are living at reception centres. Since the beginning of the year about 7,341 persons applied for asylum. Furthermore Serbian authorities prevented a total of 3,100 refugees from crossing the border from Bulgaria or the FYR Macedonia since the end of July. 622 people were stopped inside the country by joint patrols of the military and police.

After the Balkan route has been closed down about one third of the people seeking protection arrive via Macedonia and the other two thirds via Bulgaria. Most of these migrants come from Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan and the majority entered with the help of smugglers. According to latest information of the UNHCR

430 refugees continue to camp out at the two border crossings to Hungary near Horgos and Kelebija, most of them are women and children from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Another 470 persons are staying at a reception centre in the Serbian city of Subotica. 30 persons are admitted to Hungary every day.

Kosovo

Several IS training camps

The media reported the existence of five training centres for fighters of the terrorist militia IS in Kosovo. One of them is located in Vitia, about 50km south-east of the capital Priština, the other four in almost non-accessible mountain regions in the border area between Albania and Macedonia. According to the reports, former UCK members that already fought in Syria, act as trainers. They also said that there are almost 30 children under the age of 15 staying in these camps with the consent of their parents. Of the camps' trainees over 200 are currently fighting in Syria and Iraq, including 38 women, the reports said.

Arrests for attack on the parliament

Six members of the nationalist opposition party Vetevendosje (Self-determination) were arrested on 01 September 2016 on the suspicion of having thrown an IED at parliament in the beginning of August (see Briefing Notes of 08 August 2016). Vetevendosje's chairman, Visar Imeri, rejected the allegations and said that this was persecution of political opponents.

There have been repeated tensions between the political parties in the last ten months. The three opposition parties Vetevendosje, Alliance for the Future and Nisma (Initiative) had repeatedly interrupted parliamentary sessions with tear gas at the end of 2015/beginning of 2016 to prevent the formation of the „Community of Serbian Municipalities“ and the adoption of the border agreement with Montenegro.

Arrests after anti-Serbian protests

On 27 August 2016 24 Kosovo Albanians were arrested who had participated in an anti-Serbian protest. Serious clashes resulted in the village of Mushtisht in southern Kosovo, when about one hundred Albanians protested against the visit by a group of Serbs to the Serbian-orthodox monastery. As justification for their protest the Albanian villagers cited the war crimes the Serbs committed during the Kosovo war from 1998 to 1999.

FYR Macedonia

Interim government elected

After many months of mediation by the US and the EU parliament elected an interim government to lead the country until new elections will be held in December. The government comprises all major parties. Furthermore the government and the opposition agreed on reforming the media to permit fair and free elections and on appointing a special prosecutor to investigate corruption charges against the former government and offences potentially committed by the opposition. Since 2014 the country has been experiencing a political crisis that deepened in 2015 because of a bugging scandal.

Moldova

Protest during independence celebrations

During the military parade on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of independence (27 August 1991) the police used tear gas against hundreds of anti-government protesters criticizing the influence of the wealthy entrepreneur Vlad Plahotniuc.

The pro-European government is unable to bring about political stability and economic growth. The prime minister was exchanged five times in 2015, the influence of oligarchs is growing. On top there is the frozen conflict with the pro-Russian separatist region of Transnistria.

High migration rate

At the end of the 1980s Moldova had a population of about 4.5 million, while it is hardly 3.5 million now. According to a BBC study Moldova is the world's country with the fastest shrinking population. Next to poverty, the main reason for emigration is the population's general disaffection with corruption and the lack of reforms. Every third Moldovan is considering emigration. The remittances of the expatriates account for more than 20 % of the GDP.

Myanmar

Historic peace conference

A peace conference considered to be historic took place in the capital Naypyidaw from 31 August to 03 September 2016. State advisor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi opened the conference that was attended by about 1,400 persons, including UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, on the first day. Representatives of the government, all parties, the military, and civil society attended as well as almost all ethnic rebel groups. Three of them had been excluded as they were currently involved in armed clashes with the military. The conference wants to end the ethnic minorities' striving for more self-determination that has strained their relationship with the government for decades. It marks the beginning of a peace process that might take years. The next conference is planned for March 2017.

After the 2010 elections the military transferred its powers to a civil government under its control (in March 2011) with the support of a new constitution that guaranteed the military almost the same level of powers up to now. The civil government made ceasefire agreements with eight of about 20 rebel groups in October 2015. In November 2015 the opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi won the parliamentary elections and has been in office since March 2016.