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Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration

Briefing Notes

30 September 2019

Afghanistan

Presidential elections

Contrary to what was feared relatively few attacks marred the presidential elections on 28 September 2019. However, it is estimated that only about 20% (about two million) of the voters did cast their ballots, although the government had deployed 100,000 soldiers and policemen to protect the polling stations. Many polling stations remained closed for security reasons, in particular in areas in which fighting rages or which are under Taliban control. According to press reports about 260 to 400 attacks were counted nationwide. The estimates for dead and injured victims range between three and 29 killed and 24 to 190 wounded. The election results are not expected before 18 October 2019.

Other attacks/fighting

On 23 September 2019 at least 35 people died in an air raid against the Taliban in Musa Qala district in Helmand province. Most of the victims are said to be civilians attending a wedding celebration.

A bombing by as yet unknown attackers killed four civilians, including a child and a journalist, in Kandahar city in the south on 24 September 2019. The attack happened in the fourth district of Kandahar near a campaign office of acting president Ghani.

The scene of one of the attacks of 28 September 2019 was a mosque used as polling station in Kandahar. At least 13 civilians and one policeman died in the bombing.

Albania/North Macedonia

German Parliament supports EU accession of Albania and North Macedonia

On 26 September 2019 a majority in the German Parliament approved the initiation of EU accession negotiations with these two countries in the Western Balkan. 395 MPs voted for the accession of Albania in the roll-call vote, 188 voted against and 16 abstained. A total of 465 MPs were for the accession of the Republic of North Macedonia, 122 voted against and 16 abstained.

The Parliament stipulated several conditions for the accession negotiations, though. Such as the due operation and functioning of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court should be ensured by providing an adequate number of vetted judges and prosecutors; the adoption of a reform of election law by the government and ensuring transparent funding of parties and election campaigns. The German Parliament also insists on visible advances in fighting corruption and organized crime at all levels, including action to be taken against high-ranking Albanian officials and politicians. Furthermore, tangible progress needs to be made in administrative reforms, including the review of the recruiting of high-ranking officials and directors. In the motion on the accession negotiations with North Macedonia the federal government is requested to ensure that the continuation of the reform activities and the implementation of the adopted reforms by North Macedonia. Another requirement are further extensive efforts by North Macedonia especially in the fields of the rule of law, special prosecutors, fighting corruption and organized crime as well as strengthening institutions to protect and promote human rights.

In the European Council on 17/18 October 2019 the EU members will finally vote on the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.

Albania/North Macedonia/Serbia

Western Balkan countries planning minor Schengen area

On 28 September 2019 the Serbian daily Danas reported about the intention of the three Western Balkan countries to establish a common economic area to enhance their competitiveness for the European and other markets. Deputy Serbian Prime Minister Zorana Mihajlović said that the three countries are too small to attract international investors and achieve consistent economic growth separately.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, North Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama met on the occasion of the UN General Assembly in New York on 24 September 2019 to discuss a concept for the abolishment of the different business barriers and the free movement of goods, people and services in the three Western Balkan countries.

Algeria

Said Bouteflika sentenced

A military court sentenced Said Bouteflika, the brother of former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to 15 years imprisonment on 25 September 2019. He was charged with conspiracy against the executive and undermining the army's authority. The former head of the secret service Mohamed Mediene and his successor Athmane Tartag as well as the chairwoman of the Communist labour party, Louisa Hanoune, also received 15-year sentences.

Casualties in hospital fire

Eight babies died in a fire in the maternity ward of a hospital in Oued Souf region in eastern Algeria. Reportedly the fire was started by a short circuit, there had been another fire in the same hospital already one year ago. On 24 September 2019 several hundred people gathered in front of the hospital demanding improvements in the health care system.

China

Hong Kong: Protests

Tens of thousands attended an authorized rally on 28 September 2019. On the fringes of the rally violent clashes with the police started and there was more violence on 29 September 2019 during unauthorized protests of several thousand people. The police used water cannons, tear gas and pepper spray. Dozens of people were wounded and many were arrested.

Hong Kong: Dialogue with the population

On 26 September 2019 Chief Executive Carrie Lam held the first of her public dialogues with the Hong Kong population which she had announced in early September (see BN of 09 September 2019). She met 150 people randomly selected from 20,000 interested Hong Kong citizens at Queen Elizabeth stadium in Wan Chai district. Most of the 30 people who were able to speak were critical of the government. Thousands of protesters gathered in front of the stadium.

Hong Kong: Special status impaired

On 24 September 2019 Amnesty International (AI) reported that the Hong Kong government is undermining Hong Kong's special status in its cooperation with the central government. In the course of the years the rights to assembly, freedom of opinion and association have been progressively restricted, AI said. Repressions against activists and representatives of the media are increasing. Critical voices have been censored, persecuted and threatened. On the other hand, those responsible for the consistent police violence against protesters had not been held to account yet.

Activist honoured

Lawyer Guo Jianmei received the Right Livelihood Award for her commitment to promoting women's rights in China. She enabled thousands of disadvantaged women to gain access to the law. The prize will be awarded on 11 October 2019 and goes to three other winners as well.

Egypt

New wave of protests and repression

Last week's protests were followed by a considerably harsher response from the security forces in Egypt, particularly in Cairo. Tahrir square and parts of down-town were closed off and the police showed a strong presence. Nevertheless minor, seemingly spontaneous protests against the head of state Abdel Fattag al-Sisi flashed up mainly in Cairo and Giza, but also in other Egyptian cities. Even football games were cancelled. It seems that the visible, massive and prompt response of the security forces deterred many of last week's protesters, but as yet it remains uncertain how the situation will evolve.

India

Lynching of two outcast children

On 25 September 2019 two ten- and twelve-year-old casteless children (Dalits) were lynched by a mob in Shivpuri in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Two men beat the Dalits (untouchables) with clubs until they were dead in the middle of the street. When the murderers tried to run away, some neighbours stopped and held them until they were arrested. The incident was related to the caste system. Although discrimination on grounds of caste is prohibited by law in India, it frequently occurs, especially in rural areas.

India/Pakistan

Conflict in Kashmir

In his address to the UN General Assembly in New York Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan called upon the UN to interfere in the Kashmir conflict warning that otherwise the probability of another war between the nuclear powers Pakistan and India would increase. He also demanded the lifting of the house arrest in Kashmir and the re-establishment of the region's autonomous status. Indian Prime Minister Modi, speaking one hour before him, did not mention the conflict in his speech.

On 28 September 2019 the Indian military tightened its security in the Kashmir valley near Srinagar. Several protests were held on 29 September 2019. Dozens of citizens of Kashmir lit firecrackers in the streets and demanded independence from India.

Indonesia

Fatalities in Papua unrest

According to official statements at least 20 people died and 75 were injured in several skirmishes in Papua province on 23 September 2019. The media report up to 26 deaths. Allegedly the clashes were started by rumors of a teacher's racist comments about Papua's indigenous population. Papua and West Papua provinces have experienced protests since the middle of August 2019. In early September 2019 about 3,000 policemen and soldiers were deployed to Papua and the neighbouring province of West Papua, the internet was blocked for two weeks.

Stricter criminal law

According to media reports more than 300 people were wounded in rallies attended by tens of thousands on 24 September 2019. Again, the rallies were held to protest against the planned reform of the criminal code. Among other things the amended code provides for prison sentences for extra-marital sexual relations and cohabitation of unmarried individuals. The existing abortion law will become stricter. Insulting the president will become an offence. On 20 September 2019 President Widodo postponed the vote on the criminal law reform by the parliament scheduled for 24 September 2019 following massive criticism. Should the amended criminal code become law this might also affect unmarried tourists, because it shall also apply to foreigners.

Iraq

Security situation

Security relevant incidents continue in Iraq, mostly with explosive devices. Baghdad, Diyala, Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk and Ninive provinces were most affected.

Attack near Kerbala

Twelve people died and five were wounded when a van exploded on 20 September 2019. The incident happened at a check-point near the access to the city of Kerbala. IS claimed responsibility for the attack. Media reports say that this was one of the major targeted attacks on civilians since IS' defeat in December 2017. It happened between the two Shiite holidays of Ashura and al-Arba'in.

Closure of camp for internally displaced persons in Ninive province

The ministry for migration and displacement announced the closure of four more IDP-camps in Ninive province on 23 September 2019. The camps are closed as part of an initiative to speed up the refugees' return to their home regions. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) and the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) are warning against a premature return of the internally displaced.

Iran

Family members of women's rights activist arrested

According to information by the well-known women's rights activist Masih Alinejad three members of her family were arrested on 24 September 2019. This was also confirmed by human rights organizations, including by Amnesty International (AI). Masih Alinejad lives in the USA; she is initiator of campaigns against compulsory veiling in the Islamic Republic. Iranian authorities have been exerting pressure on women's rights activists for several months now. The Iranian judiciary threatens Alinejad's supporters with up to ten years in prison. As recently as July and August Saba Kord-Afshari was sentenced to 24 years in prison, Mojgan Keshavarz to 23 years and Yasaman Ariani and her mother Monireh Arabshahi to 16 years each.

Ivory Coast

West Africa's first Coptic-Orthodox church

On 22 September 2019 hundreds of members of the Coptic-Orthodox church gathered in the Ivorian capital Abidjan to inaugurate the first Coptic-Orthodox church. This makes Ivory Coast the first West African country that houses a Coptic-Orthodox church which shall double as the West African central office. The Coptic-Orthodox church is an ancient Oriental church of Egypt where it has five to eleven million members. Outside of Egypt there are small Coptic communities in Libya, Sudan and some other countries.

Jordan

Teachers on strike

Since the beginning of September, more than 100,000 of Jordan's public school teachers have been on strike. Ever since the new school year started, about 1.3 million pupils have not been able to attend school.

The Jordanian teachers' union demands, among other things, the salary increase of 50% that was promised in 2014.

According to the country's department of statistics the average salary of a state school teacher ranges between 360 and 450 dinars (464 and 580 euros). In Jordan, the poverty line for a family of five is at 340 dinars (438 euros). Many teachers have to rely on additional sources of income to secure their livelihood. The Jordanian teachers' union reported that about 40 teachers were arrested and released again later.

Kosovo

Parliamentary elections on 6 October 2019

On 23 September 2019, i.e., one day before the start of the official election campaign, Kosovan media reported about a video showing electoral fraud with ballots of voters from abroad. Allegedly, the disputed video shows how several individuals fill in more than 50 ballot cards of voters from abroad. The president of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Valdete Daka, does not exclude that votes from abroad will be invalidated because vote riggers may have gained access to ID documents of voters living abroad. The situation was similar in 2013 when thousands of votes cast by Serbians living abroad were invalidated by the Election Commission.

On 21 September 2019, the news portal Kossev stated that an electorate of 42,600 non-resident Kosovans had applied for ballot cards. The CEC approved 35,087 of these applications, among them 4,337 from Serbia. The number has doubled in comparison to the last elections in 2017. Based on estimates, between 400,000 and 600,000 Kosovans eligible to vote currently live abroad.

The Central Election Commission is an independent institution which is responsible for organizing and conducting elections in Kosovo. The CEC controls and monitors the election process and also has the power to register political parties in Kosovo.

Following an invitation from the President of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, the EU has deployed an election observation mission (EOM) to Kosovo to monitor the early parliamentary elections and to support the democratic processes in the country. According to the Serbian TV channel N1, Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the EU, tasked Viola von Cramon-Taubadel with heading this mission.

The EU deploys election observation missions to third countries upon invitation of the country in which the election takes place. They report to a member of the European Parliament who heads the election observation mission. The list of countries in which an observation of elections is primarily necessary is compiled by the European External Action Service (EEAS) in collaboration with the member countries and the European Parliament. The final decision about deploying an election observation mission to a specific country lies with the High Representative of the EU.

Lebanon

Protests over economic crisis

Protests flared up in the Lebanese capital Beirut on 29 September 2019 against the deteriorating economic situation and corruption as well as for more jobs and uninterrupted power supply. Demonstrators blocked several major roads. There were isolated clashes between the police and demonstrators. Other parts of the country also saw protests and blocked roads.

Libya

AFRICOM air-strikes close to Murzuq

The US Air Force under the command of AFRICOM flew air-strikes in the vicinity of Murzuq on 24 and 26 September 2019. In coordination with the GNA (Government of National Accord, Tripoli) three air-strikes so far targeted IS positions in the region over the course of this month. Reportedly, 11 IS supporters were killed during the air-strike on 24 September 2019 and 17 during the air-strike on 26 September 2019.

Morocco

Journalist detained for illegal abortion

Journalist Raissouni was arrested on 31 August 2019 for illegal abortion and an extra-marital sexual relationship. In Morocco, extra-marital sexual relationships and abortions are punishable. 490 women signed

and published a manifesto against these laws in which they declared having had an abortion themselves or having been involved in an abortion in another way or having had an extra-marital sexual relationship. The women call for an abolition of both laws.

Nigeria

Secret service defies court order to release Sowore

Although the Federal High Court in Abuja ordered the preliminary release of Omoyele Sowore (human rights activist, founder of the Nigerian news portal Sahara Reporters and presidential candidate for the African Action Congress (ACC) party in the February 2019 elections) on bail and the bail conditions were met, the State Security Service (SSS) still refuses to release Sowore. The SSS arrested Sowore on 3 August 2019 following his nationwide call for protest demonstrations against the government under the hashtag #RevolutionNew on 5 August 2019 where he, among other things, described the February 2019 presidential elections as not credible. On 20 September 2019 the prosecution indicted Sowore on seven charges, including treason, embezzlement of money, and cyberstalking of president Buhari.

ISWAP kills aid worker hostage

On 25 September 2019 the Jihadist terror organization Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) posted a video online which shows the decapitation of a male hostage. The victim was one of six hostages who had been abducted close to the city of Damasak/ Borno State, in mid-July 2019 during an ambush on the convoy of the Action Against Hunger (AAH) aid organization. According to ISWAP he was executed because the government betrayed the group during the negotiations on the release of the hostages. The military closed down AAH's offices in north-east Nigeria on 18 September 2019, on allegations that the organization was supplying the Jihadists with food and medication.

ISWAP kills soldiers in ambush of military patrol

According to military sources, a patrol on the way from Gubio to Maiduguri in Nigeria's Borno State was ambushed by ISWAP close to the community of Madamari on 25 September 2019. Reportedly at least nine soldiers died in the fighting, another seven soldiers are still missing. Already on 25 September 2019 IS had reported the attack via its News Agency Amaq and had referred to 14 troops killed and two captured.

New military super camps strategy

For some time now ISWAP has intensified its attacks on military convoys in Borno state. This is presumably connected with the new military super camp strategy that has been in place since the end of July 2019 and consists in the relocation of troops from smaller military outposts located in towns, villages and on major roads to a few well-fortified super camps which can be better defended against ISWAP attacks. The pooling of military forces shall allow mobile units, starting from the super camps, quicker and more flexible strikes against terrorist. However, meanwhile military convoys have been increasingly targeted by terrorist attacks. There is a risk that as a consequence of the withdrawal of the troops the rural regions will fall under ISWAP control.

Pakistan

Conviction after honour killing of social media activist

In the case of the honour killing of social media activist Qandeel Baloch in July 2016 a court sentenced her brother to life imprisonment on 27 September 2019. He had killed her because he had been furious about her social media videos which he thought to be indecent and giving the family a bad reputation. The murdered social media activist regularly expressed herself in social media presenting herself as a singer, actress, and model. In her posts she criticized the suppression of women and fought for equal rights.

Rwanda

Opposition politician assassinated

The national coordinator of the unregistered political opposition party Forces Démocratiques Unifiées – Inkingi (FDU-Inkingi), Syldio Dusabumuremyi, was stabbed to death in the community of Gitarama (Muhanga district) on 23 September 2019. The police announced the arrest of two suspects. In 2019, two other members of the political party had been victims of suspected assaults. On 15 July 2019, Eugène Ndereyimana disappeared; on 9 March 2019, Anselme Mutuyimana, was found dead on the edge of the Gishwati forest in north-western Rwanda.

Russian Federation

Rally for release of protesters

More than 20,000 people participated in an authorized rally in Moscow on 29 September 2019 to demonstrate for the release of detained protesters. Opposition members Alexei Navalny and Lyubov Sobol also attended in the rally. Russian authorities arrested more than 1,000 protesters during the July rallies against the exclusion of opposition candidates from the regional elections of September 2019.

Senegal

Opposition politician Khalifa Sall pardoned

Following a pardon granted by president Macky Sall, the opposition politician and former mayor of the capital city Dakar, detained in Senegal, was released from prison on the evening of 29 September 2019. Khalifa Sall, who is not related to the president, was sentenced to 5 years in prison in 2018 for embezzlement of public funds. He allegedly embezzled three million Francs (Franc de la Communauté Financière d'Afrique) in public funds between 2011 and 2015. 63-year-old Khalifa Sall has always rejected these allegations and called them politically motivated. Due to his conviction he was not able to run against Macky Sall in the presidential elections last February. Hundreds of supporters were waiting for him when he was released from prison.

Serbia

Europride 2022 in Belgrade

On 21 September 2019 the European Pride Organisers Association (EPOA) announced that the vote on the venue for the Europride 2020 had been in favour of the Serbian capital. 71% of the participants from all European countries voted in favour of Belgrade and thus sent a clear message of support to LGBTIs in all of Eastern Europe.

According to EPOA president Kristine Garine the event will have a great impact on LGBTI people in Belgrade, Serbia, and the whole region which is not known for being LGBTI-friendly. The success of Europride as a peaceful rally for human rights could set an important signal for the whole country and contribute to shaping its political future.

The current attitude of Serbians towards homosexuality is deemed to be rather negative. As reported by the paper The Guardian in 2017, 78% of the Serbs are of the opinion that homosexuality should not be shown in public. 65% of the persons who were questioned called homosexuality a disease. In Serbia it is not yet possible to get married or enter into a same-sex civil union. It is therefore all the more remarkable that a lesbian politician who openly acknowledges her homosexuality succeeded in becoming a government member in 2017. Prime Minister Ana Brnabić and her partner even participated in this year's Christopher Street Day in Belgrade.

Somalia

Attack in Mogadishu

On 26 September 2019 al-Shabaab attacked Turkish citizens close to the K5 junction in Mogadishu, injuring two.

Fighting

Last week, several clashes of al-Shabaab, on the one hand, with the Somali National Army, AMISOM, regional security forces, and the Kenya Defence forces, on the other hand, were reported. These clashes happened in Mogadishu, at a checkpoint in the city Bal'ad (Middle Shabelle region) in the Abdalla Birole area (Lower Juba region) as well as in the areas Gendershe, Dhanaane, El Salin, Badhadhe, and Qoryoley in the Lower Shabelle region.

Syria

Fighting

Fighting is reported in particular north of Latakia in the area around the Idlib de-escalation zone. Several villages and small towns have supposedly been attacked with barrel bombs; artillery fire is also reported.

Constitutional process

According to information of 23 September 2019 consultations about a new constitution are planned to take place in Syria between representatives of the Assad government and the opposition under the leadership of Turkey, Iran, and Russia. Observers responded fairly reserved to the announcement of such a conference under the auspices of the UN because there is no reason to expect any major concessions to the opposition from Assad's side. The proposal was also strongly criticized in Syria, for instance because representatives of the interests of the Kurdish population are missing altogether. Kurdish forces in northern Syria have been striving for a far-reaching autonomy of the Kurdish areas in Syria for a long time.

Turkmenistan

Prisoners pardoned

President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov has pardoned 868 prisoners as part of the country's Independence Day celebrations. Already in March and May he had signed amnesty orders for more than 2,000 prisoners. In general, political prisoners are not among the group of beneficiaries.

Yemen

Houthi rebels report ground attack in Saudi Arabia

On 29 September 2019, Houthi rebels published pictures of their latest attack on Saudi Arabian armed forces in Najran province in the south of Saudi Arabia. The Houthi also said that about 500 Saudi Arabian soldiers were killed or wounded during these attacks and another 2,000 were captured. However, as yet this information has not been confirmed nor has Saudi Arabia responded to these allegations.

Fighting

Last week armed confrontations and attacks of different armed groups were reported from various regions in Yemen, among others in Ataq (Shabwah Governorate), Jaar (Abyan Governorate), and Hamrat (Al-Dhali Governorate). Air raids of the Saudi-led coalition supposedly killed several civilians in the Sawd district (Amran Governorate) on 23 September 2019 and in the city of Qataba (Al-Dhali Governorate) on 24 September 2019.