

## Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

# Briefing Notes

6 April 2020

### Afghanistan

#### Hostilities, attacks and civilian casualties

There were media reports last week of fighting in Kandahar, Logar, Khost, Baghlan, Takhar, Helmand, Faryab, Uruzgan, Zabul, Balkh, Wardak, Laghman and Kapisa, as well as attacks in Kabul, Kandahar, Helmand and Paktika. The attacks in particular involved civilian casualties.

Since the signing of the peace accord with the USA, the Taliban have allegedly carried out over 400 attacks in 31 of the 34 provinces.

The Taliban continue to promote their military training camps with corresponding videos and photographs. Observers consider it questionable whether the Taliban will cease allowing foreign jihadists such as the Turkistan Islamic Party, Al-Qaeda, the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan or Harakat-ul-Mujahideen to use their camps. One of the conditions pertaining to the troop withdrawal agreement with the USA was that the Taliban cease supporting foreign terrorist groups.

On 03.04.20 one of the president's bodyguards was shot dead by unknown assailants. On 31.03.20 the head of the secret service's gender department was killed in an attack using a magnetic bomb.

#### ISPK leader arrested

According to government information, the leader of the ASKP in Afghanistan, Abdullah Orakzai alias Aslam Farooqi, was arrested together with 19 other persons in an operation by security forces in Kandahar last week.

#### Government circles

There are signs of conciliation on the horizon in the dispute between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah over the outcome of the presidential elections. The two sides have held discussions. There is talk of addenda to the constitution and a leading role for Abdullah in the peace process.

#### Agreement on exchange of prisoners within reach

On 01.04.20 a Taliban delegation arrived in Kabul for talks on the planned exchange of prisoners (a precondition for peace talks). The Taliban stated that these would only take the form of "technical talks" on the exchange of prisoners, but they did not rule out further-reaching "political talks".

#### COVID-19 pandemic

Confirmed cases of corona have been reported to date from 18 of the 34 provinces, with the largest number occurring in Herat. Herat is close to the border with Iran, from where many Afghans are returning from the neighbouring country. Following a brief closure, the border with Iran is open again.

Curfews are in place in the provinces of Kabul, Herat, Khandahar, Logar and Farah and in the cities of Jalalabad (Nangarhar), Asadabad (Kunar) and Zaranj (Nimroz).

All sports facilities, wedding venues, places of prayer and public meeting places in Kabul have been closed. All shops and stores have been closed, with the exception of pharmacies and drugstores. The police have stated that they intend to take tougher action against any breaches of the shutdown.

Bus transport services have ceased to operate in Kabul. Buses with more than four passengers on board are not permitted to enter the city. Some domestic flights are still in operation.

## **Albania**

### **Further tightening of curfew conditions**

The measures taken to curb the COVID-19 pandemic are among the most far-reaching in Europe. According to reports in the media, even stricter curfew conditions were introduced on 30.03.20. Even people who live together are now no longer allowed to leave their homes together. Instead, only one member of the household is permitted outside for a maximum of one hour daily. A corresponding application requires to be filed beforehand via the internet portal e-albania. The permit commonly arrives quickly. People without internet access can apply for permission to leave their home by SMS. There is criticism that in this case the permit often takes several hours or does not arrive until the following day. Pensioners are not entitled to file applications. This category of persons are banned from leaving their home at all. The ban is expected to remain in force for two months. Where younger relatives are unable to provide support, teams of helpers are to step in. The rules enjoy a high degree of acceptance among the public.

## **Cameroon**

### **MDC supporters released**

On 02.04.20 a court of first instance in Bangangte, capital of the district of Ndé, region Ouest, sentenced several supporters of Cameroon's largest opposition party, the Cameroon Renaissance Movement (MDC), to two months in prison. They were released after the hearing, however, as they had already been in custody for two months. They were accused of having distributed flyers in Bangangte calling for a boycott of the parliamentary and local government elections planned for 09.02.20.

## **Colombia**

### **Indigenous ethnic groups under threat from COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires**

According to media reports, in addition to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, indigenous groups on the north Colombian coast are also faced with the difficult task of fighting widespread fires which recently came close to their settlements and crop areas for five days. Four indigenous ethnic groups live autonomously in the affected region of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The nomadic Yukpa people have already been directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. BN of 30.03.20). The national organisation for indigenous peoples, ONIC, rates the risk for communities close to the border with neighbouring Ecuador to the south as particularly high. Ecuador recently experienced a sharp rise in the number of registered infections.

### **Ceasefire due to COVID-19 pandemic**

According to media reports, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Colombia and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, Carlos Ruiz Masieu, called for a nationwide ceasefire on 28.03.20 in view of the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was preceded by an appeal to all the parties to the conflict by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The Colombian Episcopal Conference has also called on armed groups to renounce violence.

In voicing his demand, UN representative Masieu pointed out that communities in departamentos such as Cauca, Chocó or Antioquia are still victims of violence.

Also on 28.03.20, the National Liberation Army guerilla organisation (ELN), which is still active in Colombia, declared a unilateral ceasefire in April 2020 as a humanitarian gesture towards the people of Colombia in the face of the pandemic.

The ELN expressly reserves the right to take measures to defend itself against attacks by the army, paramilitary groups or drug gangs, however. Its declaration includes a call for president Iván Duque to resume the dialogue with the ELN, which was broken off in 2019.

## **China**

### **State action against COVID-19 activists**

The human rights organisation Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) reported on 01.04.20 on action taken by the state against people who have criticised the state's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak on the internet or shared messages about COVID-19 on social media. According to CHRD, media have been censored, doctors seeking to enlighten the public have been punished, independent journalists and critics of the government have been taken into custody, foreign reporters have been expelled from the country. The organisation has documented 897 cases nationwide in which the police took action between 01.01.20 and 26.03.20 against individuals who had posted comments or shared information online about COVID-19. Measures by the state allegedly cover various forms of custody, fines and warnings, mostly for spreading false information and disturbing public order. The organisation states that no details are available in the majority of cases, however. CHRD assumes that its analysis of official media reports has not been able to cover all such cases, however, pointing out that the ministry of public security referred to 5,111 relevant cases back in February 2020, without going into further detail.

## **DR Congo**

### **Bundu dia Kongo gathering broken up by force**

Enforcing the ban on large gatherings to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, on 30.03.20 the police used tear gas and gunfire to break up a gathering by around 300 members of the politico-religious Bundu dia Kongo movement (BDK) in Kinshasa's Ma Campagne residential district. According to the movement's leader, Ne Muanda Nsemi, four of his supporters were killed and eleven injured. The police deny that anyone was killed in the operation. Citing a UN intelligence source, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that at least three people were killed.

## **Ethiopia**

### **Parliamentary elections postponed**

The parliamentary election planned for 29.08.20 has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chairperson of the electoral commission, Birtukan Mideska, stated on 01.04.20 that a new date would be announced after the end of the crisis. By way of explanation, it was pointed out that the registration of voters which was scheduled to begin in April 2020 and the planned start of campaigning in May 2020 were not compatible with the precautionary measures against coronavirus.

The elections, which take place every five years, are being awaited with great anticipation. These are the first elections in which prime minister Abiy Ahmed, who has been in office since April 2018, is to face the electorate. Abiy, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year, has initiated a process of political opening and made peace with Eritrea. Despite his general popularity, the outcome of the election remains in the balance, as the country is marked by increasing ethnic violence and a strong opposition has formed in a number of regions.

### **Journalist detained after COVID-19 report**

The Committee to Protect Journalists has demanded the immediate release of the journalist Yayasew Shimelis, who was arrested in the district of Legetafo on 27.03.20 after claiming in a video on his YouTube channel that the government had called on religious leaders to dig 200,000 graves on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and the expected death toll. The health ministry stated that the report was false and condemned it as a deliberate attempt to stir up public unrest. Yayasew has since apologised for posting the video.

In February 2020 parliament passed a law against agitation and false information which provides for announcements and messages which "might give rise to violence or disruptions of public order" to be punished with fines and custodial sentences (cf. BN of 17.02.20).

## **India**

### **Death sentences executed**

Four death sentences relating to the case of a gang rape in 2012 were executed on 20.03.20. The executions by hanging had been deferred three times. The executions were carried out at Delhi's Tihar prison. No death sentence had been executed in India since 2015.

The Nirbhaya case caused a stir throughout the country and sparked debates about women's social standing well beyond India's borders. Shortly after the incident, thousands of protesters called for the culprits to be executed at once. Action is rarely taken in cases of violence against women in India. After several days of public protests, the justice system took stern measures in this case, however. In addition, a female police unit was established in New Delhi in response to the incident, with responsibility for crimes committed against women.

### **Kashmir: Law on residence**

Almost eight months after the special status of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked, on 01.04.20 India's central government passed a new law on permanent residence in the union territories. Under this law, anyone who has been resident in this region for more than 15 years or has studied there for seven years and graduated can become a permanent resident of Jammu and Kashmir. This also applies to children of federal government civil servants who have served in Jammu and Kashmir for a period of ten years, even if they no longer live there.

### **Kashmir: Exchanges of fire**

According to information from the Indian military, two incidents involving exchanges of fire with insurgents occurred in Jammu and Kashmir on 04./05.04.20. On 04.04.20 a unit came under fire during a search operation in the town of Kulgam. Four rebels were killed. On 05.04.20 an exchange of fire occurred when armed insurgents entered into the Indian part of Kashmir near Keran, a village on the border with the Pakistani part of Kashmir. Five attackers and one soldier were killed and two soldiers were injured.

## **Iran**

### **Easing of protective provisions to combat COVID-19**

President Hassan Rohani has announced that the government intends to ease slightly the strict protective provisions which have been imposed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 11.04.20, some shops in the provinces will be allowed to open again, subject to compliance with particularly strict hygiene requirements. The same arrangement will not apply for Teheran until 18.04.20. Gymnasiums, stadiums, swimming baths and other places where large congregations of people could gather are to remain closed. Schools, universities and religious sites are to remain closed until 18.04.20 at least, and there are to be no Friday prayers anywhere in the country. According to the president, travel to other provinces will continue to be prohibited. The latest figures from the health ministry put the number of deaths at 3,400, with 55,000 people infected. 70 % of the economy has reportedly been brought to a standstill.

## **Iraq**

### **Conditional release of prisoners**

Prisoners have been released on various conditions, such as bail or parole, in several Iraqi provinces in order to relieve the pressure on the crowded prisons in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The releases are implemented by local courts and are subject to time restrictions.

### **Security situation**

In March 2020 there were less security incidents attributable to IS fighters. The largest number took place in Diyala, followed by Baghdad, Salahaddin, Ninive and Anbar.

### **Extension of curfew**

The government has extended the curfew (cf. BN of 30.03.20) until 19.04.20 at least. The Kurdish regional government has extended the curfew (cf. BN of 30.03.20) until 10.04.20 at least and has announced that public authorities will be closed until 16.04.20 at least. The airports in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

are to remain closed until 11.04.20.

Humanitarian organisations continue to report that the curfews are hampering relief measures, including preventive measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. They also note that transport between the provinces in central Iraq and the Kurdish provinces continues to be restricted. Exceptional arrangements have been secured in some provinces. The provinces concerned have not been named, however.

### **Freedom of the press and COVID-19 reporting**

The health ministry is the sole official source of figures on the numbers of patients infected with coronavirus. Following a report citing substantially higher numbers of infected people, the Iraqi authorities withdrew Reuters' reporting licence, initially for three months, and threatened to impose a fine. Referring to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the authorities stated that the number of infected people would rise in the following days because three special test laboratories have now been opened in Najaf, Baghdad and Basra. Up to 4,500 tests can now allegedly be carried out daily, as opposed to the 100 previously.

## **Kosovo**

### **Political crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Following the toppling of Albin Kurti's Kosovar government through a vote of no confidence (cf. BN of 30.03.20), media reports indicate a lack of agreement in Europe's youngest state as to whether new elections should take place swiftly. Kurti is in favour of new elections being held soon. His Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) party emerged as the winner in the elections in October 2019. Meanwhile, president Hashim Thaci is calling for the formation of a so-called government of unity. This solution could lead to the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) participating in government. Thaci led this party prior to assuming presidential office four years ago.

### **Punitive tariffs on Serbian goods lifted**

According to media reports, the 100 per cent duties imposed by Kosovo on goods from Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have been lifted in their entirety since 01.04.20. The punitive tariffs on raw materials from the two countries had already been lifted on 20.03.20.

The high tariffs were introduced by the government of the then prime minister, Ramush Haradinaj, in November 2018, in response to Serbia's anti-Kosovar policies. Serbia had attempted to isolate Kosovo internationally, for example (cf. BN of 26.11.18).

Almost simultaneously, on 03.04.20 the EU appointed a Slovakian diplomat as its new special envoy for the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo: Miroslav Lajčák's previous posts included those of Slovakian foreign minister and UN Deputy Secretary-General. He is to take over the newly created post for an initial term of twelve months.

## **Lebanon**

### **Hezbollah commander killed**

Ali Mohammed Younis, a commander within the Hezbollah militia who was entrusted with counter-espionage duties, was found shot dead on 04.04.20. There are varying reports as to the exact circumstances of his death. Hezbollah has launched investigations. Pro-Hezbollah media in Lebanon suspect that he was murdered by Mossad. Speculation that the murder might be linked to the death of Antoine Hayek, a former member of a pro-Israeli militia who was murdered by unknown assailants, has been vehemently denied.

## **Libya**

### **Fighting for Tripoli**

The 5th of April 2020 marked the first anniversary of the offensive against Tripoli. After a year of fighting and ceasefire negotiations, no side has been able to gain a decisive advantage, although positions have frequently changed hands. Any ceasefire agreements which have come about were over in a matter of days. The number

of people displaced by the offensive is well into six figures, while the numbers of dead civilians and combatants are difficult to estimate. No workable, non-military solution is in sight.

## **Niger**

### **More than 60 killed in fighting with insurgents**

The government announced on 03.04.20 that four soldiers and 63 jihadists had been killed in fighting between the Nigerian army and heavily armed extremists in the west of the country. On 02.04.20, extremists engaged in fighting with the army in the Tillaberi region, close to the border with Mali. According to the defence ministry, they were driven off. The army seized dozens of weapons and vehicles, above all motorcycles.

## **Nigeria**

### **Human rights violations against the backdrop of protective measures against COVID-19**

On 01.04.20 the director of Amnesty International Nigeria, Osai Ojigho, accused the security forces of committing human rights violations against the population against the backdrop of a 14-day lockdown imposed in parts of Nigeria. She said that these claims were substantiated by reports and videos on social media. President Buhari imposed a 14-day lockdown beginning on 31.03.20 for the capital, Abuja, the largest city, Lagos, and the federal state of Ogun, which borders on Lagos. The governments of several federal states have imposed curfews. As per 05.04.20, there were 232 confirmed cases of corona infections and a death toll of five.

## **Pakistan**

### **Pakistani Taliban still active**

In his first interview after escaping from military custody (cf. BN of 24.02.20) Ehsan Ehsanullah, a former high-ranking member of the Pakistani Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and co-founder of the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar splitter group (JuA), stated that the Pakistani Taliban and its splitter groups still had an underground presence in various large towns and cities in Pakistan and were still capable of planning and carrying out targeted attacks.

### **Baloch journalist missing in Sweden**

The Balochistan Times reported on 28.03.20 that its editor-in-chief Sajid Hussain, who originates from the south-western province of Balochistan, has been missing since 02.03.20. He went into exile in Uppsala, Sweden in 2012 on account of security concerns. The newspaper has carried critical reports about human rights violations committed against Balochs by paramilitary groups and the police. Political and armed groups belonging to the Baloch minority have been spearheading separatist movements in the province for more than a decade now. Baloch journalists are coerced into practicing a pronounced degree of self-censorship and are commonly subject to reprisals by the state.

## **Serbia**

### **Journalist detained over COVID-19 report**

According to media reports, the journalist Ana Lalic was taken into police custody on 01.04.20, following her critical COVID-19 coverage concerning conditions at a hospital in the city of Novi Sas in northern Serbia. She was released the following day.

Lalic, who works for the Nova.rs news portal, was detained on the day that a new decree entered into force which stipulates that only the corona crisis team led by the head of the government, Ana Brnabic, is permitted to disseminate information about the COVID-19 pandemic and the adopted counter-measures. This provision was also intended to cover the work of the media. The government has since rescinded the decree, which came in for strong criticism from the opposition and non-governmental organisations.

## **Somalia**

### **US-AFRICOM accused of killing civilians**

US-AFRICOM has again been accused of killing civilians in air raids targeting Al-Shabaab in Somalia. According to a report by Amnesty International (AI) on 01.04.20, an 18 year-old girl was killed in an air raid in Middle Jubba on 02.02.20. Her two sisters and her grandmother were injured. US-AFRICOM was previously accused of having killed a civilian during an air raid near Jilib on 24.02.20 (cf. BN of 03.02.20). US-AFRICOM claimed that only terrorists were killed in the air raids. In future, US-AFRICOM intends to publish its own reports on allegations and civilian casualties.

### **Measures to curb the COVID-19 pandemic**

The government has taken various steps to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. All international and domestic flights have been suspended, with the exception of humanitarian flights. The hotels along Lido Beach in Mogadishu, where hundreds of families normally gather at the weekend, have been closed. State schools, religious schools and universities have also been closed. Hundreds of prisoners have been released. Puntland has imposed a curfew from sunset to sunrise and dispatched security forces to the larger towns and cities to enforce it. Puntland has also announced that it is closing its borders with Somaliland and Ethiopia for several weeks. To date, seven people have tested positive for the virus.

## **Syria**

### **North-east: Renewed prison revolt**

In the territories administrated by the SDF, renewed clashes occurred on 30.03.20 between imprisoned IS supporters and the Kurdish-dominated security forces in Hassakeh, only a few hours after the administration had declared the rioting to be over (cf. BN of 30.03.20). The renewed fighting reportedly represents one of the most severe confrontations with imprisoned fighters since the territorial defeat of IS around one year ago. The riot was allegedly ended by 31.03.20, thereby “averting a catastrophe”, according to the regional government’s spokesperson. There have apparently been no further clashes. No information is available on casualties or fatalities.

## **Tajikistan**

### **Jehovah’s Witness sentenced to prison term**

On 02.04.20 a military court in Dushanbe sentenced the Jehovah’s Witness Jovidon Bobojonov to two years’ imprisonment. The court found the 20 year-old guilty of refusing to take up military service. All Tajik men are obliged to complete two years’ military service between the ages of 18 and 27. There is no provision in the country’s law for refusing military service on religious or conscientious grounds. According to information from the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the man was arrested in January 2020 after refusing to wear a military uniform and to swear the oath of allegiance on account of his faith. According to the Forum 18 human rights organisation, he suffered torture by beating and he will be required to serve his sentence in a labour camp.

## **Togo**

### **COVID-19 pandemic Prisoners pardoned**

On 01.04.20 president Faure Gnassingbé pardoned a total of 1,048 inmates at prisons in the capital, Lomé, and twelve other towns. The measure is intended to reduce the risk of infection by coronavirus in the prisons.

## **Tunisia**

### **Terrorists killed**

The interior ministry reported on 04.04.20 that Tunisian security forces had killed two terrorists in the province of Kasserine, close to the border with Algeria. The ministry stated that the action was the result of intelligence work carried out by the national counter-terrorism units as part of a preventive operation. The local media reported that the two terrorists were members of Jund al-Khilafa, who are also referred to as ‘Soldiers of the Caliphate’ and are linked to IS terrorists.

### **Parliament grants government special powers**

On 04.04.20, parliament granted prime minister Elyes Fakhfakham special powers for two months, in order to expedite the adoption of measures to fight the spread of coronavirus and its economic consequences.

A night-time curfew has been in place since 17.03.20. On 22.03.20 the authorities imposed further measures, which are to remain in force until 19.04.20. An all-day curfew has been decreed. Tunisians require an official permit to leave their homes. Anyone breaching the curfew will face severe penalties. Cafés, restaurants, shops, mosques and hotels have been closed. Air transport and shipping have been suspended. The interior ministry is deploying a police robot to patrol the streets of the capital. “Robocop” is remote-controlled and is equipped with infrared and thermal imaging cameras as well as a sound and light alarm system.

As per 05.04.20 the COVID-19 pandemic had claimed 19 lives in the country, with 553 confirmed cases of infection.

## **Turkey**

### **Early release of prisoners**

In view of the public health risks in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, on 31.03.20 the government tabled a bill in parliament which provides for the temporary release of approx. 100,000 of the roughly 300,000 inmates in the country’s prisons. Prisoners who belong to a health risk group are to serve the remainder of their sentences under house arrest. In addition, some 70,000 petty criminals who are currently accommodated in open prisons are to serve their terms under a form of house arrest until the spread of coronavirus has been fully halted. The same applies to prisoners who are nearing the end of their sentences. Murderers, sex offenders, prisoners who have committed violence against women, drug dealers and all prisoners who have been convicted of terrorist offences or who have been remanded in custody on charges relating to terrorism or terrorist propaganda are exempted from the provisions. The provisions are to remain in force for an initial period up to 30.05.20. The ministry of justice can extend them by a further two months as necessary, however.

### **Measures to counter the COVID-19 pandemic**

The curfew which already applied to people aged over 65 and the chronically ill has been extended to include people aged under 20 with effect from 04.04.20. The interior ministry points out that young employees and seasonal workers in the agricultural sector are exempted, however. Wearing a mask has been declared compulsory at busy places such as markets or in shops. For an initial period of 15 days, cars are to be banned from entering or leaving 31 towns and cities, including Istanbul and Ankara, without a special permit. The ministry of tourism has announced that the start of this year’s holiday season is to be postponed, stating the end of May 2020 as the prospective date for the season to open. The ban on foreigners entering the country, which was imposed to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, had previously been extended by parliament to the end of April 2020.

## **Uganda**

### **Excessive use of force by the state in connection with the fight against COVID-19**

According to reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW), security forces applied excessive force culminating in the use of firearms in March 2020 in enforcing restrictions on public life which the government has imposed as protective measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Public transport and all markets apart from those selling food have been prohibited and a night-time curfew has been imposed.

The Human Rights and Protection Forum (HRAPF) has reported a police raid on a shelter for homeless LGBT people which is run by the Children of the Sun Foundation Uganda (COSF Uganda) in Nsangi on 29.03.20. 23 people were reportedly arrested, three of whom have since been released. Those arrested have been charged with contravening the ban on public gatherings which has been imposed as part of the protective measures to combat COVID-19. Their lawyers claim that they have been targeted on account of their sexual orientation, however.

## **Ukraine**

### **No progress on the front line to Eastern Ukraine**

The ceasefire which was agreed at the summit in Normandy format which took place in Paris between France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia in December 2019 remains a long way off in the conflict region in the east of the country. While the Ukrainian army has unilaterally retreated at various points along the front line, shelling by the Russian occupying forces and their local rebels has never stopped, and continues to claim the lives of Ukrainian soldiers. Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, the separatists are being accused of using the pandemic as a pretext for restricting the freedom of movement of the OSCE monitoring mission and other international actors in the regions which they control around Donetsk and Luhansk.

It is further claimed that the Kremlin is exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic for the purposes of a campaign to secure the lifting of the western sanctions which were imposed in response to the annexation of Crimea and the Russian occupation of territories in Eastern Ukraine, with Vladimir Putin calling for all international sanctions which have not been imposed by the UN Security Council to be suspended for the duration of the crisis. In this context it very much suits the Kremlin that the Ukrainian leadership under president Zelenski appears disposed to make substantial concessions to the rebels in the hope of securing peace as soon as possible in the Donbas region. Zelenski's chief of staff, Andri Jermak, agreed to the establishment of an advisory body whose composition is to ensure equal representation for delegates of the Ukraine and of the two People's Republics, for example. This venture has been put on ice for the time being, however, following fierce protests within Ukraine.

### **Domestic policy takes a step backwards**

The reform efforts in the field of domestic policy which have proven successful to date, e.g. in healthcare and education, and the drive to decentralise the country are being discontinued or unravelled. In addition, there has been a strong resurgence of the influence which oligarchs such as Ihor Komomoiski and Rinat Achmetow hold over the government and parliamentarians. By way of example, Kolomoiski, whose television channel served as a springboard for Zelenski's career as a comedian and a star of TV series, is attempting to force the return of his bank, which was nationalised in the course of the reform of the financial system under ex-president Petro Poroshenko. Zelenski's government reshuffle a month ago finally put paid to any hope that his election to presidential office would mark a new departure and revitalise the country. There are now growing concerns that the government could abandon its pro-Western policy of reform.

## **Venezuela**

### **Members of Guaidó's staff arrested**

Five members of Guaidó's staff were arrested by security forces on 01.04.20 and 03.04.20. They are suspected of preparing a coup. One person has since been released. Internationally, the increased pressure on the opposition is being attributed to the fact that the US Department of Justice has declared Venezuela to be a state sponsor of narco-terrorism due to various government employees' involvement in drug smuggling.

## **Yemen**

### **Air raids on Sana'a**

The Saudi-led coalition reportedly flew several air raids on Sana'a on 30.03.20. These were the first raids on the Yemenite capital for some months. The attacks took place after Saudi Arabia had intercepted two ballistic

missiles over Ryadh on 28.03.20. The Houthi rebels regularly fire rockets at Saudi Arabia. These rarely reach the capital, however, which is 1,000 km from the Yemenite border.

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BN-Redaktion@bamf.bund.de