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**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION  
DIRECTORATE B  
- POLICY DEPARTMENT -**

**NOTE ON**

**Yemen**



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## Yemen

### General background

On 22 May [1990](#), the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in the north and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in the south formally [united](#) as the [Republic of Yemen](#).

<b>Population</b> (2008, ECI)	23.1 million
<b>GDP per head</b> (2008, ECI)	2,294 \$
<b>Real GDP growth</b> (2008, ECI)	3.2%
<b>Human Development Index</b> (2006, UNDP)	138 (out of 179)
<b>Adult Literacy Rate</b> (2006, UNDP)	57.3%

The **People's General Congress (GPC)**, the former ruling party of the North, emerged as the leading party, while the **Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP)**, the former ruling party of the South, initially was given a share of power in the government. The Islamist **Al Islah** (a party close to the Muslim Brotherhood with tribal and Islamist wings) had a strong showing. Between April and July 1994 a **civil war** erupted in which the North defeated its long-time southern rival.

In the aftermath of the civil war, the government, isolated by its Gulf neighbours and much of the West for its support for Iraq during the Gulf war, was faced with an economic crisis. It turned to the IMF for help and in early 1995 embarked upon an IMF-supported structural adjustment programme.

Yemen's governance relies on a **distribution of power among the regime, the tribes, and the Islamic movement**. For several years after the unification, the new country enjoyed a degree of political pluralism unique in the Arab world. But to solidify its control of the political scene, the ruling GPC began placing restrictions on pluralism and marginalising the YSP. In the September 1999 presidential elections, President Ali Abdullah Saleh's only competitor came from his own party, since the GPC-controlled Parliament had invalidated the YSP's candidate. Saleh won with a reported ninety-six percent of the vote. By 2000, Yemen had basically regressed to the standard Arab political formula of rigged elections and more or less autocratic rule. Saleh was re-elected in September 2006.

Autocratic rule, however, has its limits in Yemen: limited central government control outside the main cities became quickly apparent after 11 September 2001, when Yemen turned into a refuge for members of al-Qaeda. The Yemeni government had little option but to co-operate with the US. This cooperation helped to improve the security situation, but it is unpopular and, in part, a cause of the continued unrest within the country.

Recent attacks and waves of protests have again deteriorated the overall security conditions. The insurgencies initiated in 2004 in the Northern region have challenged the government's authority. Discontent is also growing in the south, culminating in November 2008 in the formation of a secessionist body (see p. 2).

## Institutions and domestic policy

Yemen is a one party dominant state ruled by President Ali Abdullah Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC).

The first **constitution** came into force in 1991. The President is the head of the executive and is elected in a national poll every seven years. He appoints the Prime Minister, who in turn appoints the Cabinet of Ministers. The President also appoints a **consultative Shoura Council**, (111 members). The role of the Shoura Council has recently been expanded to include some limited legislative powers, but the primary formal legislative organ is the **Parliament** (301 members). It has long been dominated by the ruling party (GPC) and is largely ineffective as a check on executive power. Parliamentary elections are held every six years. The EU expressed its satisfaction that the 2003 election was held under conditions that were “generally considered fair”.

**Presidential elections** were held in September 2006 in conjunction with local council elections. **Ali Abdullah Saleh**, who had led Northern Yemen since 1978 before he became president of the newly unified Yemen in 1990, won 77.17% of the votes against 22.87% for his closest rival, Faisal Bin Shamlan, who was supported by the JMP coalition of Islamists and opposition parties. This will keep President Saleh in power until 2013, when, according to the constitution, he must step down.

Nonetheless, President Saleh has faced increasingly vigorous public criticism of his rule. Opposition newspapers have even taken to criticising the president by name. The government's repression against insurgents in the northern region of Sadah (see p. 3) and political parties and the application of IMF-sponsored economic reforms have generated vocal opposition from all sides. Harassment and arrests of journalists continue while newspapers are routinely shut down if they become too critical.

President Saleh is highly sensitive to international - particularly US - opinion, and has kept this much in mind over the past years. His (initial) pledge not to run and a **cabinet reshuffle in February 2006** allowed him to score political points with Western institutions and governments by naming reformers and women to certain key ministries. It also allowed him to consolidate internal power and to lay the groundwork to handpick a successor, most likely his son Ahmed, the commander of Yemen's Special Forces. The new government is plagued by rampant corruption, and the ministers are already being referred to as "the technocrats", as they lack the charisma to pose any sort of a challenge to President Saleh.

A **southern secessionist body**, the Provisional Council for the Liberation of the South (PCLS), was set up in November by southern dissident Hassan Ba'oum. Although the PCLS is unlikely to have access to much power or financial resources, it lays down a direct challenge to the authority of the government in the south.

### Main political figures

#### **Ali Abdullah Saleh**

Ali Abdullah Saleh is President and head of the General People's Congress (GPC). As field marshal of the armed forces, he bases much of his power on the unchallenged support of the security forces, although a deteriorating security climate throughout the country is testing his military strength and seemingly sapping his political support.

**Ali Mohammed Mujawer**

Appointed as prime minister in March 2007, Ali Muhammed Mujawer had previously earned a reputation as an opponent of corruption in his post as electricity minister. Under his premiership, a much clearer division of labour within the government has emerged. Mujawer has assumed responsibility for economic management, whereas the president retains control over security matters. Importantly, the new prime minister is from southern Yemen, continuing Saleh's long-standing policy of placing southerners in prominent positions in government.

**Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh**

The son of the president, he is commander of Yemen's special forces, the Republican Guard. Although he is not well regarded within the establishment and has little political experience, the president is seemingly keen to groom him for eventual succession, and he has increasingly been representing his father on overseas visits.

**Hamid Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar**

The son of the Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar, the founder of Islah, has overt political ambitions, strengthened in 2006 by his management of the campaign of Faisal bin Shamlan in the presidential election. Before entering parliament, he forged a successful business career. This, and his modern outlook, makes him popular with the urban youth, although it sets him slightly at odds with conservative tribal figures.

**Hassan Ba'oum**

Ba'oum, a former leader of the Yemeni Socialist Party, was arrested in April 2008, after publicly calling for an end to the "northern occupation" of the south. His detention inflamed tensions and prompted demonstrations throughout the south. After being released in September, Ba'oum founded the secessionist Provisional Council for the Liberation of the South and reportedly was elected its "president".

**Abdulaziz Abdulghani**

Abdulghani is the chairman of the consultative Shoura Council and a member of the General People's Congress party. He served as Prime Minister of Yemen (1994–1997) and, before the unification, as a Prime Minister of the northern Yemen Arab Republic.

**Parties and Coalitions****General People's Congress (GPC)** (Leader: President Ali Abdullah Saleh)

The GPC, Yemen's ruling party since unification, is an umbrella organisation that brings together different groups with military, tribal and civil roots. Before unification it was the only political organisation permitted in North Yemen. The GPC is not motivated by any overriding ideological commitment and is generally secular in its outlook. As the ruling party, it is Yemen's best-organised, best-financed and largest political grouping.

**Islah Party (Yemeni Congregation for Reform)** (Leader: Mohammed Abdullah Al-Yadoumi)

Islah was formed after the Yemeni reunification as an offshoot of the GPC. Islah is far more conservative and Islamist in nature than the ruling party, although it also has strong tribal roots. The party has recently been weakened by internal disagreements over its future direction after the death of its founder Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein Al-Ahmar in 2007, with some elements pushing for a more explicitly Islamist message. The party's unity was undermined further by the decision of its then leader, Sheikh Abdullah, to give his personal backing to Saleh in the 2006 election, despite the fact that Islah was officially supporting the JMP candidate.

**Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP)** (Leader: Ali Salih Muqbil)

The Yemeni Socialist Party was the ruling party in South Yemen before the unification. Now YSP is a legal but barely tolerated opposition party in the Republic of Yemen. Following the 1994 civil war, the party's infrastructure and resources were confiscated by the GPC government, the leadership of the YSP went into exile and the party lost much of its support. Its cadres and members are regularly subjected to harassment. The YSP boycotted the 1997 parliamentary election, but in 2002, when a number of former political figures were offered an amnesty, the YSP reactivated its political role. However, YSP's poor showing in the 2003 parliamentary election and subsequent local elections reflects the party's waning political power.

### **Joint Meeting Party (JMP)**

In light of the weakness of the individual opposition parties, in mid-2005 the socialist YSP and the Islamist Islah formed the JMP coalition with several other opposition groups, including the Nasserite Popular Unionist Organisation and the Arab Socialist Baath Party. The JMP was created to exert greater pressure on the government to undertake wide-ranging reform of the political apparatus and the economy. Although the coalition's presidential candidate, Faisal bin Shamlan (independent), performed creditably in the 2006 election, gaining 22% of the vote, the JMP parties performed poorly in the simultaneous local poll.

### **Upcoming parliamentary elections**

In the run-up to the **parliamentary election scheduled for April 2009**, countrywide demonstrations staged by the opposition coalition, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), have erupted into

<b>Distribution of Parliament Seats 2003–2009</b>	
General People's Congress	238
Islah	46
Yemen Socialist Party	8
Nasserite Unionist People's Organisation	3
Baath	2
Independents	4

violence in 2008. Tensions between the government and the JMP began to escalate in August, when the government-dominated parliament rejected JMP amendments to the electoral law. The government also abandoned various conditions agreed during earlier negotiations. The rejected amendments included prohibiting government officials from influencing voting; ensuring the neutrality of state-owned media and an equitable allocation of public funds for campaigning; and barring voters from registering an address on the electoral roll other than their place of birth or current residence. As a result of these developments, the JMP described the Supreme Commission for Election and Referendum (SCER) and its operations as "illegal" and urged its supporters to boycott the electoral registration process. This might lead to a **postponement of the elections**.

The recently founded PCLS also presents a challenge to the public support of the predominantly southern-oriented Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) that forms part of the JMP coalition. Besides, the PCLS has also announced that it would boycott the elections.

The **parliamentary, presidential and local elections in 2003 and 2006 were characterised as free and fair by the EU Election Observation Mission** sent upon request from the Yemeni authorities. However, the EOM also made important **recommendations to overcome several big shortcomings**. These included the implementation of clear and effective guidelines for counting and publishing election results, of effective mechanisms to ensure compliance with the elections law. It was noted that the procedures for candidate registration, the participation of women in the electoral process and the general fairness of election campaigning should be improved. The EOM also suggested considering a constitutional change to reduce the presidential and parliamentary terms of office.

### **Internal security challenges**

Yemen has long had a reputation of lawlessness and militancy. Approximately 60 million fire weapons are said to circulate in this country which accounts for hardly more than 20 million inhabitants. In August 2007, citizens were banned from carrying firearms in Sanaa. Although over the past month Yemen's main sources of violence

and unrest - the **Al-Huthi insurgency and Al-Qaeda Islamists - have relatively subdued, kidnappings and other events have challenged general security.**

In 2000, Al-Qaeda members bombed a US Naval ship, the **USS Cole**, in the port of Aden in Yemen. In October 2002, the French oil supertanker "**Limburg**" was attacked off Yemen. The government has responded in a **crackdown against Islamists**. Yemen's Justice Minister announced in April 2004 that his country was drafting a special terrorism law. In July 2007, a suicide attack presumably taken out by Islamists killed eight Spaniards and two Yemenis in the province of Marib. Although a recent spate of arrests and killing of key members of Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) have further weakened the Islamist groups, they are likely to provoke retaliation along the lines of the attacks on the US embassy in March and September 2008. "Jund Al-Yemen", a faction that split from the mainstream AQY, has claimed responsibility for these attacks.

In June 2004, Hussein **Al-Huthi**, a former Member of Parliament for the Zaydi party Al-Haqq launched an **insurgency in the northern province of Sadah**. The rebellion was crushed in three months and its leader was killed in September 2004. The fighting resumed in March-April 2005 under the leadership of Badr-Eddin and Abdul-Malik Al-Huthi, Hussein's father and brother. In May, their group, named the Youthful Believers, renounced the campaign, thus leading to the amnesty of 600 rebels in March 2006. However, tension was high in the province after 45 Jews were forced from their homes by masked gunmen in January 2008, and new clashes between security forces and rebels erupted in January-March 2007. In June 2008, Abdul-Malik Al-Huthi accepted a ceasefire. Motivated by a mix of political and sectarian grievances, the insurgency and its repression have claimed hundreds of lives and created about 70,000 internally displaced persons in the Sadah region.

During the last ten years, more than 200 foreigners have been kidnapped in Yemen, generally for a very short duration. However, these actions generally lead to a peaceful outcome, with one exception in December 1998 when three British and one Australian died in a rescue operation attempted by Yemenite security forces. In most cases, **Yemenite kidnappers are motivated by socio-economic reasons**, claiming better access to healthcare and education or even the release of imprisoned relatives. Three Germans that were taken hostage by tribesmen in December 2008 were released only after the government had detained 100 members of the tribe. In early January, three South Africans were kidnapped by a separate tribal group.

Analysts fear that Yemen's instability could develop into a major potential threat to the political order in the whole Horn of Africa region. A UN Security Council report in December 2008 drew attention to a raise of **illegal migration, weapons smuggling and piracy between Somalia and Yemen**. Yemen has become the primary source of arms and ammunition to Somalia. Ships in the Gulf of Aden off the Yemeni coast have been attacked by Somali pirates. The government has grave concerns about maritime insecurity, in part because of the risk that it could damage efforts to attract foreign investment.

The Gaza crisis in winter 2008/2009 has resulted in mass protests. On 30 December 2008, hundreds of **angry protesters broke into the Egyptian consulate in Aden** to protest at Egypt's perceived failure to take a stance against Israeli action. The Egyptian consulate played down the attack, and, in an effort to assuage strong local feeling, the Yemeni government has organised the delivery of 42 tonnes of aid to Gaza.





## Economic situation

Yemen is the **poorest country in the Middle East** with a poor standard of public health and education, a high population growth rate of more than 3%, a low degree of service accessibility and 35 % of the population living under the household poverty line.

**Oil** accounts for almost 90% of export earnings and around 70% of government revenue. However, the real revenues of the oil sector are more or less unknown and fuel a large patronage system with the ruling class and the security being the major beneficiaries. The country's oil reserves are, by Gulf standards, relatively limited. **Agriculture** is the second mainstay of the internal economy. Over half of the active population works in this sector. It is, however, under threat, as Yemen's aquifers have been depleting in recent years.

Cultivation of the narcotic plant **qat** plays a dominant role in Yemen's agricultural economy. Qat is chewed by almost everyone in Yemen, it is estimated that Yemenis spend about 14.6 million man-hours a day chewing qat. Qat cultivation constitutes 10 percent of GDP and employing an estimated 150,000 persons while consuming an estimated 40 percent of irrigation water and displacing about 60 percent of areas that could otherwise be used to grow cash crops. Qat creates a regular and large transfer of money from town to country. Marketing is well organised and efficient, without any big concentrations.

As concerns **trade**, most of the Yemeni products are not up to modern standards and thus not competitive on Western markets. Therefore, Yemeni exports go mostly to China and South East Asia, followed by the neighbouring countries. Trade with the EU is rather limited. The EU exports more than 10 times more to Yemen than Yemen to the EU.

**Foreign development aid** is an important factor for economic and social progress in Yemen, accounting for around 10% of the country's GDP. The EU and its Member States contribute with 15% of this assistance, most of it as grants. However, a number of donors have cut their development assistance to Yemen, in particular the US, the World Bank, the Netherlands and also the EU, as tangible economic and democratic reforms are still lacking.

As the economy is largely cash-based, the impact of the global financial crisis on Yemen has been limited.

## Human Rights

In recent years the government has signed several Human Rights treaties; however, the Human Rights situation in Yemen is rather poor.

Yemen is, together with Iran and Saudi Arabia, one of the only three countries where **executions** are carried out for crimes committed by people below the age of 18.

The security forces have been responsible for torture and inhumane treatment. In connection with the conflicts in the northern governorate of Sadah, reportedly dozens of **arbitrary arrests and disappearances** have occurred; many detainees are held without charge or trial. Up to 70,000 internally displaced people in remote areas and towns of the Sadah governorate are inaccessible for aid agencies, due to government restrictions.

In spite of the Yemeni Constitution of 1994, which stipulates equal rights for Yemeni citizens, **women** are struggling with various constraints and secondary status. Growing fundamentalism contributes to the aggravation of restrictions for women. Yemen's Personal Status Law in particular gives women fewer rights than men. Forced marriages and early marriages are common. Subsequent to the case of a 9-year-old girl that managed to get divorced from her 30-year-old husband, an ongoing campaign advocates a legal minimum age for marriage.

Women political representation has decreased over the last years. Two female government ministers have been appointed, but they can not travel without their husbands' permit.

## External relations

Since the end of the Cold War, Yemen has been redefining its foreign relations. It has succeeded in rebuilding its relations with the neighbouring Gulf States after the Gulf crisis, during which Yemen's perceived solidarity with Iraq resulted in its isolation. Saudi Arabia (after an agreement on borders) and Kuwait have resumed their financial aid. Moreover, during the course of 2002 Yemen has gained partial membership of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** in non-political fields (health, social affairs, sports and education). The focus is now on discussing to find the funds for bringing Yemen to the standards of the GCC.

Yemen has longstanding relations with **Somalia**. The situation there is a major risk for Yemen in terms of stability. Thus it has much contributed to the process of bringing the different fractions together, but it has also broken the weapons embargo on several occasions. The outbreak of a new civil war in Somalia in early 2006 has led to a surge in illegal migrations to Yemen, claiming hundreds of deaths in the crossing of the Gulf of Aden. A record 50,000 illegal Somali migrants have reached Yemen in 2008, while at least 500 died making the crossing. To date there are over 700,000 Somali refugees in Yemen, according to Yemeni sources.

Relations with **Eritrea** are turbulent. Although a dispute over the shared maritime border was settled through an international arbitration panel at the end of the 1990s, ties are still strained.

**Relations with the West** also recovered rapidly after the Gulf war. Western democracies spurred by Yemen's attempt at democratisation and impressed by its commitment to a stringent economic structural adjustment programme in 1995, encouraged international donors to extend their financial assistance. Relations with the US were further eased by US interest in using Aden as a refuelling stop for its navy, which it began doing in 1999. After the bombing of USS Cole in Aden harbour in October 2000, Yemen has become an important US partner in the fight against terrorism, as it continues to crack down on suspected Islamic extremists.

Western countries' policies add further incentives for the regime to embrace authoritarianism. The American counter-terrorism strategy in Yemen relies upon building up the Special Forces—headed by one of President Saleh's sons, Ahmed—in order to strengthen the central government's control over the tribes. The US and European countries seek to decrease the presence not only of Islamist militants in the country, but also of more moderate Islamic actors inside the system, even though their participation is essential for a functioning pluralist system.

## Relations with the EU

Following the unification of the two Yemens, the **Cooperation Agreement** signed in 1984 with the Yemen Arab Republic (northern Yemen) was extended in 1995 to cover the entire territory. An advanced and expanded framework cooperation agreement on commercial, development, and economic cooperation came into force on 1 July 1998. In 2001, the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) Middle East was created as a new EC budget line to fund operations in developing nations in the Middle East that were not covered by the MEDA programme.

Bilateral relations were strengthened in 2004 when a **European Commission Delegation office** opened in Sana'a. Since then a **Political Dialogue** with the EU has been organised on a regular annual basis. The last session took place on 29 October 2008 in Sana'a. There is also a political dialogue at local level where Heads of Mission meet quarterly.

The EC Country **Strategy Paper 2007-2013** and the **Multiannual Indicative Programme 2007-2010** put an emphasis on fighting poverty and improving development through measures in population growth, private sector development and good governance issues. The approach is in line with a reform matrix presented by the Yemeni government in December 2005, which covers a wide range of issues from democratisation to the reform of the judiciary. The Multiannual Indicative Programme allocates overall € 60 millions for the period 2007-2010 under the Development Cooperation Instrument for Middle East. In 2009, € 15 millions are intended for private sector development in agriculture and food processing. However, the implementation of the reform agenda outlined in the Strategy Paper seems to have lost somewhat its impetus.

After having deployed an **Election Observation Mission** for the September 2006 presidential election, the EU is planning to participate in monitoring the parliamentary elections in 2009. In January 2009, EC officials and the SCER held a preparatory meeting in Sanaa.

In early January 2009 the European Commission announced that it is allocating €500,000 of relief aid in assistance for the 700,000 Somali and Ethiopian immigrants in Yemen.

## The European Parliament and Yemen

No specific texts on Yemen have been adopted during the Parliament's 6th term. In February 2004<sup>1</sup>, the EP recalls "the success of the Sana'a conference organised with EU and Member State sponsorship by the Yemeni Government and the NGO No Peace Without Justice". In January 2004, Yemen had hosted this high-profile conference on democracy, human rights and the role of the international criminal court, attended by more than 800 officials from 52 countries. The EP commends the conference participants who signed the ambitious "Sanaa Declaration," committing their respective countries to uphold democratic processes, institutions and values.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution on reinvigorating EU actions on human rights and democratisation with Mediterranean partners P5\_TA(2004)0099, 12 February 2004.

In its Resolution on the Common Strategy of the European Union on the Mediterranean region, as laid down by the Feira European Council of 19 June 2000<sup>2</sup>, the EP “believes that [the core values embraced by the Union and its Member States] would be strengthened in the newly-developing democracy in the Yemen Republic through involvement of Yemen as an observer in the Barcelona process, and hopes that the modalities for such an arrangement will be examined”.

Finally, Yemen is merely mentioned in the EP resolution on female genital mutilation of 20 September 2001<sup>3</sup> as one of the countries concerned and in the EP resolution of 8 May 2008 on the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World<sup>4</sup> as one of the countries that have criminalised homosexuality.

A number of Yemeni officials have visited the European Parliament in 2008. President Ali Abdullah Saleh met with EP President Pöttering in January 2008. Amal Al-Basha, the chairperson of a Yemeni Human Rights organisation, and the former Foreign Minister of Yemen Abdulkarim Al-Eryani participated in the Arab Week that was held at the European Parliament in November.

### What is at stake for the EU?

The EU has no major trade or economic interests in Yemen. A successful democratisation of Yemen might not have a major impact on the other Arab states, but a failure could shed negative light on the EU as a reliable partner.

What is at stake is first and foremost security. Yemen’s stability affects the EU’s stability as it has been demonstrated for example by the “Limburg” and “USS Cole” events and in the aftermath of the Afghanistan war. The Yemeni government is weak and the country, which is a fragile state, has to be prevented to become a failed state. Yemen is also one of the few Arab states (like Morocco and Jordan) which have declared themselves ready to take part in the reform process and the EU’s response was that it stands ready to support Yemen in this regard.

However, not much progress has been registered on either side, recently. President Saleh is very critical to conditional support of the Western countries. During his last visit to China in April 2006, he praised the Chinese who give support without exercising any sort of pressure or setting out conditions.

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<sup>2</sup> A5-0008/2001, 1 February 2001.

<sup>3</sup> A5-0285/2001.

<sup>4</sup> A6-0153/2008

ANNEX 1

MAP OF YEMEN



Source: EIU Country Profile