

The German army as occupying power... and spearhead for German business

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German army (Bundeswehr) units have been stationed in the south of Kosovo since June 11, thus opening up a new chapter in the history of German militarism.

With its active participation in the NATO bombing of Serbia, the Bundeswehr joined in a war of aggression against a sovereign state for the first time since its foundation in the fifties. For the first time since the defeat of the Wehrmacht and the end of the Second World War, German troops are acting as an occupying force.

With 8,500 soldiers the German army has the second biggest contingent of the NATO force, following Britain with its 13,000 soldiers. The US, France and Italy have each sent 7,000 men and Russia has sent a 3,600-strong force. Kosovo has been divided into five zones of occupation, with the German zone comprising the southwest part of the province, bordering on Albania and Macedonia.

The German KFOR contingent is led by General Fritz von Korff, commander of the 12th tank division "Oberpfalz". Last March von Korff was promoted to brigadier general. He has been waiting for some months at the German army base in Teltovo, Macedonia for the intervention in Kosovo. For a time he was directly involved in the talks with the Yugoslav army leadership led by General Mike Jackson.

The entry and the stationing of the German troops in the region of Prizren, Kosovo's third biggest town, was accompanied with a barrage of propaganda: "peace mission", "army of liberation", and pictures of refugees clapping and waving. As usual, the more removed from the truth, the bigger were the headlines and the shriller were the commentaries. The facts reveal a very different picture.

Backed up by the entry of the Bundeswehr and the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army units of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) immediately began to terrorise those parts of the Serbian population which remained. KLA fighters have taken over the police headquarters in Prizren. Prior to taking over the building they arrested many civilians, mostly elderly men, including Roma gypsies and Kosovar Albanians, who are accused of betraying their country and collaborating with the enemy.

The KLA terror against gypsies and Serbs has not been limited to the German zone of occupation, but has taken place throughout Kosovo and unleashed a new flood of refugees—this time in the direction of Serbia.

From the total 200,000-strong non-Albanian population in Kosovo, tens of thousands began to flee when Yugoslav Army troops began to withdraw on June 9. Many of those remaining are being persecuted. In Kosovo's capital, Pristina, 30,000 of the total 40,000 Serbian inhabitants of the town had left within the first two weeks of the peace.

Neither the Bundeswehr nor the NATO leadership can pretend to be

surprised by the extremely brutal actions of the KLA commandos. Such a development was predictable. In the negotiations over several days for a Serbian capitulation, the leadership of the Yugoslav army warned NATO representatives of such a danger and attempted to delay the withdrawal of their own troops in order to guarantee the security of the Serbian population.

NATO however insisted on the immediate withdrawal of Serbian troops and threatened to renew the bombing. It knew full well that the resulting power vacuum could not be immediately filled by NATO troops and left a free hand for the KLA.

NATO banked on the KLA terror. This not only serves to refute the propaganda over the "peace mission" of the Bundeswehr and NATO, it also makes clear that the occupation government which is being put together and assisted to power in Kosovo will be based on the most reactionary political and social forces.

Reports have been circulating for weeks detailing the Mafia-type structures of the KLA. There is no doubt that the organisation has financed its activities with drug dealing and extortion and that the present ruling clique came to the fore through resorting to the murder of its political opponents. The German interior ministry even justified its decision for the quickest possible repatriation of Kosovo refugees in Germany with reference to the criminal activity of the KLA, which had to be prevented from establishing a base in Germany. In Kosovo however, the German and other occupying powers are relying precisely on such forces.

At the same time as the entry of German troops into the area, the KLA named one of its retinue, Gafur Kiseri, as the new mayor of Prizren. He has the responsibility of ensuring that local businessmen close to the KLA do not go wanting when it comes to reconstruction.

The new prefect for Prizren is the former KLA spokesman in Kukes (Albania), Kadri Kyreziu. He now acts as a mediator for the German KFOR troops. In a report by the German *Tageszeitung*, Kyreziu confirmed that the KLA was carrying out policing actions together with the KFOR soldiers: "They wear the PU sign on their arm—'Police Unit'." He referred to the co-operation with the KFOR as "excellent" and added: "I am in contact with the Germans and last Tuesday they expressly approved of my work."

While the alleged violent expulsion of the Albanian population by Serbian militias served as the justification for the weeks-long NATO bombing and the destruction of large parts of Yugoslavia, the brutal activities of the KLA against the Serbian minority is regarded as the criminal actions of a few individuals, and only halfheartedly punished.

As well as the Serbs, the Roma gypsy population have been the victims of racist attacks. An editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Peter Münch, interviewed a 29 year old Roma named Luan Kallo who had

been tortured by KLA members in the “KLA thrashing school”—a school which has been turned into an army barracks for the KLA. Kallo reported that, on arrival at the centre, he was greeted with the words: “You will confess to whatever we accuse you of.” He was then accused of collaboration and the murder of women and children. Although threatened with death he denied all the charges. Gangs of thugs took turns in beating him black and blue.

Asked about the torture, a KLA man responded: “All gypsies should be slaughtered. They have ransacked our houses, they admitted it yesterday.” He continued swearing until others told him “to keep his mouth shut”. No one was brought to book for the offences.

The paper made the following comment regarding the tolerant attitude of the Bundeswehr to the KLA: “The Germans are cautious of adopting too hard a line against the often dubious Albanian troops. They are petrified of endangering the deal over the disarming of the freedom fighters which was recently celebrated as a breakthrough. The Bundeswehr also believes that they could well use the services of the KLA in the struggle against the threatening anarchy, as a sort of subordinate power” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29.6.99).

The human rights organisation Human Rights Watch has also reported on attacks being made by the KLA on Serbs, Albanians and Roma. “In Prizren, two elderly ethnic Serbs, Trifa Stamenkovic, an eighty-five-year-old man, and Marija Filipovic, a fifty-nine-year-old woman, described the June 21 murder of their respective spouses, allegedly by KLA soldiers. Stamenkovic and Filipovic, close neighbors in a traditionally Serbian area of Prizren, both went out to run errands in the mid-morning. When they returned home, Stamenkovic's seventy-seven-year-old wife, Marika, and Filipovic's sixty-three-year-old husband, Panta, had both been killed: they were stabbed and their throats had been cut. The week prior to the killings, the couples had both received three threatening visits from uniformed KLA members armed with AK47s who demanded their weapons and money. Panta Filipovic was struck with a gun butt when he claimed not to possess any weapons, Marija said. The Stamenkovic family was robbed, according to Trifa. Although neither Stamenkovic nor Filipovic witnessed the killing of their spouses, Filipovic's ethnic Albanian neighbors told her that the KLA was responsible.”

In light of such reports German politicians and the military leadership are trying to diffuse any impression that they are directly working with the KLA. Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping (SPD) has rejected the American proposal for an independent military role to be played by the KLA in Kosovo or the transformation of the organisation into a sort of national police force. Scharping however qualified his rejection by declaring: “There is a place for some of its members, but it is in a multi-ethnic, democratically legitimated police force.”

In line with the hoary old saying of all colonial powers, “divide and rule,” German policy is to use the conflict between the various ethnic groups in the Balkans to advance its own economic and strategic interests. The recognition of Slovenia and Croatia by the Kohl government, which opened the floodgates to a torrent of violence, worked to this end. The flood of words about “democracy” and “freedom” cannot disguise this fact.

A virtual baggage train of German industrialists, determined to outdo the competition and secure the majority of lucrative contracts arising from the reconstruction of Kosovo, has followed the trail blazed by the German army.

Already in the middle of June the United Electricity Works (VEW) from Dortmund and the Chamber of Industry and Trade from North

Rhine-Westphalia (IHK) announced the foundation of a Kosovo pool of companies. In all 60 companies joined within the space of a few days and interest grew when the VEW and IHK reported on their initiative to a press conference. Georg Schulte, speaker of the Chamber of Trade, complained that “in Bosnia-Herzegovina it was mainly Italian and American firms who benefited from the reconstruction. This time German companies have to take part.”

At the beginning of July a delegation of 20 managers from the VEW/IHK company pool travelled to Prizren to carry out initial discussions with the leader of the reconstruction work, Mattai Hoffmann, and the KLA town mayor. The first successes were recorded. According to the German business newspaper *Handelsblatt* 500 German companies were active in the region before the war and receipts from exports amounted to 25 billion DM last year. This year the figure is expected to rise to 30 billion DM, despite the war.

Lucrative contracts are in prospect because of the large sums which the European Union has made available for the reconstruction of the devastated land. From January next year a total of 700 million Euros (over 700 million dollars) will be made available each year. On June 22 the European Council established a European Agency for the Reconstruction of Kosovo. Led by 250 “specialists,” allocation teams are to be set up which can check, on the spot, the degree of war damage and then allocate contracts based on “clear, objective criteria”.

In view of these enormous sums, a tug of war has begun behind the scenes over who should participate in the allocation teams. In one of its last acts as president of the European Union, the German government pushed through the nomination of the former minister from the Chancellor's office, Bodo Hombach, as EU Balkan co-ordinator. Austria and a number of other EU countries were firmly opposed to the decision. Business groups in Germany applauded the move, well aware that Hombach—a former company manager and state economics minister—has a record as an aggressive advocate of German business interests.

Immediately following Hombach's nomination, the *Handelsblatt* (June 24) quoted the head of the National Organisation for German Industry, Rudolf von Wartenberg, who called for “appropriate consideration to be given to German business.” The newspaper continued: “The mistake that was made in Bosnia, where Germany assumed responsibility for a third off the costs but only received between 4 and 8 percent of the contracts, should not be repeated... The interests of German companies had to be secured with seats and votes in the Agency for Reconstruction”.

“Not least,” the *Handelsblatt* concluded, “German business hopes that Hombach will prove to be an effective advocate of its interests. The international tussle for the huge contracts arising from the reconstruction of the infrastructure has already begun.”



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