

Opposition to KLA grows in Kosovo

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The regime imposed by the Kosovo Liberation Army under the auspices of NATO is meeting growing opposition, even amongst the Albanian majority of Kosovo.

The Party for the Democratic Progress of Kosovo, formed by KLA leader Hashim Thaqi, is suffering a sharp decline in popular support according to a number of voter surveys. The reasons cited are anger over the KLA's heavy-handed monopoly of power and disgust at its promotion of violence against Serbs, Roma gypsies and political opponents within the Albanian population.

Some surveys predict that the KLA would be crushed in provincial elections at all levels and, if presidential elections were held, Thaqi would be easily defeated by Ibrahim Rugova, head of the Democratic League of Kosovo. Rugova is Thaqi's main rival within the Kosovan nationalist movement. He led a 10-year, non-violent resistance campaign against the Serbian government, but was shunted to the side when the US decided to promote the KLA in the months leading up to last spring's air war against Serbia.

One opinion poll found 4-to-1 support for Rugova over Thaqi. Another survey of 2,500 voters found that Rugova would win 92 percent of the vote in a two-way race with Thaqi. Support for the KLA, even in its former strongholds such as Thaqi's home base in the Drenica area of central Kosovo, is in single percentage figures, according to the polls.

On April 2, during the second week of NATO bombing, the interim or Provisional Government of Kosovo was formed as a front for the KLA. By late July its control had been extended to all localities and city authorities. The United Nations governs the country under a Security Council resolution and formally does not recognise Thaqi's government. But neither it nor NATO does anything to challenge it, and the UN has organised the KLA forces into the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), which has official policing

powers.

The KLA's so-called Interior Ministry has presided over a wave of anti-Serb violence carried out by the KPC and other less formal KLA units. In mid-October, for example, an ethnic Albanian march in Mitrovice ended in anti-Serb rioting organised by the KLA. Earlier that same month Valentin Krumov, a Bulgarian UN worker, was accosted by a group of Albanian youths who asked him the time. When he answered in Serbian, he was kicked and punched and then shot in the head in front of a large and supportive crowd. The KLA has posted lists of suspected Serb war criminals to be targeted for vigilante action.

Attacks on Serbs and Roma Gypsies are regularly used to seize control of housing for KLA supporters, many of whom are gangster elements involved in drugs, prostitution and black marketing. At least two UN police officers are also under investigation for pressuring Serbs to sell their homes to ethnic Albanians. Newspaper reports cite young KLA soldiers with wads of German marks and expensive cars taking control of municipal buildings and Serbian housing and lording it over the local residents.

The situation facing ethnic Roma is no better. Once numbering 40,000, they have been reduced to around 800 in one refugee camp outside the provincial capital of Pristina. All Roma Gypsies were driven from their homes by Kosovar Albanians and face a harsh winter in tents.

There are repeated threats of violence against everyone—from supporters of Rugova to Albanian women who date foreign UN personnel and aid workers. The KLA has unofficially warned that it is compiling a register of those parties it deems fit to take part in any future election.

Winter will exacerbate tensions amongst the Albanian population. While KLA officers enrich themselves, the reconstruction of 100,000 homes destroyed or heavily

damaged during the war—65 percent of the homes in Kosovo—will not begin until spring. Hundreds of thousands face bitter cold in temporary shelter.

A local charity worker estimates that 500,000 people still don't know where they will spend the winter. Since the end of the war on June 12, the population of Pristina has doubled to 200,000. Electricity and water systems frequently break down. This, together with a lack of food and shelter, could provoke unrest—particularly if rural residents continue to flood into the overcrowded cities.

The NATO powers are becoming increasingly concerned at the deteriorating situation. On his first visit to Kosovo last Friday, NATO's new secretary-general George Robertson warned that "vigilante justice is no justice, but a return to random violence. NATO will not stand by and see the creation of a single-ethnic Kosovo."

Perhaps the most telling statement was made earlier by the secretary-general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. He warned of the "built-in tension" between the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo who want independence and the United Nations, which is administering the territory as part of Yugoslavia.

The KLA is committed to independence and future unification with Albania. Annan warned that holding elections too quickly may strengthen separatist demands: "We have a mandate to administer the territory as part of sovereign Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but those we are administering want independence. This ambiguity is going to bring problems down the line." Albanians could end up seeing the UN as an "occupation force", he said, with all that this implies.

Against UN and NATO opposition, Serb leaders have responded to routine ethnic Albanian attacks by announcing their intention to create secure enclaves and a protection force to prevent the remaining 20,000 to 100,000 Serbs—out of a pre-war population of 200,000—from fleeing the province. This was denounced by Bernard Kouchner, the UN administrator of Kosovo, who said, "It is against the regulation of the UN mission and it is unnecessary."

Throughout the war against Serbia, the KLA was portrayed as a liberation movement fighting to free ethnic Albanians from Serbian dominance. Its real program for the driving out of all minorities and the

creation of an ethnically pure Greater Albania was concealed, as well as its well-known terrorist and criminal activities since its formation in 1993.



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