

## **Albanians Spurn K-For**

**Author:** [Petrit Krasnigi](#)

Relations between K-For and Albanians in Kosovo appear to be rapidly deteriorating

When NATO troops entered Kosovo one year ago they were greeted by cheering crowds who hailed them as liberators.

A year on, relations have deteriorated to such an extent that a K-For Civil Military Cooperation, CIMIC, report recently said the alliance was concerned its forces "had lost substantial credibility" in the eyes of both the international and local communities.

Disillusionment with the efforts of the international civil presence, particularly the UN mission to Kosovo, under Dr Bernard Kouchner, has been apparent for some months now, both inside and outside Kosovo.

And, despite their initial heroes' welcome, K-For troops have not always been warmly greeted throughout the province. The most obvious examples are the French and Russians, both of whom are seen by many Albanians to be pro-Serb, sometimes with fatal consequences.

Events in June may mark a turning point in relations between the international community and the people of Kosovo.

Early in the month, the centre of Pristina was closed because of a bomb threat. A passer-by happened to spot a suspicious package beneath a car on one of the provincial capital's main street.

The device, made safe by K-For troops, had a killing radius of 10-15 metres. It had been placed opposite buildings housing the central police station, the headquarters of the 2 Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Centre for Peace and Tolerance (a Serb NGO). The headquarters of the UN High Commission for Refugees and the UN Mission in Kosovo are also nearby.

No one claimed responsibility for the bomb, which was clearly placed where it was most likely to injure internationals. In the 10 days that followed, the centre was closed two more times following hoax calls.

Many people thought such incidents were confined to the past. The effective closure of the middle of Pristina demonstrated that, for some people, the war is not over yet - and that international staff are legitimate targets.

The violence in Kosovo is not just political. In late June, personnel from the US Office in Pristina went to a local nightclub called Disco 2000 -two of them were beaten up and ended up in hospital.

The incident occurred shortly after a large arms cache, said to be enough to equip two heavy infantry companies, was unearthed by British K-For troops near the village of Klecka/Klecka in the Drenica region - the heartland of the former Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA.

The fate of the KLA is potentially the biggest embarrassment to the international community. The guerrilla

movement was supposed to have disarmed and demobilised. In return, the Kosovo Protection Corps, KPC, was established - a civil security body, drawing most of its members from the KLA membership. The KPC was essentially a job creation scheme for ex-guerrilla fighters.

It must be one of the first times in military history that demobilisation has included keeping ex-soldiers together in military-style units, allowing them to continue wearing their uniforms (with a minor change in insignia) and carry arms, and transferring much of the leadership from one body to another.

The result is a body of men who see themselves as the future army of an independent Kosovo. They have been implicated in illegal law enforcement activities and with supporting the "liberation army" of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac, in southern Serbia.

Moreover, a report by the International Crisis Group in March said there was a possibility that some KLA units still exist. It also questioned whether the organisation's intelligence network had been disbanded.

Whatever name they are known by, the KLA still carries much influence amongst Albanians, particularly in rural areas.

In late June, the arrest of former KLA member, Shabit Shala, sparked demonstrations near the village of Lopusnik/Gryka e Llapushnikut, on the road between Pristina and Pec. Protesters waved banners with slogans such as "Long Live UCK, (KLA)" and "Weapons belong to our nation" - a clear reference to the arms cache discovery.

These incidents constitute a more worrying trend. From being allies, K-For and the self-proclaimed Kosovo Liberation Army find themselves in direct confrontation.

When NATO Secretary-General, George Robertson, recently visited the province he said the international community was beginning to lose patience with the violence. "It will not be long," he said, "before Kosovo as a whole begins to lose the support of the people it needs the most."

Unsurprisingly, Robertson missed the point entirely. It is the international civil and military presence that is beginning to lose the sympathy and support of the people it needs the most if its mission is to be successful - the people of Kosovo.

Petrit Krasniqi is a pseudonym for a Kosovo journalist

**Location:** [Serbia](#)  
[Kosovo](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/albanians-spurn-k>