

## **Burying The Hatchet?**

With UN prodding, Kosovo's rival Albanian leaders have patched up some of their differences. But key questions of money and power remain.

After months of feuding, Kosovo's rival Albanian leaders Ibrahim Rugova and Hashim Thaci held talks last week which appear to have gone some way to patching up their differences.

Rugova, the pacifist president of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and former undisputed Kosovo Albanian leader, and Thaci, the political leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), met up under the auspices of UN Administrator Bernard Kouchner.

Although all sides deemed the meeting constructive, points of conflict remain. Perhaps inevitably, a principal bone of contention is control of the resources amassed abroad during the past decade via the contributions of the Kosovo Albanian diaspora.

In the wake of the meeting, Rugova agreed to join Kosovo's Transitional Council, a move he had so far refused to make. This body, which has been created by the UN and which includes two representatives of each Albanian political party or faction, two independent Albanian politicians and representatives of Serbs and Turks, is intended to be the nucleus of a future Kosovo executive.

Despite Rugova's new-found cooperativeness, it remains unclear what role he will play in the council. Since the outbreak of fighting in Kosovo in February 1998, his party, the LDK, has fragmented. Disgruntled elements have suggested that Rugova will be participating in a personal capacity, and not as party president.

But the most critical element of the Thaci-Rugova talks was the issue of who gets the cash. The funds are those collected during the past decade among the Kosovo Albanian diaspora to finance the parallel ethnic Albanian institutions of the self-proclaimed Kosova Republic.

The man responsible for collecting these unofficial taxes, which amounted to a 3 per cent levy on the income of all emigre Kosovo Albanians, was Rugova's Prime Minister in exile, Bujar Bukoshi, who has recently returned home to Kosovo from Germany.

Over the years this fund, which is believed to be held in German and Swiss banks, grew steadily and is now, following Bukoshi's return, the subject of much speculation. According to some western sources, the sum contains several million, perhaps even several tens of millions, of US dollars.

In the past two years, as the LDK's pacifist approach to generating change in Kosovo gave way to the KLA's armed struggle, the KLA launched its own "Motherland Calls" fund and began attracting contributions from the diaspora.

At the Rugova-Thaci meeting, it seems that Rugova approved a UN proposal to form a joint commission with responsibility for overseeing the transfer of both KLA and LDK funds into a joint Kosovo Fund that would be supervised by the UN.

However, it appears that Rugova acted without consulting Bukoshi who is reported to be reluctant to relinquish control over the money and is yet to surrender any of the funds.

KLA sources say that Bukoshi is determined to retain control of the funds and to use them to finance his campaign in Kosovo's first post-war elections, currently expected in 13 months.

"If he can't get people to join him, he will buy them," said a senior KLA source, speaking under condition of anonymity. The source adds that in addition to talking with Rugova, Thaci has also met Bukoshi.

The top secret meeting was held on 3 August, that is prior to the Rugova-Thaci talks, and - according to inside sources - took place without Rugova's knowledge. However, it seems that nothing of substance was agreed at the meeting. It remains to be seen whether real groundwork has been laid for a durable between Rugova and Thaci.

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