

Come Together

Author: [IWPR](#)

By Arben Puto (BCR No 1, 01-Feb-99)

The first personality to arrive in the Albanian capital as Adem Demaci, the political representative of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Next came Rexhep Qosje, chairman of the United Democratic League, followed by a large delegation from the Kosovo shadow parliament. Idriz Ajeti, chairman of the parliamentary delegation, met with top figures from the Albanian government. Fehmi Agani, vice-president of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Mark Krasniqi, chairman of the Christian Democratic Party, Gjergj Deda, chairman of the Liberal Party, Kacusha Jashari, representative of one wing of the Social Democratic Party, all came as part of the delegation.

In addition, Tirana received Veton Surroi, well-known intellectual and founder of *Koha Ditore* newspaper, who met separately with Albanian President Rexhep Meidani, Prime Minister Pandeli Majko, Foreign Minister Paskal Milo, and opposition leader Sali Berisha.

In another meeting, the Kosovo parliamentary delegation met with Skender Gjinushi, president of the Albanian parliament, to discuss the possibility of drawing all of the Kosovo Albanians together under a common platform. The delegation stressed the importance of forging a negotiating group or government which would have the mandate of the entire Kosovo Albanian population. Gjinushi foresees a process whereby, after the planned international meeting on the crisis scheduled for Vienna, the Kosovo delegation would once again come to Tirana to confirm a government that would have the authority to represent the Kosovo people. He stressed that such an administration has to be established based on the unification of the four main groups: the parties participating in the Kosovo parliament (represented by Ibrahim Rugova), the KLA, the parties allied with Qosja, and the Student's Union.

Besides meeting with Albanian authorities, the Kosovo delegation held meetings with Daan Everts, the ambassador of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to Tirana. Everts acknowledged that the group which negotiates with Belgrade will be drawn from all Kosovo Albanian political factions, including the KLA. He stressed the urgency of creating a common platform, and the role Tirana, the Contract Group and the OSCE can play in helping unify the Kosovo parties.

Such comments were not lost on the visiting Kosovars. Fehmi Agani, a member of the parliamentarian delegation and lead negotiator for the current Kosovo Albanian negotiating group, stressed his "satisfaction that in Albania a common view exists with the Kosovo Albanians based on acknowledging the right of self-determination of the Albanians." In the effort to create a new negotiating group to start talks with Belgrade, he accepted the possibility of a Tirana roundtable. Yet he too stressed the importance of agreeing some outlines of a negotiating body.

"It is important that a political negotiating group is established to fly to Vienna, Frankfurt or wherever the meeting will be held, so that we will go unified to negotiate with Europe about the future status of Kosovo. If we do not reach a unification before then, it would be a failure, or half-failure. Meetings in Pristina, Tirana or Europe are not exclusive, but fulfil each other," he argued.

As for Rugova's absence from Tirana, Agani insisted that the Kosovo president did not oppose the invitation to Tirana but merely had "very important" obligations in Kosovo at the same time. Rugova, he said, had intended to come to Tirana January 25, but after the Racak killings the schedule had been put back, and he had to postpone his visit to Tirana, too. Yet he stressed that Rugova would come to Tirana to meet with the political leaders in Albania.

For its part, the Tirana media expressed its astonishment at Rugova's absence, in some cases directly accusing him of being an obstacle in the creation of a unified all-Albanian platform. In an editorial, the daily *Shekulli* commented severely that "the outdated claim for respecting his legal status as president, personal rivalries with some of his enemies in the field and in Pristina, rancour towards political leaders in Tirana, and especially his great will to remain in the centre of a crisis which is no longer confined within the political environment in Pristina and even less within his own office these have all contributed to his restrained and negative stand."

Whatever Rugova's explanations, the general conclusion is that by such steps he is excluding himself from the new politics emerging out of the crisis, and that the stock of the pacifist leader is no longer rising. Some called his absence from Tirana a luxury. Sabri Godo, head of the foreign affairs committee of the Albanian parliament, argued that "Rugova has demonstrated his cold attitude during the past 2-3 years. I remember that between 1993-94 he used to come every two months, but later his visits became infrequent, becoming a sort of estrangement." Neritan Ceka, leader of the Democratic Alliance Party noted

the irony that Rugova used to visit Tirana at a time when it could not play any real role. “He doesn’t come now when Tirana has become the promoter of conversations among all Albanians. I cannot understand this behaviour,” Ceka commented.

Within Albania, public opinion seems aware that Tirana has started to change its orientation towards the Kosovo problem. Once the European countries became diplomatically engaged in the crisis, Tirana seems to have decided to play its own role with the Albanians in Kosovo. However, many believe that the Albanian authorities could not undertake this role without the blessing of the international community. This follows from the fact that even the recent meetings between Prime Minister Majko and opposition leader Berisha and the period of détente that followed between them is explained by many analysts by the Kosovo crisis and Western pressure on Tirana to put aside domestic quarrels and commit more attention to the matter of Kosovo.

Artan Puto is Albania project consultant for Press Now.

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