

## **Controlling The Struggle**

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Kosovo Albanians are still unable to form a unified front. But the balance of power has clearly shifted to the KLA, leaving Rugova nearly a private envoy.

Despite the war in Kosovo, the province's ethnic Albanian leaders have failed to form a united front. Yet authority has clearly shifted from the pre-war elite to the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

During the first month-and-a-half of NATO bombing, Ibrahim Rugova, the 54-year-old pacifist and long-time undisputed leader of Kosovo's Albanians, was effectively under house arrest. In his absence, a provisional, ethnic Albanian government for Kosovo was formed, dominated by the KLA.

As a result, those who--both inside and outside the country--led resistance to Serb rule for the best part of a decade after the removal of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989 appear increasingly marginalised. Allowed to leave Yugoslavia, Rugova, is now touring European capitals in what amounts to a private capacity.

"The provisional government led by Hashim Thaci is recognised both by the Albanian government and the ethnic Albanian party in Macedonia, the Democratic Party of the Albanians," asserts a KLA representative in Tirana.

A week earlier the Albanian parliament officially passed a resolution recognising Thaci's provisional government.

"Recognition of Thaci's government is based on an agreement reached in Rambouillet," said Prec Zogaj, an adviser to the Albanian President.

At the Rambouillet peace talks Western leaders looked to 29-year-old Thaci to form a new government. Under the terms of the peace accords, a new ethnic Albanian government was to be formed comprising the KLA, Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Rexhep Qosaj's United Democratic Movement (LBD). In the event, one ministry in the provisional government was left vacant for the LDK.

While the Albanian government recognises Thaci's provisional government, the country's largest opposition group, the Democratic Party of former President Sali Berisha, has refused to follow suit, on account of its alleged Marxist-Leninist leanings.

The Democratic Party has boycotted the Albanian parliament since the May 1997 elections, which it accuses the ruling Socialist Party of fixing.

Berisha and his party say that the only representatives of Kosovo's Albanians they recognise are Rugova and Bujar Bukoshi, his long-term prime minister in exile and the man responsible for collecting "taxes" from ethnic Albanians working in western Europe. This is because the two men have mandates based on democratic elections, Berisha told a press conference in Tirana recently.

Rugova and the LDK were, indeed, victorious in underground elections held in March 1998. However, these polls, the second to have taken place in the 1990s, were effectively boycotted by most other political parties, which deemed them inappropriate after the outbreak of fighting in the province.

In an attempt to help mend fences between rival Albanian factions, Arben Xhaferi, the president of Macedonia's Democratic Party of Albanians, and a partner in the Macedonian government, paid a unexpected one-day visit to Albania. Xhaferi met with the Albanian government leadership, the KLA Spokesman, Jakup Krasniqi and Berisha.

"All this political bickering between the Albanians is deflecting attention from the war and the real criminal-[Yugoslav President Slobodan] Milosevic," said Xhaferi, who wishes to unite all Albanian political leaders under the slogan: "This is a war against Albanian ethnicity".

However, although Xhaferi commands respect among all Albanian political leaders, his intervention has so far failed to resolve differences among Berisha, Rugova and Bukoshi, on the one hand, and Tirana, Tetovo and the KLA, on the other.

The division in Kosovo's political leadership led to the creation of a second Kosovo Albanian army, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosova (FARK), loyal to Bukoshi. However, sources in the field play down the differences and say that as fighting between Serbs and Albanians intensified, FARK has come under the command of the KLA.

According to a KLA soldier who just returned from the front: "In Kosova there is only one army and only one enemy."

"The respective commanders of FARK and the KLA are united once again in Kosova. We don't want to know about politics. We want guns, bullets, bread and water," the soldier said.

In the past two weeks the KLA says it has pushed 15 kilometres inside Kosovo. Faced with an increase of volunteers in need of military training and faced with need to change their strategy from defence to offence, the KLA appointed Agim Ceku as the new military commander.

Ceku commanded Croatian forces in Croatia and Bosnia, and speculation about his role has focused on his involvement in Operation Storm, the Croatia action in 1995 which retook the Krajina and resulted in a massive wave of Serbian refugees. Certainly, the KLA expects him to contribute military and organisational expertise to the current fight.

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