

## **Ex-Fighters Shovel Snow**

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Militant Albanians mock former comrades taking on peacetime duties.

The newly formed Kosovo Protection Force (TMK) last month completed one of its first "peacetime" operations - clearing snow from the streets of Pristina.

Hardline members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) - which forms the back-bone of the TMK - jeered as war hero Ramush Haradinaj and other former fighters set to work on "Operation Snow".

The Movement for the National Liberation of Kosovo (LKCK) - considered one of the founders of the KLA - argues the transformation of the rebel group into a civilian force is an abandonment of its goals. One entire KLA unit from Podujevo disbanded rather than join the TMK.

The transformation of the Kosovo Liberation Army began in June 1999 with the signing of the Demilitarisation Agreement by the then political leader of the KLA, Hashim Thaci, and the first KFOR commander in Kosovo, General Mike Jackson.

In January, Bernard Kouchner and new KFOR commander, General Klaus Reinhardt, appointed 44 TMK officers - all of them former KLA commanders. Uniforms and rank insignia were designed to reflect the civilian nature of the new organisation. Only Agim Ceku, TMK commander and former KLA military leader, received a military rank - that of general.

The TMK's peacetime tasks will include repairing essential public utilities, providing emergency services in the wake of natural disasters and supporting civilian services.

Changing the KLA into a civilian force presented the international community with, arguably, the most workable solution to the problem of gaining control over the guerrilla force. Any efforts to forcibly disarm or disband the KLA would have met with considerable hostility.

Unwilling at first, the KLA leadership inside Kosovo and abroad has on the whole co-operated with the creation of a civilian force from the ranks of their guerrilla fighters.

KLA doves say the TMK is the only authentic Albanian structure in post-war Kosovo. They argue the old KLA command structure remains intact within the TMK and, should the need ever arise, the military organisation could very quickly be reactivated.

At present, effective power in Kosovo rests with the international administration. Thaci, who heads the co-operative faction of the KLA, has accepted this and in so doing has bolstered his position within the guerrilla leadership, marginalising the hawks. Alongside Ceku, Thaci now holds undisputed authority over the reformed KLA and its officer core.

The international administration has to date avoided siding with any one Albanian leader. But Thaci and Ceku have behind them a genuine and respected Albanian organisation. This lends them particular weight in negotiations with international bodies and in the fight against hawks within their own community.

The extent of Thaci's and Ceku's authority is perhaps best illustrated by "Operation Snow". Just a few months ago only a brave or foolish person would have dared to suggest that KLA guerrillas like Haradinaj would be clearing snow from the streets of Pristina.

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