

## **Kosovo: Arrests Spark Albanian Protests**

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A UN crime crackdown has provoked a backlash by Kosovo Albanian radicals.

The UN's arrest of Albanian war crimes suspects has provoked a wave of protests against the international community.

The detention of three former KLA members on January 28 signalled a UNMIK crackdown on the mafia and extremists wanted for atrocities during and after the Kosovo conflict.

Some of the 5,000 Albanian protesters demanding the release of Latif Gashi, Naim Kadriu and Nazim Mehmeti - detained on suspicion of committing crimes against Albanians during the war - attacked UNMIK police in a demonstration in the centre of Pristina last Friday.

The Association of KLA Veterans, the Association of KLA Invalids of War and the Association of Martyr's Families organised the protest, which ended in several policemen and civilians being hurt.

The protesters threw rocks at private shops and abused passers-by, calling them traitors for not joining the demonstration. They also threatened local OSCE guards and attacked a Kosovar journalist.

Gashi belongs to the National Intelligence Service, a shadowy organisation formed in 1999 by Hashim Thaci's provisional Kosovo government; Kadriu is a secretary of Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo, PDK; while Mehmeti is a member of the Kosovo Police Service.

Immediately after their arrest, the UN announced a tougher stand on gangsterism - promising to arrest the main mafia bosses in Kosovo this year - and war crime suspects. Over the past two years, Western officials have come under criticism for not doing enough to bring criminals to justice.

The Pristina action was the largest of a series of demonstrations organised by KLA veterans' associations in protest over the three arrests. The actions fanned a mood of anti-UNMIK hysteria, with the international administration accused of attempting to hold political trials and entering into secret agreements with Serbia.

In the Pristina protest, a Nazi swastika was displayed next to anti-UNMIK graffiti, which warned the organisation not to play with fire. On a nearby wall, someone daubed the slogan, "UNMIK is Serbia".

Political demands have been tacked on to the campaign for the release of the three men, such as the annulment of the joint agreement, signed between the UN and the Belgrade authorities, according to which representatives of each would join Albanians in working groups charged with discussing everyday issues affecting the protectorate. The Albanians rejected the initiative, fearing it would allow the Serbian authorities to reassert themselves in Kosovo.

The Albanian backlash doesn't appear to have intimidated UNMIK. After last Friday's protest, the international police force introduced tough laws on street demonstrations, declaring that it would no longer tolerate violent gatherings.

Simon Haselock, UNMIK's spokesperson, said those who orchestrated the dissent and the anti-UNMIK hysteria wanted to shield themselves from justice.

UNMIK's line may be having some effect. There are signs that the pro-KLA associations have gone too far, alienating the wider public.

For the first time, Koha Ditore and Zeri, the two main independent newspapers in Kosovo, publicly condemned what they described as efforts to create an atmosphere of hostility between the international community and Kosovars. Agim Ceku, head of the Kosovo Protection Corps, a civilian security force made up of former KLA members, said violence against police and citizens was unjustifiable.

But on a more defiant note, Xhavit Jashari, chair of the organising committee behind the Pristina demonstration, accused police and some residents of provoking the violence in the city and vowed the protests would go on.

The difference in opinions highlights the division in Kosovo between moderates and extremists. In the last three years, society has proved all too vulnerable to the intimidation and violence of the latter, partly owing to a weak political structure.

David Mullins is a pseudonym of a journalist working in the Balkans.

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