

## **Kosovo: New Crime Crackdown**

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Locals appear to have accepted that no one in the protectorate should remain above the law

UNMIK's latest drive against crime - the arrest of several men including four Kosovo Guards for the murder of an ex-policeman and his family - silences Albanian radicals who have sought to whip up tensions during previous swoops.

The Kosovo Guard is an elite force in the Kosovo Protection Corps, KPC, which was created out of the disbanded Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA, in November 1999.

Since January, UNMIK has arrested a number of KPC members for a variety of alleged crimes said to have been committed after the war. The public's response to the detentions has been muted, despite concerted attempts by Albanian radicals to whip-up tensions.

Civil unrest after the first set of arrests in January backfired after marchers stoned UNMIK police and then turned on bystanders at a nearby cafe for not joining in the demonstration. The episode prompted a public outcry against the protesters.

Eleven men in all were apprehended last Saturday in the town of Glogovac in central Kosovo. They have been arrested in connection with the murder of Hamze Hajraj, a "collaborator" who worked for the Belgrade-run police service during 1998-9.

Hajraj was killed along with his wife, son and two of his daughters on August 21, 2001. The family members were shot with AK47 assault rifles on their way home from a relative's wedding. One daughter, aged 16, survived the attack.

It is not known if collaboration alone was the reason for the slaughter. Ostracised after the war, Hajraj and his family lived a lonely life in their Glogovac flat and there are no allegations of crimes against fellow Albanians, which could have been the motive for a revenge killing.

On Tuesday, the KPC general staff acknowledged that four of those arrested - Skender Halilaj, Florim Kicina, Zeqir Kicina and Arben Kicina - are members of the Kosovo Guard. Unconfirmed reports suggest that three others are members of the Kosovo Police Service, KPS.

But significantly, the corps' response was muted compared to earlier arrests, when it has accused UNMIK of intentionally targeting the organisation. "We cannot believe that our members could be involved in such acts and we urge a swift resolution of this case," said a KPC statement issued on Monday.

UNMIK police spokesperson Paul Hamlin stressed that the arrests were directed against "individuals who may have committed crimes", not against the organisation to which they may belong.

The public's indifference is encouraging for UNMIK, which has announced further swoops during the summer. "I have said before that no one is above the law ... all those who have committed crimes will be arrested and brought to justice," mission head Michael Steiner said in a recent press conference.

Last month, six former KPC men including the high-ranking Daut Haradinaj were arrested in western Kosovo. Two thousand protesters from the KLA heartlands of Peja, Gjakova and Decan travelled to Pristina to demand their release.

However, local residents failed to join in. It would seem that the public supports the UNMIK position that no one in the protectorate should remain above the law.

Kosovo politicians have also joined the chorus against crime. Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi, himself a former member of the KLA, said no exceptions should be made in the administration of justice, while Ramush Haradinaj, an assembly member and president of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, AAK, was responsible for persuading his brother Daut to turn himself in when a warrant was issued for his arrest.

In a report on Saturday's arrests, the Pristina daily Epoka e Re - which is known for its radical views - struck a discordant note, warning that "if this humiliating pattern continues, there could be unpleasant consequences".

Some fear that militant former KLA groups, who have failed to attract public support, could now abandon peaceful protest and return to violence in an attempt to discourage UNMIK from taking law enforcement further.

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