

## **Talk of Haradinaj Indictment Unnerves Kosovo**

If the Hague tribunal indicts the former KLA commander, violence may erupt in his western Kosovo heartland.

The situation in western Kosovo is increasingly fragile two weeks ahead of the December 31 deadline for the Hague tribunal to issue the final war crimes indictments in the former Yugoslavia.

Many people interviewed by IWPR in the Decani region, home to Ramush Haradinaj, the new prime minister of Kosovo, are predicting major unrest if he is indicted in the final three weeks.

Tribunal officials visiting Pristina have already questioned Haradinaj twice, on November 10 and 11, over his role as a commander of the Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA, in 1998-99 in the western Dukagjini region.

The possibility that an indictment might be issued did not prevent Haradinaj from being nominated to the second most important post in the Kosovo government after the presidency.

He was inaugurated as prime minister on December 3, after a coalition deal was struck between Kosovo's biggest party, the Democratic League of Kosovo, LDK, and Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo, AAK.

Although Haradinaj says he is confident that he will continue to run the government, some of his hard-line supporters in the Decani area are preparing for the worst.

Ibrahim Selmanaj, mayor of Decani, says local officials are bracing themselves for turbulence.

"Knowing the mentality of my people, and knowing that Ramush's family is highly respected for the sacrifice of family members in the war, people will react very badly to his arrest," Selmanaj told IWPR.

"This reaction will be directed at everything and everyone, including my own institution", the mayor added.

Others are also predicting that Haradinaj's arrest will trigger unrest in the town, which is burdened with high unemployment, especially among the young, and poor infrastructure.

Naim Rashiti, a researcher with the International Crisis Group office in Kosovo, who spent two days in the western areas researching the security situation, says a combination of economic deprivation and demographics could lead to serious trouble in the event of Haradinaj's arrest.

"Six hundred students graduate yearly from Decani high schools, of whom only 100 go on to university," said Rashiti. "The rest of the unemployed young people are left behind, listening to stories and legends about the [1998-99] war. They would have no problem with violence if somebody with a heroic reputation, such as Haradinaj, was arrested."

"There will definitely be riots like those in March if he [Haradinaj] is arrested," agreed Rexhë Kukalaj, who

runs a Kosova Petrol gas station in Decani. "Once they start, who knows what will happen next?"

"If they wanted to arrest him, they shouldn't have let him become prime minister in the first place."

Naim Haxhosaj, 25, a student from Decani, confirmed he was ready to take to the streets if Haradinaj was indicted, adding that he would direct his anger at the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK.

"I will join protests against UNMIK because they are the ones who are cooperating with The Hague over these unfair arrests", Haxhosaj told IWPR.

Veterans from the Kosovo war also said they held UNMIK responsible.

"We blame UNMIK for every arrest so far, and they are the ones we protest against," said Sherif Krasniqi, president of the Association of War Veterans, which says it defends KLA war values.

"In Kosovo, they are the ones leading the inquiries, not The Hague," he added.

The anger vented against UNMIK is ironic given that Carla del Ponte, the Hague tribunal's chief prosecutor, publicly criticised the UN body at the NATO summit on December 3 for its alleged failure to cooperate over war crimes in Kosovo.

In spite of the mounting hostile chorus, the NATO-led peacekeeping Kosovo Force, KFOR, says it is not convinced there is any serious cause for concern at the moment.

"The situation is calm and quiet and we love it like that," KFOR spokesman Colonel Yves Kermorvant told the media in Pristina on December 10.

A former member of the KLA living in Decan, however, told IWPR that UNMIK might find itself facing paramilitaries if Haradinaj was indicted.

"No one has given up all the arms they had in the war," he said. "We could easily get a thousand armed people together overnight."

"These are people who have nothing to lose," said Naim Rashiti. "They are not necessarily members of the AAK [Haradinaj's party] but they would be former KLA fighters, or members of more militant organisations who have been involved before in conflicts in the Presevo valley and Macedonia."

Other potential fighters, according to Rashiti, would be young people who did not fight in any of these previous conflicts but who are now desperate to vent their frustration.

UNMIK head Soren Jessen-Petersen certainly knows he will have his hands full if violence does erupt if Haradinaj is arrested.

On December 13 he told the BBC's Hardtalk show that he had asked KFOR to ensure that troops in the ground were "more mobile, more flexible and also more visible".

However, fears remain that it will take more than efficient deployment of troops to keep control of Kosovo if there is an eruption of violence, which many believe is imminent.

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