



THE VIEW FROM TIRANA

THE ALBANIAN DIMENSION OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS

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THE VIEW FROM TIRANA

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Executive Summary

Relations between Albanians from Albania proper and their ethnic kin over the border in Kosovo are complex. Despite obvious linguistic and cultural ties, the political division of the past 80 years and Albania's isolation during the communist period have caused the two communities to evolve in a very different fashion. Moreover, the arrival of Kosovo Albanians in Albania in recent years and their influence in some unsavoury spheres of the economy have caused resentment among Albanians from Albania proper, most of whom are too preoccupied with the daily struggle for existence to devote much time or thought to national questions. The upsurge in violence in Kosovo and the influx of several thousand Kosovo Albanian refugees have, nevertheless, reminded Albanians of the links between the communities and sympathy for their ethnic kin in Kosovo is especially strong in the border areas among the Ghegs, the northern Albanians.

Although the Albanian response to the escalating violence in Kosovo has to date been restrained, the government, which is dominated by Tosks, southern Albanians, inevitably finds itself under increasing pressure to adopt a more aggressive stance. A policy of restraint may win international approval, but it brings into question the administration's nationalist credentials, both with Kosovo Albanians and within Albania proper, especially among the Ghegs. Moreover, it plays into the hands of ex-president Sali Berisha who is already exploiting the Kosovo conflict to mount a political comeback in Albania. Like the Kosovo Albanians, Berisha is a Gheg and comes from Tropoje on the Kosovo border. This part of the country is largely beyond Tirana's control and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is operating there increasingly openly. Given the current weakness of the Albanian Army and latent hostility between Ghegs and Tosks, there is a danger that the KLA will in time extend its theatre of operation to Albania proper.

Albania's attitude towards Kosovo and the Albanians of the former Yugoslavia was largely dismissive during the communist period between 1945 and 1992 when, as today, the country's elite was largely made up of Tosks. Relations between Albania and the Kosovo Albanians were transformed after the victory of the Democratic Party and the election of Berisha as Albanian president in 1992. Although forced by US pressure to abandon calls for the unification of all Albanian-inhabited regions of the Balkans, Berisha made the national question a priority and forged strong links with the Kosovo Albanian leadership. Berisha was forced to resign last year in the wake of an uprising against his rule following the collapse of a series of pyramid investment schemes and his party was subsequently defeated in elections in May 1997. In the anarchy of the uprising some 750,000 weapons were stolen from military depots and much of the army deserted, leaving only some 11,000 troops today. Many of the missing weapons have inevitably ended up in the hands of the KLA.

The new socialist-led government of Fatos Nano has plotted a very different course from that of its predecessor, much to the disappointment of the Kosovo Albanian leaders. It has attempted to court the West; it has forged good relations with neighbouring Greece and Macedonia; and it has supported the efforts of the Contact Group to resolve the Kosovo crisis, seeking only the status of a third republic for the majority-Albanian province and the deployment of NATO forces along its borders. That said, Albanian policy is shifting as a result of the on-going violence and popular pressure at home. And the initial restrained response is evolving into overt support for, in Nano's words, "the people of Kosovo taking up arms in order to defend their lives and property".

The Albanian government has intercepted some arms supplies intended for the KLA in those regions which it controls. However, the bulk of weapons going into Kosovo enter from regions of northern Albania beyond Tirana's control around border towns like Tropoje, Kukes and Bajram Curri. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU) have teams of monitors in those border areas. Yet in the remote Albanian highlands it is virtually impossible to detect all the mule tracks over the mountains. And given local sympathy for the plight of Kosovo's Albanians, the poorly-equipped Albanian border guards can do little but monitor the comings and goings of KLA fighters.

In an effort to ease tension and build stability in the region, ICG urges the following:

- Diplomatic pressure on former Albanian president Sali Berisha to refrain from exploiting the Kosovo crisis for his own political goals;
- International assistance for the Albanian border police to monitor more effectively the Albanian-Kosovo and Albanian-Macedonian frontier;

- Scrutiny of activities of Kosovo Disapora support groups in the West;
- International mediators to keep Albania informed of and, where useful, brought into Kosovo talks; and
- International relief agencies to direct aid for Kosovo Albanian refugees away from border to territory controlled by Tirana government.

I. INTRODUCTION

As fighting escalates in Kosovo and Kosovo Albanian refugees stream out of the ethnically-divided, southern Serbian province into neighbouring Albania, that country -- Europe's most impoverished -- is being inexorably dragged into the conflict. Indeed, given the nature of the fighting in Kosovo and the ethnic and, in some cases, family ties between Kosovo Albanians and Albanians from Albania proper, it appears almost impossible for Tirana to stand passively by. Moreover, since a violent outbreak of anarchy in spring 1997 in the wake of the collapse of a series of pyramid investment schemes, parts of northern Albania on Kosovo's border have been largely beyond Tirana's control. These regions potentially therefore offer fertile soil for insurgents, whether from Kosovo or from Albania.

This report, another in a series of ICG studies of the southern Balkans, examines the Albanian dimension of the Kosovo crisis. It describes the background to Kosovo-Albanian relations, both during the communist era and more recently during the 1992-1997 administration of ex-president Sali Berisha. It examines the position of the current Albanian government, its restrained response to the crisis and its relationship with Kosovo Albanian politicians. It also examines how the Albanian media and opposition have reacted to the violence in Kosovo, and considers Serbian allegations that Kosovo Albanians are using northern Albania both to acquire weapons and to recruit soldiers. The report concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at lessening tension and contributing to stability in the region.

II. BACKGROUND TO ALBANIAN-KOSOVO RELATIONS

A. The Communist Period

During the communist period Albania failed either to confront the Yugoslav government over the denial of national rights to the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia or to work towards Albanian unification. Albania's late dictator Enver Hoxha chose to ignore the national unity question in the interests of the stability of his own regime. He also recognised the complexities and potential pitfalls involved in unification of the two Albanian communities. The many decades of separation had served to enhance the many social and psychological differences between the internationally-isolated Albanians of Albania proper and the relatively cosmopolitan nature of their ethnic kin in Kosovo.

The Tirana elite who determined Albanian foreign policy was generally insular, sceptical and conservative in its attitude towards Kosovo Albanian aspirations. During the 1980s, for economic as well as security reasons, Tirana put more effort into establishing good relations with Belgrade than with Pristina. Although some groups ideologically related to Tirana were engaged in subversive activity in Kosovo, they generally proved an embarrassment to the Albanian leadership.

The fear of attack by the Soviet Union following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 -- a fear which was also shared by Belgrade -- led Tirana to lend Yugoslavia diplomatic support and even state publicly that if Yugoslavia were attacked, Albania would come to her aid. For a long time Yugoslavia remained Albania's major trading partner with an increasing integration between their mineral and electricity industries. The Albanian government therefore never interfered directly in Kosovo's internal politics and never pleaded the Kosovo Albanian cause before such international forums as the European Court of Human Rights, although they did plead on behalf of the Chams (the Albanian Muslim minority displaced from the north of Greece after the Second World War). This historical apathy of the Tirana authorities towards their plight has contributed to a distrust among Kosovo Albanians of the present socialist-led government in Tirana, whom they still generally regard as communists under a new name.

B. The 1992-1997 Administration of Ex-President Sali Berisha

After communism disintegrated in Albania, Sali Berisha and his Democratic Party won a majority in multi-party general elections in March 1992. The poll took place against a backdrop of Serbian oppression of Kosovo's Albanian minority and Berisha made this issue a key feature of his election campaign, claiming that once in power he would bring down the "Balkan Wall". Already in 1990 the Democratic Party in its inaugural

manifesto endorsed an eventual “democratic” union with Kosovo. With Berisha’s arrival on the Albanian political scene, Kosovo Albanian leaders felt that at long last they had an ally in Tirana and that the new Albanian government would lobby internationally for the independence of Kosovo and its eventual unification with Albania. Indeed, before the elections they mobilised their émigré communities to raise funds for the Democratic Party and thus to assist Berisha’s electoral campaign. As a Gheg, with family ties to Kosovo Albanians, Berisha attached greater priority to unification with Kosovo than did many Tosk politicians. Thus the victory of the Democratic Party in March 1992 and the election of Sali Berisha to the presidency, were hailed by Albanians in Kosovo as triumphs for the Albanian nation as a whole. Moreover, Berisha soon changed the concept of Albanian citizenship to one encompassing all ethnic Albanians whether or not they were actually from Albania. In this way, any Kosovo Albanian who migrate to Albania is automatically entitled to both Albanian citizenship and an Albanian passport.

In the wake of war in the former Yugoslavia many Kosovo Albanians, including large numbers of draft-dodgers, migrated to Albania. Though in absolute terms the amount of hard currency the Kosovo immigrants brought with them was modest, in Albania this money, coupled with the international connections of their extended families, enabled them rapidly to control several spheres of the economy, both legal and illegal. This included car imports, drug-dealing and gun-running. Kosovo immigrants thus bear some responsibility for the spiralling crime rate and the growth of Mafia-style activities which have characterised Albania’s recent history. Moreover, their influence has generated resentment among many Albanians, who, as a result, often view their Kosovo ethnic kin as bad-mannered, poorly-educated, aggressive and prone to criminal activity. Kosovo Albanians, on the other hand, have often adopted a patronising attitude towards Albanians seeing them as naive, backward, elitist and incapable of operating successfully in the modern world.

The relative economic success of Kosovo Albanians in Albania has helped create a ‘them and us’ attitude and has contributed to feelings of indifference among many Albanians to the plight of their ethnic kin in Kosovo. By 1994, as the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina threatened to spill over that country’s borders, the West pressed Tirana to recognise the inviolability of its frontiers with Serbia and Montenegro. As a result, Berisha reluctantly abandoned publicly his support for an independent Kosovo, and called instead for dialogue between the local Kosovo Albanian leadership and Belgrade aiming at re-negotiated autonomy for Kosovo within Yugoslavia. Berisha was aware that any move towards a forcible change of borders and the creation of a unified Albanian state would have the potential to destabilise South-Eastern Europe and cost Albania critical foreign financial assistance.

III. CURRENT ALBANIAN-KOSOVO RELATIONS

Electoral defeat for the Democratic Party in May 1997 to the socialists and the forced resignation of President Berisha in the aftermath of Albania's spring 1997 *de facto* uprising contributed to a feeling of dismay among Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. Hitherto, and despite having to curtail public manifestations of support for Kosovo's independence, Berisha had presented the world with a united pan-Albanian front. The anarchy and violence in Albania, and the election of a government dominated by socialist Tosks undermined that notion.

Early Kosovo Albanian suspicions of the motives and attitudes of the government of new Prime Minister Fatos Nano concerning the national question have been confirmed by some of its actions in the past year. These include a cordial meeting in November 1997 between Nano and Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic on Crete in Greece, and even statements from the Albanian Foreign Ministry describing the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) as "terrorists" rather than "freedom fighters". As a result, there has been little personal contact between the official Kosovo Albanian leadership and the present Albanian government. Indeed, instead of the red carpet treatment previously accorded to them under the Berisha administration, visiting Kosovo Albanians now make their appointments with government officials through the Kosovo "embassy" in Tirana.

Kosovo's Albanians often express the view that Albanian foreign policy is being dictated by Greece. They are especially wary of Foreign Minister Paskal Milo whom they consider to be too closely connected to Greece and who has publicly declared that a good many Albanians living abroad damage efforts to resolve the Kosovo crisis by supporting the KLA.

As a result of this ambivalent attitude towards Kosovo's Albanians, the Tirana government is in practice poorly informed both of the internal dynamics of Kosovo Albanian politics and of the activities of the Kosovo Albanian Diaspora in Switzerland and Germany, which is greatly influencing the pace of events on the ground in Kosovo. Defending accusations of Tirana's apparent apathy towards the national question in meetings with Kosovo Albanian leaders, Nano repeatedly stresses the difficult economic and political situation of his country. Moreover, this position is generally shared by ordinary Albanians most of whom are largely preoccupied with the daily struggle for survival.

Albanians who are actively involved in the political debate generally focus on the problem of internal reconciliation following the spring 1997 violence which brought the country to the brink of civil war. Just as most Albanians

are not especially informed of events in neighbouring Kosovo, most Kosovo Albanians appear to have little understanding of the events that led to the overthrow of the Berisha government or of the political situation in Albania today. Indeed, when it comes to understanding each other's diverse backgrounds, aspirations and objectives, the gulf between Albanians from Albania proper and their ethnic kin in Kosovo remains enormous.

IV. ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO KOSOVO CRISIS

A. Political Moves

Albanian Foreign Ministry statements repeatedly assert that the Albanian government believes the international community will be able to broker a satisfactory solution and that the Albanian government has complied with all Contact Group decisions. Albanian Foreign Minister Paskal Milo believes that a compromise between the Kosovo Albanians and the Serbian leadership is the only way to resolve the crisis in Kosovo. According to Milo, the solution favoured by the Albanian government is to see Kosovo become a third republic with equal status to the other republics within the Yugoslav Federation. That said, Albanian policy has changed as a result of the on-going violence and the initial restrained response is evolving into a more aggressive stance. Since the end of May 1998, for example, official statements from both Nano and the Foreign Ministry have dropped the term "terrorist" and refer instead to the "people of Kosovo taking up arms in order to defend their lives and property". Moreover, in a televised statement at the beginning of June 1998, Nano acknowledged the growing strength and popularity of the KLA saying: "The people of Kosovo have taken up arms in self defence and their organisational structure is a reality that should not be ignored."

The escalation of the crisis in Kosovo has highlighted, among other things, an acute lack of expertise on matters relating to Kosovo in Albania. Recognising this shortcoming, Nano has formed a Kosovo advisory group composed of diplomats and specialists on the region. According to its brief: "The group, which will be in constant contact with the Foreign Ministry, is to intensively study the situation and to make proposals for Albanian and foreign diplomatic initiatives."

In a letter to the Italian Foreign Minister, Lamberto Dini, on the eve of the Contact Group's meeting in Rome at the end of April 1998, Nano requested the deployment of NATO troops along Albania's northern borders to prevent the conflict spilling over into Albania. At the end of June, Nano renewed his appeal for NATO intervention to prevent the crisis from escalating. In a speech in Vienna, Nano said that Albania was "on the eve of war with neighbouring Yugoslavia". Western governments, however, remain hesitant and divided about any possible military intervention to halt the violence. The NATO alliance has been careful to condemn the violence on both sides and to note that while it supports a return to the autonomy Kosovo enjoyed before 1989, it does not support Kosovo Albanian calls for independence.

The logistical difficulties involved in deploying NATO troops should not be under-estimated. Albania's chronic lack of infrastructure means that electricity supplies are meagre, roads are sometimes impassable, water supplies are erratic and telephone communications limited and unreliable. According to a team of foreign technical experts surveying the Kukes district in mid-June, even if NATO were to agree immediately to the deployment of troops it would take a minimum of four months before the necessary technical infrastructure could be in place and ready for use. Another factor to be considered is the lack of adequate security in the lawless northern border regions, where equipment is routinely stolen almost as soon as it is installed. Moreover, the Albanian opposition, as well as the Kosovo Albanians, are against the deployment of NATO troops in Albania, demanding instead that they be dispatched to Kosovo itself. They argue that the NATO presence along Albania's northern border with Kosovo called for by Nano would effectively do Milosevic's work for him. It would cut supply routes for the KLA and obstruct fleeing refugees.

B. Response to Developments on the Ground

The number of refugees arriving in Albania from Kosovo continues to grow. In mid-June the Interior Ministry announced that there were an estimated 15,000 of them, only 9,000 of whom had actually registered as refugees as the remainder had almost immediately gone to stay with relatives. Although a few Kosovo Albanians are remaining in the Albanian border towns of Tropoje, Bajram Curri and Kukes, the majority are filtering southwards to stay with relatives in Shkoder, Tirana, Shijak and Durres. However, Albanians are reluctant to accept Kosovo Albanians whom they are not related to into their homes as a result of widespread fears that some of them work clandestinely as agents of the Yugoslav intelligence service.

Albania is ill-equipped to deal with the influx. Its infrastructure is either run-down or, in many parts, non-existent. In Shkoder, for example, the district council has provided them with accommodation by putting two university dormitories and a secondary school at their disposal. However, the refugees will have to find alternative accommodation when the students return to study in September. Many businessmen have also offered financial assistance and a special office has opened in the city to collect aid for them. A team of experts from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) visited the Kukes and Tropoje regions and held talks with prefecture officials concerning contingency plans for a larger influx of refugees. Discussions on other forms of humanitarian relief programmes have also taken place between government officials and representatives of the relevant NGOs operating in Albania. Doctors and emergency medical supplies have been

dispatched to the northern towns of Bajram Curri and Kukes, and all but urgent medical operations have been suspended in order to conserve blood supplies. The government has repeatedly stated its support for those Kosovo Albanians who are genuine refugees. At the same time, border police have been ordered to apprehend bogus refugees, whom the government terms "Kalashnikov merchants". Many socialist Albanians are concerned that the Democratic Party is encouraging Kosovo Albanian refugees to settle in the lowland region in order to alter the political balance in their favour. That said, the majority of Kosovo Albanians appear to want to return home as soon as they are free and safe to do so.

Although attempts to monitor the border have been stepped up, Albania's 140 km frontier with Kosovo is poorly patrolled. There are only 67 police border guards, most of whom are also village policemen and they tend to patrol on foot, both because of a lack of cars and the nature of the terrain. Moreover, should they detect anything, they often have a two-hour walk to reach a base to report it as a result of a lack of communications equipment.

The Albanian Army came close to total disintegration during the anarchy of 1997 when soldiers deserted *en masse* and civilians ransacked military depots, looting some three-quarters of a million weapons. Since then, there have been two governmental attempts, in the form of amnesties, in the north of the country as well as in the capital Tirana, to retrieve stolen weapons. However, both have been failures. The few weapons which were eventually collected were predominantly old hunting rifles. People are reluctant to hand in their precious new weapons as long as the security situation remains volatile. Appallingly high crime figures are a constant feature in the media, and there is little public confidence in the ability of the police to protect citizens from criminals. Until the security situation improves therefore, it will be extremely difficult to disarm the population.

Only at the beginning of 1998 was any effort made to rebuild the army with the result that today it numbers around 11,000 troops, of whom some 5,000 are regulars. Despite the increase in violence, however, the government has not raised its state of preparedness. Instead, it has hoped that by refraining from military manoeuvres it would reduce tension along the border. Indeed, the army and police forces on the Albanian side have gone to great lengths to avoid any action that may be interpreted as provocative. There is no general mobilisation. Soldiers remain in their barracks and not in the field positions they would occupy in the case of a full alert. Two infantry units comprising 200 men are now stationed close to the northern borders. No reservists have been called up, but combat training is being conducted throughout the army. The Defence Ministry

aims to increase the number of military personnel to 20,000 by the end of 1998.

The Albanian army began preparations for a draft in mid-May 1998, drawing up lists of eligible males along its northern border in the districts of Kukes, Has and Tropoje. Military alarm drills have also been organised for civilians. The local authorities said that people have generally responded positively but problems have arisen from inaccurate lists of potential recruits. This results from the migration of hundreds of families to the southern lowland areas since the collapse of communism in 1992 and an estimated 400,000 young men who have moved abroad to find work. Thus the present military lists are inaccurate and local authorities have been ordered to draw up new lists immediately - a procedure that is both difficult and time-consuming. On 19 June 1998, in a bid to demonstrate its readiness for combat, the Albanian air force conducted its first aerial manoeuvres since last year's unrest. Five Albanian MiG-15 and MiG-19 fighter jets took off from Albania's main air bases at Rinas, Gajdar and Kucova, five days after NATO planes had held air exercises over Albanian and Macedonian air space.

Elsewhere in the region, Albania's current policies appear to confirm the suspicions of many Kosovo Albanians concerning the true nature of the Nano government's patriotism: namely that at this critical time Albania's relations with her immediate neighbours, Greece and Macedonia, are on a far better footing than those with the Albanians of the former Yugoslavia. Relations between Tirana and neighbouring Macedonia and Greece have significantly improved since Nano's government came to power a year ago. The Defence and Interior Ministries of all three countries have been working effectively together to improve regional co-operation in the fight against the smuggling of drugs, weapons and illegal immigrants, as well as in matters relating to border security.

Controls have been tightened along the Albanian-Macedonian border to prevent the illegal crossings of people and weapons. At the end of March 1998, Albania and Macedonia signed a military co-operation agreement ahead of a scheduled visit by President Rexhep Mejdani to Skopje. A month later, Albania and Greece signed a similar agreement on military training within the framework of the Partnership for Peace programme between Albania and NATO. During discussions at that time, Nano reassured Greek Defence Minister Athanasios Tsohatzopoulos that he had no regard for the KLA with its ambiguous structure and suspicious financing - a reference to the belief that the KLA is at least in part funded by the profits from crime. Although Albania's main political parties planned to organise a series of joint rallies in support of the Kosovo Albanians, these have failed to take place. However, Albania's politicians remain deeply divided over a diplomatic and practical response to the escalating crisis.

V. RESPONSE OF THE ALBANIAN OPPOSITION AND MEDIA

A. Opposition

One positive consequence of the escalation of violence in Kosovo has been the announcement in mid-March 1998 that the Democratic Party was ending a six-month boycott of parliament. The Democratic Party had earlier resisted international calls to return to parliament and co-operate with the ruling coalition to draw up a constitution. The decision to move back followed the Serbian clamp-down in Drenica which began at the end of February 1998. The Democratic Party is dismissive of the government's ability to contribute towards a solution to the Kosovo crisis owing to its lack of "nationalist credentials and legitimacy". The latter refers to the Democratic Party's claims that last year's elections, which brought the socialists to power, were fraudulent.

Since the start of the crisis, the opposition has been critical both of what it sees as the international community's feeble response to Milosevic and the Albanian government's failure to demand that stronger measures be taken against Belgrade. Speaking on behalf of the newly-formed right-wing political grouping Union for Democracy, Berisha described as a complete failure the April 1998 Contact Group meeting in Rome, which decided to freeze foreign assets of both the Yugoslav and Serbian governments and all investments in Serbia if the latter did not begin talks with the Kosovo Albanian leadership by 9 May 1998. He also said the measures adopted in Rome failed to take a severe and clear-cut decision against Serbian aggression. Diplomats in Tirana responded by warning Berisha neither to play nor exploit the nationalist card. This followed reports that former national intelligence (SHIK) officers still loyal to Berisha are instrumental in organising the shipment of weapons from Albania into Kosovo and Macedonia for the use of the KLA.

B. Media

Immediately following the Drenica clamp-down in March 1998 until the renewed attacks on Kosovo Albanians at the beginning of June 1998, the Albanian press gave roughly as much coverage to events in Kosovo as to internal affairs. Albanians are still deeply pre-occupied with trying to boost their meagre incomes -- the average wage is \$32 per month -- or to find ways of leaving the country to work abroad. This has resulted in a great deal of apathy, not only towards Kosovo, but also internal political developments. Nevertheless, those newspapers supporting the Socialist Party have attempted to explain the government's stance on Kosovo -

accepting the decisions of the Contact Group - as the best solution to the problem, while those supporting the right-wing opposition were predictably scornful of government policy, claiming it to be a betrayal of the "national question". However, since the conflict escalated again in early June 1998 and as consequences have been felt in Albania proper, the coverage of Kosovo has soared.

Overall, Nano has won praise among Albanians for his skilful handling of negotiations with the Contact Group and NATO and for having helped keep Albania from becoming directly involved in the conflict. The foremost independent newspaper, *Koha Jone*, hailed Nano's request for the deployment of NATO troops on the border with Yugoslavia as part of a well thought-out policy. The daily reported that using terms to justify the request such as "to prevent illegal arms trafficking", or "the unlawful crossing of the border", implied that NATO troops would be deployed more to get these problems under control, or at least to invalidate Belgrade's claims in this respect, than to defend the Albanian border against Serbian attack.

On the whole, the press has been restrained. Even opposition newspapers, such as *Albania*, which is sympathetic to the Democratic Party, have refrained from indulging in jingoism. In fact, the most strident call to arms has come from the independent daily *Koha Jone*, which has urged the government to put the army on a state of alert and arm the population in the north of the country. The paper warned that: "The Serbs have felt our arms on their backs more than once this century." It also criticised the government's military manoeuvres in Kukes and the equipping of hospitals with more beds and medical supplies as insufficient and cosmetic, arguing instead for partial mobilisation, arming and training of the population along the northern border as the priority emergency measures.

Opposition papers have focused on attacking the government for its feeble stance on Kosovo, taking the view that the international community has failed in its hurried and ill thought-out policy on Kosovo. In a 30 April 1998 editorial, for example, *Albania* stated that the continual deadlines set by the Contact Group were merely offering Milosevic more time to seal Kosovo's borders in preparation for further atrocities to be committed against Albanian civilians.

The paper *Zeri-i-Popullit*, which supports the Socialist Party, has been careful to explain the government's stance against a change of borders through the use of violence and the settlement of the Kosovo question through peaceful dialogue. In an attempt to appease opponents, the paper has, however, also tried to equate government policy with support for the national question. The belated acknowledgement of the national

question by the Albanian government received a scornful response from the opposition press, which argued that any further involvement by Tirana in the Kosovo issue was superfluous. An editorial in *Albania* stated that: "In the Albanian-Serb conflict in Kosovo, the Albanian party is Pristina and there is no need for the addition of Tirana. The Tirana parliament has recognised the willingness of the Albanians in Kosovo for independence and it should not be involved any further in this issue."

VI. SERBIAN ALLEGATIONS OF RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF ALBANIANS TO FIGHT IN KOSOVO AND OF ARMS TRAFFICKING FROM ALBANIA TO KOSOVO AND MACEDONIA

In recent years Serbia has frequently accused Albania of recruiting and training terrorists in Albania and supplying the KLA with weapons. Indeed, as far back as 1992 the then Albanian Defence Minister Safet Zhulali felt obliged publicly to deny to the international press that Albania was training Kosovo Albanians for guerrilla fighting in Kosovo. On that occasion, he was responding to Serbian allegations that Albania had built a system of tunnels under its mountains to smuggle armed insurgents into Kosovo. At the time, although some military movements were taking place in the north-east, any deployments were strictly defensive in nature and limited to the digging in of artillery pieces along the main road.

The Albanian government, understandably concerned by Serbian attempts to label it as a supporter of terrorism, denies it is a base for the KLA and has taken some steps to cut military supplies to them. On 18 June 1998, for example, Albanian customs officials in Durres seized a lorry that had just arrived off the ferry from Italy and contained a large quantity of weapons destined for Kosovo hidden under packets of detergent. Both the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU), have teams of border monitors in the towns of Bajram Curri, Kukes and Peshkopi, and the Albanian border police have also increased their monitoring of the border. Yet in the wild and remote Albanian highlands it is virtually impossible to detect all the ancient mule tracks that snake their way through otherwise impenetrable mountains. It is also increasingly clear that Tirana's authority does not extend to key areas of Albania contiguous to Kosovo. Moreover, supporters of ex-president Berisha, the champion of Kosovo Albanians and an advocate of Albanian unity, are concentrated in these regions.

During the uprising last year, many Berisha supporters, including a large number of officers of the National Intelligence Agency (SHIK), seized a large quantity of weapons and ammunition, much of which was transported to the port of Durres, where it has inevitably been acquired by Kosovo Albanians. With the demand for weapons increasing, systematic attempts to loot Albanian arms depots continue. On 11 April 1998, a military weapons cache in the suburbs of Durres was attacked by a group of armed men exchanging gunfire with soldiers and policemen guarding the depot. On the same day, gunmen attacked Kukes police station where a number of weapons were known to be stored. The price of a black market Kalashnikov has, nevertheless, risen from just \$15 a year

ago to more than \$100 today. In mid-June 1998, such rifles were being sold openly in Tropoje, less than a mile from the Yugoslav border, from the boots of Mercedes cars for an asking price of 350 DM, although the sellers were willing to negotiate down to 150 or 200 DM. And by early July, an ever increasing number of KLA activists -- many wearing Swiss military fatigues -- have been operating openly in Tropoje town and the surrounding villages. The KLA have also, it seems, established medical posts and ammunition dumps in the town and are setting up new training camps along the border in order to cope with the rapid rise in Kosovo Albanian volunteers wanting to join the KLA.

In other border towns such as Kukes and Bajram Curri, where much of the local population has relatives in Kosovo, the KLA is inevitably popular. As a result, any Albanian border patrols trying to apprehend Kosovo Albanians smuggling weapons into Kosovo would themselves be attacked by armed local inhabitants. In effect, Albanian border guards around Tropoje can do little but monitor the comings and goings of KLA fighters. That said, the government in Tirana is becoming increasingly concerned at the pan-Albanian nature of the KLA programme, which has as its ultimate goal the unification of all Albanians in the former Yugoslavia with those in Albania. Moreover, as the KLA consolidate their presence in Tropoje, the Yugoslav Army may feel compelled to attack the town, thereby bringing the conflict onto Albanian soil.

As for recruitment of KLA fighters, it seems that there is no need for additional soldiers from Albania. The majority of recruits come from Kosovo itself, where there is no shortage of manpower, with other volunteers returning from the Diaspora, in particular from Switzerland and Germany. As discussed above, there is a significant lack of understanding and trust between Kosovo Albanians and Albanian Albanians, and owing to the very secretive nature of the KLA's organisational structure, recruitment is restricted to known family and clan members.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Relations between Albanians from Albania proper and their ethnic kin over the border in Kosovo are complex. Despite obvious linguistic and cultural ties, the political division of the past 80 years and Albania's isolation have caused the two communities to evolve in a very different fashion. Moreover, the arrival of Kosovo Albanians in Albania in recent years and their influence in some unsavoury spheres of the economy have caused resentment among Albanian Albanians, most of whom are too preoccupied with the daily struggle for existence to devote much time or thought to national questions. The upsurge in violence in Kosovo has, nevertheless, reminded Albanians of the links between the communities and sympathy for their ethnic kin in Kosovo is especially strong in the border areas among the Ghegs, the northern Albanians.

Although the Albanian response to the escalating violence in Kosovo has to date been restrained, the government, which is dominated by Tosks, inevitably finds itself under increasing pressure to adopt a more aggressive stance. A policy of restraint may win international approval, but it brings into question the administration's nationalist credentials, both with Kosovo Albanians and within Albania proper, especially among the Ghegs. Moreover, it plays into the hands of ex-president Sali Berisha who is already exploiting the Kosovo conflict to mount a political comeback in Albania. Berisha is a Gheg and comes from close to the Kosovo border. This part of the country which is largely beyond Tirana's control and the KLA is operating there increasingly openly. Given the current weakness of the Albanian Army and latent hostility between Ghegs and Tosks, there is a danger that the KLA will in time extend its theatre of operation to Albania proper. In an effort to ease tension and build stability in the region, ICG urges the following:

A. Diplomatic pressure on former Albanian president Sali Berisha not to exploit the Kosovo crisis for his own political goals

Diplomatic pressure must be put on former president and leader of the Albanian Democratic Party Sali Berisha not to play the nationalist card to make a political comeback. Although Berisha was forced from office in disgrace, he retains the support of several prominent Kosovo Albanians -- Kosovo's "prime minister" in exile Bujar Bukoshi is a personal friend -- as well as of a sizeable group of loyalists, some of whom were implicated in the darker aspects of his former administration.

B. International assistance to aid the Albanian border police more effectively to monitor the Albanian-Kosovo and Albanian-Macedonian frontier

Weapons are inevitably being smuggled from Albania to Kosovo, not only through Albania's northern borders with Serbia, but also to the east across Lake Shkoder into Montenegro and then on to Kosovo, and to the west into the Macedonian towns of Struga, Gostivar and Tetovo. Although control along Albania's borders has been tightened since March 1998, it is in no way adequate to monitor this largely inhospitable and remote terrain. The international presence along all of Albania's eastern, northern and western borders should be boosted to assist the Albanian government in its attempts to stem the flow of weapons into Kosovo. Moreover, the Albanian border police should be strengthened both in material and manpower terms. Above all, the border police require binoculars, radios and communications equipment.

C. Scrutiny of the activities of Kosovo Diaspora support groups in the West

Given that much of the fund-raising and organisational structure of the Kosovo Albanians and the KLA is based in exile among the large Kosovo Albanian Diaspora in the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and other western European countries, the Albanian government wields little influence and has no ability to curb funding to the Kosovo Albanian militias. Host countries should scrutinise the status and activities of the various 'Kosovo Diaspora support groups which have sprung up in Western Europe and the United States.

D. International mediators to keep Albania informed of and, where useful, brought into the Kosovo dialogue

Given the stake and interest that Albania has in events in Kosovo and the obvious potential it has to destabilise the region if it were to become a launching pad for the KLA, the country must be kept informed of international attempts to resolve the crisis and where possible brought into the dialogue.

E. International relief agencies to direct aid for Kosovo Albanian refugees away from border to territory controlled by the Tirana government

International relief agencies should direct aid for Kosovo Albanians who have taken refuge in Albania towards the southern lowlands and away from the northern border regions. In this way the refugees would have to move out of territory which is beyond the control of the Tirana government. Tirana is uneasy about the prospects of great tracts of the north of the country falling under KLA control, lest it lead to rebellion