

UNIFYING THE KOSOVAR  
FACTIONS:

The Way Forward

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## UNIFYING THE KOSOVAR FACTIONS: The Way Forward

### A. INTRODUCTION

The Kosovo peace talks, held at Rambouillet (France) under the auspices of the six-nation Contact Group, have been suspended until 15 March 1999 after a provisional agreement was reached on granting substantial autonomy for Kosovo. However, neither the Kosovo Albanians nor Serbian delegates have yet signed the draft peace accord, which calls for a NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, and in which the "final status" issue has been deliberately fudged. The immense complexities of the Kosovo question were dramatically illustrated at Rambouillet by the last-minute refusal of the Albanian delegation to sign the accord, due to pressure from a hard-line faction of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) which refused to attend the talks.

The chief opponent of the peace accord, as framed in Rambouillet, is Adem Demaci, the KLA's political representative until his resignation on 2nd March.<sup>1</sup> Demaci wanted the accord to call explicitly for a popular referendum at the end of three years, instead of its more vaguely-worded pledge to "determine a mechanism for a final settlement....on the basis of the will of the people and the opinions of the relevant authorities." After listening to Demaci's arguments, a number of rebel commanders telephoned the chateau outside Paris, where the talks were being held, to voice objections to the deal. These calls appear to have particularly influenced Hashim Thaci, head of the ethnic Albanian delegation, who was sentenced in absentia to 22 years in prison for terrorist offenses by the Yugoslav courts. As a result, Thaci encouraged other delegates to oppose the accord and raised objections up to the final minutes of the negotiations. Thaci's actions took Western diplomats by surprise, as his comments earlier in the talks had led the diplomats to conclude that the KLA would accept the accord.<sup>2</sup>

Although the ethnic Albanians were severely criticised for not signing the accord at once and demanding a two-week period for consultations, Mr. Thaci apparently had

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<sup>1</sup> In 1964 Demaci, known as the Albanian Mandela, was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for dissident activities. In a mock trial in 1976, he was sentenced to a further fifteen years on charges of forming the National Liberation Movement of Kosovo, the alleged goal of which was the unification of Kosovo with Albania. He served nearly twenty-eight years in prison until his release in 1990. The following year he was awarded the Sakarov Prize in Strasbourg.

<sup>2</sup> Kosovo Daily News, 25 February 1999.

good reasons for demanding a delay. "What Thaci was in fact fearing in Rambouillet was that any hasty move might have inspired bloodshed among Albanians in Kosovo." Explained Dukagjin Gorani, an Albanian journalist attached to the Rambouillet talks. This was echoed by Commander Drini, who commands the rebels south of Pristina. "The best achievement of the Albanian delegation was that they went into Rambouillet separated and they came out united," he said in a press statement.<sup>3</sup>

The profound differences between rival Kosovo Albanian political groups, especially between the KLA and the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) led by Dr Ibrahim Rugova, were well known before the Rambouillet talks began. However, in order to get the KLA to the negotiating table, it was essential to broker some level of peace between the LDK and the KLA. Given the bitter divisions between the various Kosovar Albanian factions, the West continued to promote Rugova as the man to do business with. Nevertheless it was clear that no peace talks could convene without the presence of the KLA, since it was responsible for dictating the pace of events on the ground. Consequently, for several months before the Rambouillet talks began, international mediators tried unsuccessfully to bring together the divided Kosovar leaders in support of efforts to secure an autonomy deal for Kosovo. All attempts, however, to bring the KLA under the control of the LDK and Rugova failed.

Ethnic Albanian leaders may be united by the common goal of independence for Kosovo, but beyond that single outcome, they are bitterly divided by personal and ideological differences, petty rivalries and the desire for power. However, the bitter wrangling between factions within the KLA itself over acceptance of the draft peace accord took Western observers by surprise. Many Western diplomats were baffled by the intransigence of the rebels, whom they see as the main beneficiaries of international involvement in the crisis. Recently, there has been a growing power struggle between radical elements of the KLA, who refuse to compromise with either the Serbs or with the LDK, and relative moderates who appear ready to work together with pacifist rival groups around Rugova. In addition, there are also differences of approach to the entire Kosovo issue between the Socialist-led Government of Albania versus Albania's right-wing opposition groups, led by the Democratic Party.

A year after the start of their open conflict with the Serbs, the KLA have transformed themselves from a motley band of armed villagers into a well disciplined military force, the command structure of which increasingly dictates events on the ground. As a result, KLA commanders have become increasingly arrogant and self-confident. They are also hostile to any agreement that would grant Kosovo autonomy from Belgrade without the certainty of independent status in the foreseeable future, or indeed to any peace deal that requires it to disarm. However, refusal to sign the proposed agreement introduces the real risk that the KLA may be left to its own devices to repel superior Serb forces as the international community loses patience with the ethnic Albanians' plea for outside assistance. By refusing to sign the draft peace accord, the KLA also risks becoming increasingly isolated from the majority of Kosovo Albanians.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Independent*, 3 March 1999.

Over the past few months, the ideological disagreements and personal animosities, particularly between the moderate LDK leader Ibrahim Rugova and the KLA's Adem Demaci, have also served to weaken the political voice of the Kosovo Albanians. As a result, international mediators have gone to considerable lengths to try to persuade rival ethnic Albanian groups to form a united negotiating team to participate in peace talks. It was not, however, until the involvement of the Albanian government at the beginning of this year that a breakthrough occurred and the KLA agreed to participate, along with other Kosovo Albanian political groups, in peace negotiations. In January, the Socialist-led coalition Albanian government of Premier Pandeli Majko invited a number of Kosovo Albanian politicians to Tirana in an effort to form a united negotiating team. A solution to the Kosovo crisis is of critical importance to Tirana for a number of reasons other than finally solving the emotive 'Albanian National Question'.

Albania is still recovering from the violent uprising that swept the country in 1997 and damaged and destabilised its institutions, and is not keen to see further deterioration of the conflict in Kosovo. Tirana already finds it difficult to control the remote north-east of the country, where the KLA has established numerous bases. From there, it smuggles men and equipment into Kosovo, leading Belgrade to accuse Tirana of encouraging 'terrorism'. The tension has fuelled rumours in Tirana about alleged plans in Belgrade for military intervention in northern Albania to wipe out KLA bases. Albania has also taken in thousands of Kosovar refugees who, according to government sources, are beginning to place a heavy burden on the national budget.<sup>4</sup> Another concern for Tirana is the fact that foreign investors are extremely reluctant to invest in Albania while such acute regional instability, due largely to the Kosovo conflict, threatens to draw Albania into a wider regional war.

## B. POLITICAL DIVISIONS AMONG KOSOVO ALBANIANS

Following Belgrade's abolition of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, ethnic Albanians found themselves dismissed *en masse* from civic and state institutions. In response, Kosovo Albanians set up the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), headed by Dr Ibrahim Rugova. A parallel state, which finances an extensive network of schools and health clinics, has been operating in Kosovo, with varying degrees of success, under the auspices of the LDK since 1991.

By 1996, there were more than 15 Albanian political parties in Kosovo, which suited Belgrade since the factionalisation of Albanians led to extensive internal division. Despite the number of political groupings, however, the parallel state and the Kosovar national movement as a whole remained under the domination of the LDK. Other Kosovar political parties were unable to articulate a different national programme or to present any serious political opposition to the LDK.

The LDK leadership was increasingly criticised for its lack of creativity, its tendency to monopolise power, and for keeping the Albanian movement in a bureaucratic grip,

<sup>4</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 5 February 1999.

leaving little space for criticism and dialogue. The most vocal attacks on the LDK came from Adem Demaci, the KLA's political representative until his resignation in March 1999, who described democracy in Kosovo as a caricature and condemned the transformation of the LDK from an ethnic Albanian national movement into a political party, giving rise to the subsequent organisation of many other political parties in Kosovo.

According to Demaci, this had led to an enormous waste of energies in a struggle for power in Kosovo which did not actually exist. Demaci argued that Kosovo Albanians could no longer continue to support Rugova's stance and that a more active resistance to the situation was needed.<sup>5</sup> Although, therefore, the LDK still enjoyed wide popular support, it had to some extent alienated those dissident circles which challenged its approach and which had attempted to put forward alternative strategies.

In March 1998, the LDK organised illegal elections, using private homes as polling booths, which overwhelmingly endorsed Ibrahim Rugova as 'President'. Since then, however, support for Rugova and the LDK has plummeted. A good deal of confusion has since arisen as to how far the LDK can legitimately claim to represent the Kosovo Albanians. The older, more middle-class leaders of the LDK, including Rugova, had tended to rest on their prestige among the Kosovo Albanians until the KLA appeared on the scene to shake them from their complacency and demand more aggressive action against Belgrade. Unlike the broad-based popular support increasingly enjoyed by the KLA, the LDK now represents some very specific interest groups. The LDK maintains its dwindling support primarily among Kosovo's urban, educated population centred in Pristina, who have been wary of the KLA since its emergence back in 1996, and have been trying unsuccessfully to gain control over it for most of last year.

For its part, the KLA has persistently tried to undermine Rugova's influence among rural Kosovars by denigrating his policy of 'peaceful resistance', which has so noticeably failed to protect unarmed villagers from Serb attacks. The KLA argue that, contrary to his claim that he is president of the Kosovar's 'parallel' state, Rugova represents little more than the interests of a small minority of wealthy and influential families.<sup>6</sup>

Since the beginning of 1999, the KLA has been setting up its own administrative structures in those areas of Kosovo under its control. Many members of the KLA were formerly members of the LDK, and some have therefore had experience of local political administration. Until recently, the KLA exercised little influence in the towns. This situation has now changed. The influx of rural Kosovars into the towns, following the shelling of their villages, has brought with it a radicalisation of the local urban population and consequently a decline in support for the LDK. Over the last six months, the relatively moderate and tolerant southern town of Prizren has become

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<sup>5</sup> D. Kostovicova, *Parallel Worlds: Response of Kosovo Albanians to Loss of Autonomy in Serbia*, 1986-1996. Keel European Research Centre, 1996, pp57-58.

<sup>6</sup> ICG interview with KLA supporters, Pristina, November 1998.

increasingly radicalised by the arrival of hundreds of refugees from the surrounding burning villages. The LDK's ability to influence the KLA is further undermined by the significant number of KLA higher command originating from Tetovo, in the predominantly ethnic Albanian-inhabited region of Western Macedonia.

A number of members of the LDK are from the 12,000 strong Gorani community, who are Albanian-speaking Muslim Slavs. The KLA has long suspected Goranis of providing the Yugoslav Secret Service (UDB-a) with information about the activities of the KLA. The KLA point out the number of Gorani villages that remain intact while neighbouring Albanian-inhabited villages are in ruins after shelling by Yugoslav forces. KLA intelligence has recently uncovered what is interpreted as the true extent of Gorani collaboration with UDB-a, and consequently the KLA has stepped up its attacks on these so-called 'collaborators', or as Belgrade calls them 'loyal Albanians'. This explains, in part, the recent upsurge in the number of killings of Kosovo Albanians by other Albanians. In mid-January, a close aide of Rugova's, Enver Maloku, who was half Gorani, was shot dead in Pristina by unidentified gunmen rumoured to be KLA.

Another group of Kosovar Albanians which has strong reservations about the KLA are representatives of Kosovo's small but influential Roman Catholic community.<sup>7</sup> The Catholic clergy, in particular, are alarmed not only by reports of the anti-religious Marxist-Leninist element within the hierarchy of the KLA, but also of some of the KLA's social policy initiatives, such as a plan to open family planning clinics throughout Kosovo.

Support for Rugova and for the policies of the LDK have been waning among younger Kosovars ever since the first publicised appearance of the KLA back in February 1996. In Kosovo's war-torn countryside, Ibrahim Rugova has become increasingly irrelevant, a leader left behind by events. A virtual recluse in Pristina, Rugova is believed to be reluctant to leave the city for the countryside. In the vain hope that his credibility might be improved in areas controlled by the KLA, Rugova ventured into war-scarred central Kosovo for the first time in November 1998. He went in the company of US peace mediator Christopher Hill to the KLA heartlands of Maleshevo and Drenica. Rugova's credibility is being constantly undermined by the inability of the international community to guarantee the safety of his people.

In defence of Rugova, his remaining supporters claim that if he had allowed the mass arming of civilians and led the call to revolt back in the mid-1990s, as many were demanding, then there would have been tens of thousands of ethnic Albanian casualties. These LDK supporters claim that the KLA has no regard for the number of civilian casualties. Since the massacre of around 80 ethnic Albanians in Drenica last March, however, Rugova's credibility has declined sharply, including among the large Kosovar Diaspora, especially in the United States.

The majority of the 400,000 Albanian-American community has switched its crucial financial support from Rugova's LDK to the KLA's patriotic Homeland is Calling. This

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<sup>7</sup> An estimated ten per cent of Kosovo's Albanian population are Roman Catholic.

group has raised vast sums of money for the KLA, not only in the United States but through chapters of Homeland is Calling which have sprung up in major Western European cities since last March. In Albania, too, Rugova is viewed with some degree of caution because of his extremely close relationship with Sali Berisha during the heyday of the latter's presidency.

A further complication has arisen with the announcement of the formation of a Provisional Government of Kosovo, agreed to by Kosovar Albanian delegates at the Rambouillet Conference. This is intended to be formed as an interim measure in preparation for parliamentary elections to be held later this year. Although the provisional government includes representatives of both the LDK and the United Democratic Movement of nationalist academic Rexhep Qosja, the KLA has named Hashim Thaci as 'prime minister' of the new government. This move is calculated to diminish the status of the LDK's parallel government and its president Rugova. Power, both political and military, now stems from the general headquarters of the KLA, run by Suleiman Selimi. Although the LDK and the new Liberal Democratic Party will share ministries with the KLA, they will clearly be the junior partners.

Adem Demaci opposed the creation of the provisional government, calling it "groundless and without legitimacy". Demaci, who refused to attend the Rambouillet talks, issued a statement in Pristina saying that neither he nor the KLA's General Staff had been consulted, and that the formation of the provisional government is an effort to manipulate the Kosovo Albanians into accepting an agreement "which is not for the well-being of Albanian people and which is contrary to its determination for freedom and independence."<sup>8</sup>

The key question now is to determine what role the KLA is to play under the proposed agreement. An order to disarm completely is unlikely to happen. Instead, the KLA could be divided into a defence force and a political party called the 'Kosovo Liberation Party'.

## C. THE ROLE OF TIRANA

Kosovo is the key to the success or the failure of all the Balkans, but especially of Albania. Therefore the destinies of all the Balkan countries, and primarily that of Albania, are linked to finding a solution to the Kosovo crisis. There has been strong support from the United States for the personal efforts of Premier Pandeli Majko to unify the political factors of Kosovo. Majko warned that Albanians can suck the whole Balkan region into war if the Serb massacres in Kosovo continue. "All Albanians, wherever they are, in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia or Montenegro, have the right to organise their collective self-defence if the Serbs continue their massacres," Majko declared at a press conference following his week-long trip to the United States at the beginning of February.

As the international community came to understand the need for the participation of all interested parties in any meaningful negotiations regarding Kosovo, the Albanian

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<sup>8</sup> RFERL Newline SE Europe (Kosovo) 28 February 1999.



government was encouraged to try and bring about a broad political pact among the Kosovar political factions. KLA representative Adem Demaci's visit to Tirana in January, at the invitation of Premier Majko, was therefore viewed as a breakthrough. The VIP treatment accorded to Demaci demonstrated the Albanian leadership's drive for closer ties with the KLA, at a time when increased border skirmishes threaten to draw Albania into conflict with Yugoslavia. The move was also designed to strengthen Majko's nationalist credentials, following the breakdown of relations between Tirana and the Kosovars<sup>9</sup> in 1997. Following Adem Demaci's visit to Tirana, the secretary of the office of the General Political Representative of the KLA, Albin Kurti, told a press conference: "Albania will have a great impact in the future true unification of Albanians. As far as the self-declared members of the self-declared parliament [a reference to the LDK] are concerned, we think that they have been brought down to earth by the Albanian officials and have been convinced to join the KLA."<sup>10</sup>

Tirana claims that a unified approach by Albanian politicians on both sides of the border would make the international community take the Albanian national question in the Balkans more seriously. The Albanian government and the KLA, which until the Rambouillet meeting remained outside any negotiating process, agreed to co-ordinate politically with the Albanian government. In a press statement, Albanian Foreign Minister Paskal Milo said: "We are going to have direct contacts to keep each other informed and to co-ordinate our joint actions. These contacts will now be more concrete and frequent." The Albanian government announced its backing for a Kosovo provisional government and hoped all Kosovo's political leaders would support the establishment of the new government.

The Albanian Premier has found himself in a difficult position - on one hand, being asked by the international community to bring together disaffected factional Kosovar leaders in order to present a united Albanian voice, while on the other hand being encouraged by the West not to mention the "I" word (independence) in return for the promise of desperately needed financial aid for Albania.

On 16 February 1999, Premier Majko was criticised by two visiting Americans, Congressman James Traffickant and former Congressman Joseph Dioguardi, for not declaring himself publicly in favour of independence for Kosovo. Having walked out of the meeting with Majko, Traffickant explained that he was stunned by the response of Premier Majko to a request that he should declare himself in favour of independence for Kosovo.

"He told us that he respected international laws, when we asked him to sign a petition for the independence for Kosovo," Congressman Traffickant said. "When even the Albanian Premier does not declare himself in favour of the independence of Kosovo, then I cannot comprehend what is expected from the international community."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Relations deteriorated after former president Fatos Nano's held a meeting on the island of Crete with Slobodan Milosevic.

<sup>10</sup> *Kosovo Daily News*, 2 February 1999.

<sup>11</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 19 February 1999.

Relations between the Albanian government and Sali Berisha's opposition Democratic Party (DP) have improved following two meetings in January between Premier Pandeli Majko and Berisha. The war in Kosovo was the pretext for this attempt at internal Albanian party political rapprochement. However, Berisha's sole aim is to win parliamentary elections and return to power. Although the involvement of the DP leadership in last September's attempted coup is still under judicial review, charges are now unlikely to be pursued against Berisha. However, around 25 mostly Kosovar Albanians who were involved in the coup attempt remain in prison in Tirana. Awareness of the involvement of Kosovo Albanians in the internal politics of Albania has angered many Albanians. While public sympathy for the Kosovars is widespread, there is reluctance to turn this sympathy into action.

On 5 February 1999 there was a demonstration organised by the right wing Republican Party in Tirana to support the Kosovars. About three to four thousand people attended the rally in Skenderbeg Square, but most were Kosovar students, refugees and northerners with strong family ties with relatives in Kosovo. Noticeably absent from the demonstration were ordinary Albanians.

#### D. RAMBOUILLET

All Albanians, whether they are from Albania, the former Yugoslavia or part of the diaspora, are aware that their nation was divided by the Great Powers at the beginning of this century. The Rambouillet Conference underlined (for Albanians) that this enforced division of their nation must be resolved in order to bring stability to the Balkans. As one Albanian daily newspaper wrote: "The Albanian nation was divided in half by the incorrect placing of borders at the end of the Balkan Wars at the beginning of this century, and may well constitute a major reason for the eruption of a new Balkan war."<sup>12</sup>

Many Albanians were consequently convinced that the Rambouillet talks were convened in order for today's Great Powers to redress this error by making Kosovo an ethnic Albanian-governed UN protectorate for three years, followed by a referendum in which Kosovo's majority Albanian population would vote for independence. There would then follow a period of gradual integration of civil and social institutions between Kosovo and Albania before an eventual unification of the two.<sup>13</sup>

The degree to which Albanians believed that Rambouillet would mark the start of solving the 'Albanian National Question' can be gauged from an editorial in the opposition Democratic Party daily *Rilindja Demokratike*. The newspaper criticised the Albanian government for continuing normal activities at such an historic moment when the future of the Albanian nation was to be discussed and the name Rambouillet would be enshrined in future Albanian history books: 'the historic

<sup>12</sup> *Gazetar Shqiptare*, 10 February 1999.

<sup>13</sup> ICG interview with individual Albanians in the run up to the Rambouillet meeting.

question of the Albanian nation' was being discussed at Rambouillet. The editorial declared that future generations will pose the question: "Where were the official Albanian institutions when our history was being made at Rambouillet?"<sup>14</sup> This was a reference to the absence at Rambouillet of any representative of the Albanian Foreign Ministry.

There was united optimism about the Rambouillet Conference across the Albanian political spectrum. The talks were viewed as an historic moment. Just as the Great Powers oversaw the 20th century fate of the Albanian nation, so it was perceived that at Rambouillet they would now reshape the nation's destiny into the next millennium. The leader of the centrist Democratic Alliance Party, Neritan Ceka, said: "It was important that it had been decided in Rambouillet that within three to five years Kosovo would be independent....The road to its achievement has its own difficulties, but there is a European political will that was previously lacking and a military force that stands behind this will."<sup>15</sup> Democratic Party spokesman Vili Minaroli said: "What is being accomplished in compliance with the points of the Contact Group is a very important step in the process of the independence and self-determination of Kosovo."<sup>16</sup>

"Albanians on the Eve of Their Future Destiny" was how the pro-DP daily Albania viewed the Rambouillet meeting. The paper's editorial stated: "The maps in London and Paris in 1913-1914 were truncated to the great loss of Albanians....The Balkan map that emerged from the doors of the European castles was the source of the present crisis in Kosovo."<sup>17</sup> Although there was no mention of any unification of Kosovo with Albania, it was implied that "Kosovo is only the start of the formation of a real Albanian state."<sup>18</sup>

In a statement, the main Albanian opposition leader, Sali Berisha, condemned international mediators at the Rambouillet talks for failing to support the idea of an independent Kosovo. "It is a pity to see pressure put on the Albanian delegation to give up their demand that in three years Kosovo Albanians can express their will in a referendum to vote for independence," Berisha said. "Such an agreement (without the referendum) fatally damages the interests of the Albanians."<sup>19</sup> Berisha also called on the Albanian government to stop using the term 'self-determination' when referring to Kosovo's status, saying that it leads to fears about a Greater Albania. "'Self-determination' should be replaced with 'independence,'" Berisha said. "There should not be confusion about Greater Albania - an idea that frightens Europe, since the creation of a great Muslim state is not in their interest."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Rilindja Demokratik*, 18 February 1999.

<sup>15</sup> *Koha Jone*, 9 February 1999.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Albania*, 7 February 1999.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 20 February 1999.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

Majko's Socialist-led coalition has studiously avoided raising the spectre of 'Greater Albania', in which Albanians of Albania would be united with those of Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro in one large state. A recently published map of 'Ethnic Albania', printed by the large Kosovar Diaspora community in Frankfurt, incorporates vast areas beyond the present borders of the Republic of Albania as the natural ethnic homelands of the Albanian nation. The map, which has caused considerable concern among Albania's Balkan neighbours, is considered by Albanians worldwide as the correct definition of the Albanian nation's ethnic territory.

The Albanian government is forced to balance a show of solidarity with the Kosovars with restraint over the question of independence for Kosovo. Tirana calls for a solution to the Kosovo problem through negotiation and dialogue, as opposed to violent uprising. The Albanian government has made clear its opposition to independence for Kosovo and for any change of borders between Albania and the territories of the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, Premier Majko has been moving towards increasingly overt support for the Kosovars, while being careful not to alienate the West by adopting a hawkish stance that could further destabilise the volatile Balkan region.

In his four months in office, Majko has quietly distanced himself from the policy of his predecessor Fatos Nano, who took the view that Kosovo should not gain independence but become a third Yugoslav republic alongside Serbia and Montenegro. Majko has avoided spelling out exactly what solution he does envisage, saying that it is for the people of Kosovo to decide. Nevertheless, government rhetoric on Kosovo has recently become noticeably tougher. KLA spokesman Rexhep Iberdemaj welcomed the shift of tone in Tirana. "We expect the government of the Albanian state to support our demands and we believe some correct steps have been taken recently in this direction," he said. "We also expect that co-operation between Kosovo Albanians and the Albanian government will be strengthened."<sup>21</sup>

On 18 February, Premier Majko visited a group of Kosovar refugee families whose relatives had been killed by Serbs. Addressing the families, Majko declared: "The martyrs who laid down their lives are not only martyrs of Kosovo, but of the whole of Albania. Their blood orders us to be united in our efforts to resolve the just cause of Kosovo." Majko reiterated the importance of all Albanians speaking with one voice over the Kosovo issue, saying: "Any division amongst us has a price - a bloody one." The families responded by declaring: "Kosovo awaits much from Albania."<sup>22</sup>

## E. HEIGHTENED TENSIONS IN NORTHERN ALBANIA

In recent weeks, tension has heightened along the Albanian border with Yugoslavia. Fear of a Serb attack is widespread throughout northern Albania. Albania's army has

<sup>21</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 22 January 1999.

<sup>22</sup> *Zeri-i-Popullit*, 19 February 1999.

been put on high alert in the North and the government has promised a sizeable increase in the wages of Albanian military officers guarding the country's borders. The north-eastern town of Kukes now resembles a city on the brink of war, with its inhabitants psychologically prepared to fight to defend the nearby borders. Citizens have been summoned to join military units in the north-eastern regions of Albania under the slogan "Fatherland's defence is an obligation". Men under the age of 50 have received call up papers stating "The fatherland is in danger!" In mid-February, military units began calling up reservists, and the Kukes division is being hastily reinforced with military equipment, with some 30 tanks being added to the previous contingent at Kukes, which also covers the Tropoje and Has districts.

The fear of local inhabitants of a possible Serb attack has heightened after a recent spate of declarations by Serb officials that KLA guerrillas are sheltering in villages in the Kukes district. Although ethnic Albanian separatists have been training in Albania for almost a decade, their camps were secreted away from public view and the Tirana government strenuously denied such activities were occurring. Over the past year, however, the presence of large numbers of KLA guerrillas training in Albania's remote northern highlands, and 'recuperating' in the clubs and bars of Tirana, are well documented. On 10 February, authorities in Kukes sent an urgent request to Tirana for money to fund local defence fortifications. A local town hall official has asked for urgent financial assistance to increase defences. He told journalists: "The Bajram Curri population is totally vulnerable to any possible Serb attack." A Lek 3.7m (\$US 26,000) fund is desperately needed to build up fortifications along the Tropoje border areas.<sup>23</sup>

## F. CONCLUSION

The conflict between the various ethnic Kosovo Albanian groups stems more from personal rather than ideological rivalries. Leaders of the LDK have gained personal privileges through their position within the bureaucracy of the LDK; those in the KLA have gained respect on the battlefields of Kosovo in the past year and feel they have risked their lives for their people's freedom, and thus want a role to play in the governing of Kosovo

Although most Kosovo Albanians cling to the goal of independence, after a year of violent bloodshed, the majority are more concerned now about ending the violence on the ground. Having witnessed the death and destruction which has been the lot of the Kosovo Albanian population since the arrival of the KLA, some are now asking the question "What price freedom?" Unless the KLA signs the Rambouillet Agreement, that price will be higher than the average inhabitant of Kosovo can afford, in terms of death and economic ruin. This applies to both ethnic Albanians and Serbs. It is therefore in the interests of all to sign. The rebels face a choice between ending the war, with their aspirations for an independent Kosovo unresolved, or continuing to fight at an appalling cost to Kosovo's civilian population, and in the face of isolation from the international community.

<sup>23</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 11 February 1999.

This period appears to be the political eclipse of 64-year old Adem Demaci, who has announced that he will step down as the political representative of the KLA. Demaci is finding himself opposing a younger, more flexible element within the KLA, exemplified by Hashim Thaci, the chief Albanian negotiator at Rambouillet who advocates at least some degree of co-operation with Rugova. An encouraging number of KLA members are also seeing advantages in signing an interim peace agreement, as an opportunity to set up the institutions of government in preparation for the day Kosovo gains its eventual independence. As one regional KLA Commander explained: "You don't have to be smart to see that autonomy now is a fair deal. If we make our own institutions, our own government, and our own social structure, we will bring a final decision on independence with or without a document."<sup>24</sup>

The departure last autumn of former Albanian Premier Fatos Nano paved the way for a defrosting of relations between Tirana and Pristina. Since then, it has become increasingly apparent that Albania has a significant role to play in providing a national support mechanism for Kosovo Albanians, either by providing relief and shelter to ethnic Albanian refugees, giving diplomatic support on the international scene, or by enabling Kosovar political leaders to use Tirana as a neutral but also 'nationally sympathetic' and unbiased base to discuss their differences.

## G. RECOMMENDATIONS

The international community must continue to emphasise that its considerable political will to find a viable solution to the Kosovo crisis may be jeopardised if this latest peace initiative fails. The KLA must not only be persuaded to show restraint on the battlefield but also a willingness to participate with more moderate elements within the Kosovar leadership, or risk losing the support of both NATO and the international community. Assistance must therefore be given to the KLA to help its transition from a guerrilla army into a political organisation - the Kosovo Liberation Party (KLP).

There will of course be some elements within the KLA who will find it difficult to adjust to peace-time conditions after months of fighting. These groups must be targeted and brought quickly into the new political process. This group of potentially disaffected KLA hardliners are the most likely to revert to guerrilla warfare, and thus jeopardise the peace process, if they feel marginalised.

In the wake of the declaration of a provisional government by the KLA, attention must be paid to the effect this will have on the remaining institutions of the LDK's parallel state, which by implication will have to be wound up. This is a complex matter involving the health care and educational provisions of ethnic Albanians, as well as more delicate matters such as the personal prestige of the LDK hierarchy and the transfer of large sums of money from the control of the LDK to that of the new

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<sup>24</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 February 1999.

provisional government. Although this provisional government is only an interim government until parliamentary elections are held later this year, these crucial few months that lie ahead will be a testing time to oversee a peaceful realignment of power among the Kosovo Albanian leadership.

Reassurances must also be given to Kosovo's non-Albanian population that the announcement of the ethnic Albanian's provisional government is regarded by the international community as merely an interim process, and that following Kosovo-wide elections later this year, the resulting government will include and reflect the views of Kosovo's non-Albanian population.

As long as the war in Kosovo continues, Albania is likely to remain a political and economic basket case, because the war and the overwhelming presence of the KLA in northern Albania, makes it almost impossible for the government to regain control over the entire north-eastern sector of the country. As a result, the international community must continue to support Albanian government efforts to provide a framework for dialogue between Kosovo's political factions in order to achieve a unified approach to the Kosovo question.