

KOSOVO'S LONG HOT SUMMER:

Briefing on military, humanitarian and
political developments in Kosovo

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KOSOVO'S LONG HOT SUMMER: Briefing on military, humanitarian and political developments in Kosovo

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past six months, Serbia's southern, predominantly Albanian province of Kosovo has emerged from international obscurity to become the world's most reported conflict zone. That said, the history of ethnic animosity in this contested land, the complexity of competing Serb and Albanian claims and the speed with which the fighting has escalated make it difficult to keep up with the events, let alone analyse and try to understand them.¹ What had, on 1 January 1998, been a long-standing ethnic Albanian political aspiration, namely an independent Kosovo, had evolved, by 1 March 1998, into the military objective of a popular insurrection and had by, 1 July 1998, become part of the cause of an impending humanitarian catastrophe with hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the fighting.

At the beginning of the year, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA or, according to its Albanian acronym, UCK) was an unknown, underground organisation, the frequent object of exaggerated claims and misconceptions. Now, although far from a professional army, it has begun to take some shape and must be recognised as one of the actors on the Kosovo scene. Meanwhile, on the political front, Ibrahim Rugova, elected in 1992 as "president" of the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo and viewed abroad before the outbreak of fighting as undisputed leader and sole representative of the Kosovo Albanians, is steadily losing influence, his political absolutism and passive pacifism increasingly irrelevant. If productive negotiations are ever to take place, the new balance of forces on the internal, ethnic Albanian political scene must be understood and taken into consideration.

This report examines the evolution of the UCK, its genesis, military fortunes, political impact and prospects. It considers the current humanitarian crisis. And it analyses the internal dynamics of ethnic Albanian politics in and concerning Kosovo and their impact on the options that the international community may contemplate to promote a political solution to the conflict.

¹ For a comprehensive political analysis of the Kosovo conflict, see ICG Report *Kosovo Spring*, 20 March 1998.

II. MILITARY EVOLUTION

A. Origins of the UCK

Given the events of the past decade in the former Yugoslavia and, in particular, the scale of repression in Kosovo, what is surprising is not that an ethnic Albanian liberation army has appeared, but that it took as long as it did for the UCK to emerge. The timing of the emergence as well as the explosive nature of the UCK can largely be attributed to four factors: Serbian oppression; the passive, pacifist policies of Ibrahim Rugova which failed to achieve results; international recognition of rump Yugoslavia in 1996 despite the lack of an agreement to accommodate Kosovo's ethnic Albanians; and anarchy in Albania in the spring of 1997 during which the country's military depots were looted, thus creating an obvious source of weapons for the UCK.

A first, isolated attack by ethnic Albanians against Serb policemen took place in May 1993 in Glogovac near Komorane. On that occasion two policemen were killed and five were wounded when their car came under fire. The first planned assaults, however, did not occur until 22 April 1996 when four almost simultaneous attacks were launched in separate locations, in Stimlje, Pec and Kosovska Mitrovica in which two police officers were killed and another three wounded. The same month the European Union recognised Yugoslavia, despite having earlier insisted that the country would not win recognition before the Kosovo issue was resolved.

At the time, the assaults were reported to have been masterminded by the *Levizje Nacional Clirimtare e Kosoves* - LNCK or the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo, an émigré group operating out of Switzerland. Together with *Organizata Marxist Leninist e Kosoves* (OMLK) and a few other leftist groups it founded the *Levizje Popullore e Kosoves* (LPK), the People's Movement of Kosovo. In October 1996 the Pristina-printed Serbian paper *Jedinstvo* reported that the LNCK group was discovered in Decani and its members arrested.² In addition to actions against Serbian police, the insurgents increasingly targeted ethnic Albanians who had pledged loyalty to the Serbian administration and even Serbian refugees centres. In early 1997 Albanian-language media started receiving faxes (apparently sent from a supermarket in Switzerland) in which an organisation calling itself *Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves* (UCK) claimed responsibility for the attacks.

On 17 January 1997 a car bomb in Pristina seriously injured the Serb rector of the University, Radivoje Papovic. Serbian police arrested 60 ethnic Albanians, although the link with any ethnic Albanians was never proved and car bombs are the preferred tactics of Serbian mafia rings, not of Albanian separatists. This sweep brought a temporary halt to the actions, but they resumed in the late summer of that year. Meanwhile, at trials that ICG monitored in June 1997, ethnic Albanians accused of killing Serbian police were automatically branded members of the UCK. The trials were not an exercise of justice by any standards³ and it is

² Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian, A History of Kosovo*, Hurst & Co, London, 1998, p. 278

³ Report by the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Centre from December 1997.

entirely possible, indeed plausible that the Serbian Ministry of Interior had fabricated the leaflets claimed to have been prepared by the UCK. That said, some ethnic Albanian defendants admitted to possessing Kalashnikovs and grenades. Whether or not they did in reality belong to the UCK, the trials boosted the UCK's reputation and put the organisation on the map.

The most spectacular series of attacks which gave the UCK real credibility took place on the night of 10-11 September 1997 within four hours of each other. Ten co-ordinated operations in locations up to 150 km apart targeted police barracks and vehicles. This series proved that there was a well-organised force which had the knowledge and resources to plan and execute relatively complex attacks in conditions made difficult by generally poor communications, an almost non-existent and heavily tapped phone system, and the large-scale presence of Serbian police and check-points along major roads.⁴ Overt UCK activity began on 28 November 1997 (a date observed by Albanians everywhere as Flag Day, a holiday of great patriotic significance). At a funeral of an ethnic Albanian killed by Serbs, two insurgents took off their masks and declared that they were fighting for Kosovo's independence, provoking euphoria among ordinary ethnic Albanians in Pristina.

B. Performance to Date

Logistically, a key element in the emergence of the UCK as a fighting force was the disintegration in the spring of 1997 of the Albanian army and the looting of its military depots. This resulted in the disappearance of between 700,000 and 800,000 weapons, many of which have found their way into Kosovo. Psychologically, the emergence of the UCK was made easier after a series of demonstrations organised by ethnic Albanian students around Kosovo during autumn 1997.⁵ The demonstrations generated little reaction from the Serbian security forces. They thus lowered the barrier of fear among ethnic Albanians, while at the same time increasing their appetite for a more confrontational approach. Moreover, since Rugova refused to support the demonstrations, younger ethnic Albanians felt that they had nothing to gain by following his pacifist, passive approach, and turned instead to the UCK.

More and increasingly daring actions for which the UCK claimed responsibility met with minimal response by Serbian security forces. The backlash eventually came at the end of February, in the Drenica region, the triangle formed by the municipalities of Srbica (Skenderaj), Klina (Kline) and Glogovac (Gllgovc), in the centre of Kosovo. The Serbian security forces aimed to nip the UCK in the bud. Instead, they succeeded in generating widespread popular support for the UCK among all ethnic Albanians, unarmed and gun-carrying alike.⁶

⁴ Jane's Intelligence Review, 1 February 1998, vol. 10, No. 2, page 13.

⁵ They were demanding implementation of the education agreement signed in September 1996.

⁶ Until mid-summer it was difficult to find an ethnic Albanian who would not support UCK. That said, recent set-backs and the brutal, indiscriminate destruction of the homes of ordinary ethnic Albanians by the Serbian security forces in the wake of the UCK military campaign may be changing this attitude.

Distinguishing reality from myth in general in Kosovo and more specifically where the UCK is concerned, is exceptionally difficult. Ethnic Albanian society is by nature secretive and tight-knit and these features have become more pronounced during the years of *apartheid*-like oppression. Moreover, the Albanian language is unlike any other in the region and thus an additional obstacle to obtaining reliable information. Nevertheless, it is clear that the predominant feeling among ethnic Albanians towards the UCK is one of pride, that finally they had an army prepared to fight for their cause. As a result, politicians and journalists in Pristina often exaggerate the strength and level of organisation of the UCK. According to Adem Demaci, now officially the political representative of UCK, there are 30,000 UCK fighters under arms. In the same way that Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo, or LDK, was for the best part of a decade a pacifist political movement of almost all ethnic Albanians opposing Serbian rule, the UCK is today a violent expression of that same opposition.

Ethnic Albanians present their national aspirations on the website. Until recently, however, the only known UCK spokesman, Jakup Krasniqi, an LDK leader and teacher from Glogovac, has failed to inspire much confidence. Indeed, he has on occasions even damaged the movement by giving embarrassing and contradictory statements. For example, in an interview with *Der Spiegel*⁷ Krasniqi announced: "Our goal is the unification of all Albanians in the Balkans." But then speaking to the local press he corrected himself: "The statement that we are fighting to liberate and unify all the occupied territories of Albania may have been misinterpreted or not properly understood."⁸

Krasniqi also tried to discredit the ethnic Albanian participants of the two June encounters between US envoys and UCK representatives. About the 24 June 1998 meeting of Richard Holbrooke with UCK fighters in Junik, Krasniqi told *Der Spiegel*: "This was not his first mistaken judgement of the situation." And concerning the other meeting which took place in the next days he announced that: "The person who talked to Gelbard was not an authorised representative of our movement," later to reverse his story to *Koha Ditore* stating that: "There was a mistake in the interview I gave to *Der Spiegel*. They are legitimate representatives of the UCK who have the authority to talk in the name of the UCK with various representatives and diplomats abroad."⁹

The same spokesman made other puzzling declarations to *Koha Ditore*: "I do not think we have any ideology, and in fact we do not have time for such things even if we were interested in them, because we have our main job to do, which is the task of liberation." And concerning the fact that the UCK police were dressed in black: "We had some black cloth, and we cut this in a distinctive way. It has nothing to do with fascist or communist ideology." And on the UCK salute of clenched fist: "It is a military salute like that used in the Republic of Albania... We do not consider this has anything to do with ideology. For us, a fist is a symbol of unity and strength."

In many ways, Krasniqi simply epitomises the understandably unsophisticated public relations of the UCK. While the inconsistency of his declarations could be

⁷ 6 July 1998.

⁸ *Koha Ditore*, 11 July 1998.

⁹ 12 July 1998.

dismissed as trivial, they, nevertheless, illustrate the difficult task that international mediators have faced finding interlocutors in Kosovo. Similar liberation movements in other countries are usually led either by a personality who came back from abroad or else by some local leader gone underground and resurfaced in a guerrilla uniform. With the UCK no such leader has emerged and on what seemed to be a weekly basis, journalists interviewed UCK representatives, each apparently claiming to be the rebels' "commandant", each with a different story. For example, commandant Versace told Reuters: "We will match them [the Serbian security forces] checkpoint for checkpoint".¹⁰ Meanwhile, commandant Lion told the Associated Press: "I don't know if Rugova is even Albanian. He could be a Serb. For me, he's dead. I'd kill Rugova before Milosevic."¹¹

This confused situation has been somewhat clarified since 13 August 1998 when the UCK formally appointed a well known figure, the leader of the Parliamentary Party of Kosovo, Adem Demaci, as their political representative "to lead the work for the creation of the institutions of Kosovo". Six other UCK representatives were named in the same "Political Declaration No 7" one of them being Krasniqi, another Bardhyl Mahmuti, the Geneva-based leader of the People's Movement of Kosovo.¹²

C. Balance of Forces

While the UCK claimed to hold some 40 percent of Kosovo in mid-July 1998 -- a claim which was impossible to verify since observers were denied access to many areas -- the Serbian security forces' summer offensive has successfully rolled back the insurrection's early gains. NATO manoeuvres in neighbouring Albania in June and August 1998 and Western posturing have failed to persuade either side of the necessary resolve to intervene and thus deter further violence. This leaves Kosovo in much the same position as before the beginning of the fighting, with Serbian police controlling territory inhabited by an alienated population. Meanwhile, the UCK is licking its wounds and regrouping for what it considers an inevitable further round of fighting.

The UCK's attack against the town of Orahovac on 18 July 1998 was the turning point in the insurrection's fortunes. After initial UCK successes, the Serbian police re-established control of Orahovac on 22 July and then pushed on capturing the UCK's headquarters in Malisevo on 29 July, Likovac on 6 August and Junik on 15 August. The scale and speed of the reversals led Demaci to suggest at the end of August 1998 with the benefit of hindsight that the UCK had committed a "fatal mistake" of trying to defend territory against superior Serb firepower. Moreover, he announced that in future the UCK will adopt "classic guerrilla warfare tactics".¹³

¹⁰ 14 June 1998.

¹¹ 27 July 1998.

¹² This announcement was made only hours after Ibrahim Rugova made public the composition of his latest negotiating team. The timing has fuelled speculation that the latter event was speeded up to prevent Demaci from being on the team, something president Milosevic would not have accepted (see below under III B).

¹³ Vienna weekly Profil, 24 August 1998.

Militarily, the UCK retains two key advantages: it benefits from intimate knowledge of the terrain and, with more than 90 percent of Kosovo's population ethnic Albanian, it has an abundant supply of manpower. The Serbian security forces, by contrast, largely consist of police and soldiers from outside the province, many suffering from low morale. Desertions and demands for transfer are common among units serving in or earmarked for Kosovo. For reasons that are not entirely clear Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic has not imposed a state of emergency in the province. Also, unlike in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina paramilitaries do not appear to be operating.

With the exception of the barricade erected by the UCK on the Pristina-Pec road which remained in place from early May until late July 1998, it is fair to say that the asphalt belongs to the Serbian security forces and the forest paths to the UCK. Indeed, an extensive network of back roads enables the UCK to move around freely everywhere. Some checkpoints are movable: here today, gone tomorrow, or Serb today, Albanian tomorrow. For instance, in the beginning of July the Stimlje-Pristina road was one day fully UCK-controlled, but the next day (without any major fighting in the vicinity) the checkpoints disappeared. By August the road had six huge craters around one point and Serbian tanks could be seen under camouflage on the hills, but no Serbian soldiers circulated on the road, not even in armoured cars.

The military hardware which the UCK has at its disposal is limited more or less to what a mule can carry, since all its weaponry has entered the country illegally, most probably from Albania, sometimes via Montenegro or Macedonia. The Albanian government firmly denies the participation in or knowledge of this traffic. The former may be true, but the latter is difficult to believe given that every little incursion by the Serbian police or military into Albanian territory is meticulously measured and immediately reported and denounced.

The Yugoslav Army is able to draw on all the weaponry of a modern army including helicopters and tanks. At the end of July 1998 *Jane's Defence Weekly* estimated the number of Kalashnikovs in the hands of ethnic Albanians to have been about 25,000 before the spring upsurge in fighting, and that it has probably doubled since then. According to the same source, the Kalashnikov tally for the Serbian side was as follows: between 25,000 and 40,000 in the hands of local Serbs, 12,000 with the Yugoslav Army, and 15,000 with the Serbian police (forces of the Interior Ministry or MUP), with the potential supply from Serbia proper being practically unlimited. That so many weapons should already be in the hands of civilians virtually guarantees that, irrespective of any cease-fire or peace talks, a low-intensity conflict will drag on.

During his 15 June 1998 visit to Moscow Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic agreed to the presence of an international "observation mission" in Kosovo. The mission, which was formally launched on 6 July 1998 in Pristina under the name Kosovo Diplomatic Observation Mission (KDOM), is composed of diplomats accredited in Belgrade to whom Milosevic promised unimpeded access to the zones of unrest.

To date, Pristina, the provincial capital, has been spared the fighting. An isolated bomb exploded on 3 July 1998 and a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the United States Information Centre on 26 August 1998. However, both incidents only

resulted in material damage. In the beginning of the year, when the two ethnic groups were staging daily street protests, it often seemed that the antagonistic crowds might come to blows, but this too was avoided. Nevertheless, the danger of ethnic violence within the city of 300,000 remains real.

III. HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

A. Refugee Flow

Refugees have from the very beginning of the fighting in Kosovo featured prominently in media reports. The February/March Drenica crack-down by Serbian security forces, which cost the life of some 80 people including 25 women and children, provoked the mass exodus of unarmed, ethnic Albanians from the affected areas. Images of their plight -- the most harrowing scenes have been of the large-scale exodus in July 1998 over the Prokletije (Damned) mountains into Albania and of homeless ethnic Albanians living in the open within Kosovo in August -- have to date generated the greatest international response, including discussion of various forms of military intervention, much posturing and a frenzy of robust warnings. That said, NATO officials privately admit that the current numbers of refugees are simply not sufficient to trigger any intervention.

After the Drenica crackdown some foreign leaders employed the term "ethnic cleansing". The term has, however, since been dropped, possibly because if it was deemed that ethnic cleansing was indeed taking place, then the international community would be obliged to react more forcefully. In any case, Serbian tactics did shift in early spring to those of a "scorched earth" policy. This sanitised version of ethnic cleansing has largely consisted of the destruction of real estate with relatively low collateral civilian deaths. The burning and looting of houses happens most often once the civilian population has left the region, often scared of the shelling from the distance. In addition, Serbian forces have started burning the bushes along the roads to prevent the UCK from ambushing them. Ironically, Serbian attempts to smoke out ethnic Albanians have been in part assisted by the UCK which has often encouraged the civilian population to flee in advance of an offensive so as to avoid reprisals.¹⁴

B. Scale of the Crisis

As of 1 September 1998 the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was reporting a total of 241,700 displaced persons with the following breakdown:¹⁵

Displaced within Kosovo	170,000
Displaced into Montenegro	35,000
Displaced into other parts of Serbia	20,000
Refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,700
Refugees into Albania	14,000
Visitors into Macedonia	1,000
<hr/>	
Total	241,700

¹⁴ Time, 3 August 1998, Reuters, 6 August 1998.

¹⁵ UN Inter-Agency Situation report 59, YUGBE/MSD/HCR/1341.

The number of displaced persons jumped as the Serbian security forces reversed the UCK's early gains in the course of July and August 1998. For instance, Malisevo, which had a population of 12,000 before the war, stretched to accommodate 40,000 when displaced ethnic Albanians from Orahovac sought refuge there after the UCK was chased out in a Serb counter-attack. And now, following further Serbian advances, it is a ghost town. This means that 40,000 ethnic Albanians, who had been in Malisevo, many already displaced two or three times over, are currently living in the open. Moreover, although it is difficult to imagine winter conditions in the heat of the summer, every torched house will require plastic sheeting at the very least.

In total, an estimated 15,000 houses have been destroyed¹⁶ and about 50,000 internally displaced persons are trying to survive in the open in Kosovo.¹⁷ Even if those people could return to their homes before the onset of winter, their fields have not been tended, their crops have not been harvested and their livestock is scattered or dead, so they will not be able to look after their own food needs until spring in the most optimistic scenario.

Humanitarian convoys which supposedly have unrestricted access find themselves in practice fighting their way through UCK checkpoints. On 22 August 1998 the head of the UNHCR in Pristina, Eduardo Arboleda told the BBC that hostile and nervous rebels fired shots in the air and harassed one of the UNHCR convoy drivers who was a Serb.¹⁸ Arboleda said that insurgents now posed a security risk to aid workers and were creating more problems than Serbian forces for those trying to deliver aid. A few days later, however, Serbian police in Slatina (20 km west of Pristina) turned back a UNHCR convoy of eight trucks carrying food and supplies for thousands of refugees near Lipljane,¹⁹ possibly to prevent international aid workers from seeing trucks carrying anti-aircraft missiles.²⁰

Aid agencies also complain about blocked supplies, unreasonable delays in obtaining entry visas for additional staff members, and of violence against their staff and vehicles.²¹ Humanitarian workers of one agency which preferred to remain anonymous suggested that Serbian government troops have attacked the civilian beneficiaries of their aid. Three ethnic Albanian aid workers from the Mother Teresa Society (a local relief agency which distributes international humanitarian supplies) were killed on 24 August 1998 when gunfire hit their tractors. The Serbian government statement explained that the police in the armoured personnel carrier could not see what was on the wagons and became suspicious, although *The New York Times* reported that the wagons of the tractor were piled with food and white boxes clearly marked with the name of the donor "Doctors of the World".

¹⁶ Reuters, 26 August 1998.

¹⁷ Associated Press, 25 August 1998.

¹⁸ BBC World Service, 22 August 1998.

¹⁹ VIP, 28 August 1998.

²⁰ Associated Press, 28 August 1998.

²¹ The New York Times, 27 August 1998.

The United Nations human rights observers who monitor the situation in Kosovo have expressed concern over human rights violations.²² That said, exaggerated stories of atrocities have also appeared which threaten to discredit genuine accounts. Reuters news agency reported in late July 1998 that many supposed witnesses recounting that Orahovac was "80 percent destroyed" have proved to be untrustworthy, and other "accounts of bodies hanging from electricity poles or tied to streetlamps, mutilated corpses, people being mowed down by machine-guns as they tried to surrender, and hand grenades thrown into a basement of cowering civilians" could not be independently confirmed.²³

Two weeks later German and Austrian media reported the existence of mass graves in Orahovac. Upon closer scrutiny, it turned out that the reports could all be traced to one witness whose story could not be corroborated.²⁴ A European Union delegation later went to Orahovac but failed to confirm the existence of mass graves. On 28 August 1998 the Yugoslav state news agency Tanjug reported that Serbian police discovered in the town of Klecka what Serbian police said was a furnace, part of a crematorium where bodies of 22 Serbs had allegedly been burnt. Foreign journalists were escorted to the site and shown charred bones and scattered clothes, and a captured photograph of a UCK soldier with a bloodstained knife between his teeth.²⁵ There has been no independent confirmation of the Tanjug story, it remains but the latest of a long list of mutual accusations of atrocities by Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

IV. POLITICS

A. New Political Activism

Paradoxically, the upsurge in violence in Kosovo since February 1998 has brought ethnic Albanian politics in the province to life. In the process, Rugova's once unchallenged position as leader of ethnic Albanian in Kosovo, which has enabled him to virtually monopolise visiting diplomats, foreign trips and the various perks of being a Kosovo Albanian dissident, has come under sustained pressure. Although Rugova's pacifist message is that which international mediators wish to hear, he has increasingly alienated himself from ordinary Kosovo Albanians. Moreover, as the UCK has gained ground, Rugova's influence has decreased proportionately.²⁶

²² The Financial Times, 27 August 1998.

²³ "Lurid atrocity tales fuel Albanian fears", Reuters, 24 July 1998.

²⁴ VIP, 6 August 1998.

²⁵ Reuters and Associated Press, 28 and 29 August 1998.

²⁶ Here, on the subject of Rugova's lost credibility with the young people, is a fragment from Bota i Re, a Albanian paper for youth: "However painful this fact might be for Rugova, for the man who turned Kosova into his private estate, he must in the end realise that there is no escaping reality. He can hold on as president of the Republic of Kosova for a few more days, but not for long, because the flames of war have now drawn near to Pristina, and detonations are audible in the city itself... Rugova's statement that he represents all the citizens of Kosova shows nothing but his unwillingness to confront the reality that has arisen in Kosova with the UCK, because he is aware that in any such confrontation he will be the loser."

Despite the outbreak of fighting, Rugova insisted on holding thrice-postponed parliamentary and twice-postponed presidential elections on 22 March 1998. The polls were not monitored by independent observers and are not recognised in Serbia. Moreover, the main opposition parties, including Demaci's Parliamentary Party of Kosovo boycotted the vote arguing that the elections should not be held because of the security situation. In the event, Rugova was the only presidential candidate and therefore also the winner. While the results of the vote are obviously beyond doubt, the scale of the turn-out is contested.

The first time anyone dared openly to defy Rugova's leadership was on 1 October 1997 when students decided to go ahead with planned demonstrations in spite of an LDK²⁷ statement advising them to postpone the protest, a statement issued after Rugova met with a 13-member delegation of ambassadors and high-ranking diplomats representing the United States, Russia, the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Office of the High Representative.²⁸ Since then Rugova's credibility has been further compromised by his refusal to acknowledge properly the existence of the UCK. He came closest on 19 June 1998 when he said: "They are groups of ordinary citizens, who are trying to defend their homes. But we will see to it to ensure that those groups be under control and bear responsibility for the situation."²⁹ Clearly Rugova is conscious that the emergence of the UCK poses a serious challenge to his non-violent strategy. Moreover, if he were fully to acknowledge the existence of the UCK, he would have to take a position on it: either condemn it and thus effectively commit political suicide or support it and lose much of his supposed backing in the West. Rugova's ultra cautious approach contrasted with that of Demaci who publicly announced in June 1998 that he was ready to represent the UCK politically, a position which the UCK bestowed on him two months later.

B. Negotiating Teams

In response to the carnage in Drenica at the end of February 1998, the Contact Group met on 9 March 1998 in London and called on Belgrade to begin negotiations with Kosovo's ethnic Albanians. The Serbian government promptly issued an invitation for dialogue but rejected foreign mediation. On 24 March 1998, after prodding by US special envoy Robert Gelbard, Rugova formed a negotiating group (which to the disappointment of the members, who viewed themselves as negotiators, he called "an advisory group") later to be known as G-15. It included many prominent ethnic Albanian opinion-makers, including LDK politicians, former Communist leaders, journalists and heads of minor political parties. Despite the name, the G-15 was from the outset effectively a G-13, since Kosovo's Prime Minister-in-exile Bujar Bukoshi could not participate in the meetings and Demaci refused to have anything to do with any group or body headed by Rugova.

The G-15 group met on a few occasions in April 1998, but, according to many testimonies given to ICG by the participants of those meetings, Rugova never had

²⁷ The LDK is an acronym for Lidhjes Demokratike te Kosoves or Democratic League of Kosovo, which is Rugova's political party.

²⁸ Reuters, 29 September 1997.

²⁹ Kosova Daily Report #1465, 19 June 1998.

the slightest intention to consult with or listen to anyone from that group. Indeed, members of the G-15 complain that meetings were often humiliating and, worse still, unproductive. Meanwhile, on 23 April 1998 Milosevic called a national referendum on foreign mediation in Kosovo -- the question posed "Do you accept foreign participation in finding a solution for the Kosovo problem?" -- which, predictably, 97 percent of voters rejected.

On 14 May 1998, following pressure from US envoy Richard Holbrooke, Rugova met with Milosevic. He took the crucial decision to do it alone without consulting or even informing the majority of the G-15 group, who learned about the trip to Belgrade from the newspapers. In protest, Hydajet Hyseni, Rugova's former deputy in the LDK and Bujar Dugolli, the students' representative walked out, effectively dealing the final blow to the G-15. In the rest of the group, nobody had contacts with the UCK so that talk of cease-fires or demobilisation could be academic at best.

While US diplomats attempted to present the Rugova-Milosevic meeting (in which four members of the G-15 also took part) as a concession from the Yugoslav President, it was actually Rugova who was obliged to give ground.³⁰ Having repeatedly refused to meet with Milosevic in the absence of an international mediator, Rugova did precisely this. He may have had little choice, but he made no effort to explain this decision to the G-15, let alone ordinary Kosovo Albanians whom he could have addressed in a TV or radio interview. Although uneventful politically, the meeting proved a public relations disaster.³¹

The one concrete outcome of the 14 May 1998 meeting was a decision to have further talks, at least every week. The first such meeting took place on 22 May 1998, the second was cancelled because Rugova and two other prominent G-15 members left on 26 May 1998 for Washington to meet with US President Bill Clinton. If the White House photo-op was designed to increase Rugova's credibility at home, it achieved the opposite, confirming to Rugova's critics that he is no more than a "puppet of America".

The timing of the Washington visit was especially damaging since on 19 May 1998 the Contact Group and on 26 May 1998 the European Union suspended an earlier investment ban on Yugoslavia, as a reward to Milosevic for entering into dialogue with Kosovo's ethnic Albanians. Moreover, as the Serbian security forces' offensive continued within Kosovo, Rugova extended his diplomatic tour to take in key European capitals, increasing further his alienation from ordinary ethnic Albanians.³² Meanwhile, journalists and opinion-makers complain that Rugova has failed to visit Drenica.³³

³⁰ See ICG Report Inventory of a Windfall: Milosevic's Gains from the Kosovo Dialogue, 28 May 1998.

³¹ Rugova was shown by the Yugoslav state television laughing when seated with Milosevic, something that provoked outrage among ordinary ethnic Albanians, some of whom complained to ICG about the manner in which he managed to get on with the man who was simultaneously responsible for the carnage. He was also photographed in an unflattering position when putting down a cigarette by bending all the way to the ground. The picture was reproduced in the Belgrade daily Nasa Borba as well as in the Pristina daily Koha Ditore.

³² For example, the LDK Information Centre at the time reported: "Important moments in the modern history of Kosova," the President of the Republic of Kosova Dr. Ibrahim Rugova called today (Friday) his recent visits to Washington, New York, London, and Paris and the reception he

C. UCK Enters the Political Scene

As the fighting has evolved, the political power of the UCK has been impossible to ignore. US mediators have met up with UCK representatives and attempted to bring the movement into some form of dialogue. The emergence of the UCK as a political player further undermines Rugova's position and has led to mutual recriminations and name-calling. It has thus far failed to contribute to the formation of a common ethnic Albanian front for negotiations with Belgrade.

The US administration made its first high-profile contacts with the UCK at the end of June 1998. Richard Holbrooke had what was presented as a "chance encounter" with the Kalashnikov-totting, bespectacled fighters in the "liberated" village of Junik on 24 June 1998, and special envoy Robert Gelbard talked with unidentified persons in an undisclosed place in western Europe trying to convince them to accept the leadership of Rugova in exchange for participation in negotiations.³⁴

At the same time, on 29 June 1998 a new party, *Levizja Demokratike Shqiptare*, the Albanian Democratic Movement or LDSH was created in Pristina. Its president is Rexhep Qosja, vice-president Hydajet Hyseni and Mehmet Hajrizi, secretary-general. Hyseni and Hajrizi are both former Rugova allies who served long prison sentences as political prisoners after leading ethnic Albanian demonstrations in Kosovo in 1981.

Against the above background, Rugova invited Demaci and Qosja to the LDK headquarters on 1 July 1998, having earlier expressed his agreement for some form of power-sharing. The subsequent talks focused on whether, as Rugova desired, to convene the parliament, (i.e. a body mostly made up of Rugova supporters, since the majority of opposition parties boycotted the 22 March 1998 elections), then create a government and other institutions of the self-proclaimed "Republic of Kosovo"; or whether, as Demaci and Qosja demanded, to form a National Salvation Council of all political forces, including the UCK which was to be under its control. Though Demaci and Qosja agreed that Rugova be the Council's president, Rugova rejected the offer.³⁵ In response to this meeting UCK spokesman Krasniqi said that the UCK would not be placed under Rugova's political control because his policy of non-violent resistance had failed to produce any results.

On 16 July 1998 Rugova forged ahead with his own plan: he convened the Kosovo parallel parliament in the LDK headquarters, which was later raided by the Serbian police. The parliament is not recognised either by the opposition parties (who argue that the elections were invalid), or by the UCK which said³⁶ that both the

was accorded by President Clinton, Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Prime Minister Blair and President Chirac. (Kosovo Daily Report #1465, 19 June 1998).

³³ ICG interviews with editors of Koha Ditore and Zeri.

³⁴ VIP, 2 July 1998.

³⁵ VIP, 6 July 1998.

³⁶ Interview with Zeri #1670, 18 July 1998.

parliament and the National Council are forms of organisation of Kosovo Albanians that have been superseded.³⁷

As the tide of battle turned against the UCK, Rugova has been able to recover some standing with the result that, according to testimonies gathered by ICG from those whom he consulted, by the first week of August 1998, he had dropped the idea of forming a government. Moreover, on 13 August 1998 Rugova presented a new group of five negotiators (a team to talk with Milosevic) to which US mediator Chris Hill gave his "full support".

All members of this new negotiating team are staunch Rugova supporters, many were former communist *apparatchiks* and, with the exception of Fehmi Agani, political lightweights. Meanwhile, just hours after Rugova announced his G-5 group, a "Political Declaration No 7" signed by six UCK members was made public naming Demaci as their representative for the creation of institutions in Kosovo (see above II B).³⁸ It is difficult to find anyone more critical of Rugova's policy than Demaci who immediately launched a media offensive against Rugova.³⁹

Even though it is clear that as currently structured the Rugova-led negotiations will fail to lead to any breakthrough, Western capitals are placing an excessive degree of hope in the talks. For instance, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine said on 27 August 1998 in an interview with *Le Figaro* that the United States, as well as some other powers, were ready for military intervention in Kosovo, but that at the moment they were waiting for the results of Chris Hill's on-the-ground mediation.⁴⁰ Given the multi-layered polarisation and divisions in ethnic Albanian politics in Kosovo (politicians are at loggerheads in Pristina, fighters dispersed and largely beyond political control in the field), the prospects of the formation of any united and representative negotiating front appear extremely remote.

³⁷ The reaction from LDSH was equally harsh. In a statement printed by the daily Bujku on 18 July 1998 it said: "The leadership of the Democratic League of Kosova took this damaging step in an attempt to recover the role it lost in the national movement after the appearance of the UCK, which does not recognise it, and to prevent the evaporation of the party... The LDSH expresses the conviction that the Albanian people will not accept the fraudulent policy of forming these so-called state institutions under the sway of Serbia, because the price they will be forced to pay for this policy will become increasingly steep!"

³⁸ Kosova Daily Report #1520, 13 August 1998.

³⁹ Demaci told the Belgrade daily Blic on 26 August 1998 that: "Rugova was created by God only to create rifts." Demaci told the Vienna weekly Profil on 24 August 1998 that: "He [Rugova] is president of a fiction. All he has is the support of the Americans. They like working with him because he is weak and obeys them." Demaci told the Munich daily *Suddeutsche Zeitung* that Rugova is "a soft man, lacking in courage, talent and knowledge"; And Demaci told the Zagreb daily *Jutarnji List* that: "Rugova claims that he is a president, but he cannot do the most minimal thing for Kosovo Albanians, he cannot defend them... Europe and the international community and of course the United States only heat up the Rugova fiction. But what kind of president is he without a state and what kind of state is it without the army and the police?"

⁴⁰ "La Crise Financière Court Comme un Fouret", *Le Figaro*, 27 August 1998.

V. CONCLUSION

The Kosovo powder keg, whose explosion had so often been predicted during the 1990s, is clearly now igniting with consequences which are already extending beyond the province's borders. Given the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe, it is inevitable that international efforts will focus on this aspect of the conflict in order to keep people alive in the coming months and through winter. That said, there is no humanitarian solution in Kosovo. The only lasting solution is a political settlement reconciling legitimate Serb and ethnic Albanian interests in the province. But serious talks towards such an agreement have yet to begin. For a fruitful dialogue, it is critical to choose the right interlocutors. Whereas before the conflict had escalated into a war, most Kosovo Albanians were united behind Rugova's pacifism, the fighting is creating new political realities. Despite recent setbacks, the UCK is gaining credibility and that credibility is likely to grow the longer the fighting drags on. Meanwhile, Rugova's position is increasingly weak. The time when international mediators could have looked to Rugova alone to deliver a solution on behalf of Kosovo's Albanians has passed.

**Pristina-Sarajevo
2 September 1998**

Note: ICG is currently preparing a further report on Kosovo examining possible scenarios for the development of the crisis and assessing the advantages and disadvantages of key policy options facing western decision-takers.