

In the town of Pec in western Kosovo, unknown men stopped a car and fired on its occupants late in the afternoon of 4 January. Tahir Zemaj, his son, and a cousin, all well known militants from President Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK), were killed. Zemaj had been a commander in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) but his real allegiance was to the Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (Fark), a paramilitary group that was formed in 1998 by Bujar Bukoshi, who was then prime minister of the Kosovo government-in-exile. Fark included loyal followers of Rugova, but it had to join forces with the KLA, led by nationalists who were accustomed to Albanian-style Marxist-Leninism.

The murder of Zemaj was the latest in a long series of killings. The DLK leadership has been seriously weakened, especially around Pec and the rest of western Kosovo. In December 2002 Zemaj gave evidence at the trial of the Dukagjin group, five KLA veterans who had joined the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), a paramilitary force which had an ill-defined remit and had been officially formed by the United Nations administration to help reintegrated former guerrilla fighters. The five were found guilty of killing four Albanian Kosovars who, like Zemaj, had been members of Fark. The best known of the five was Daut Haradinaj, brother of Ramush Haradinaj, leader of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AFK). This is a small nationalist party, which has won about 8% of the vote.

Ramush Haradinaj, aged 34, commanded KLA forces in the area around Pec, Decani and Djakovica. He has a long record of offences committed in France and Switzerland. He was in the Foreign Legion briefly before joining the KLA, where his command was marked by incidents of exceptional violence against Serb civilians. Of all the former KLA commanders, he is most at risk of being summoned to answer charges before the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. The chief prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, has visited Pristina several times and says she is preparing indictments against several former Kosovan guerrilla leaders. But the tribunal seems reluctant to risk adverse Albanian public opinion, and no charges have so

far be brought.

The K has nevertheless managed to win some of the old Albanian communist leaders in the province, like Mahm Bakalli, and some eminent intellectuals. It also enjoyed open support at least until 2001, in diplomatic circles, particularly in the United States. It has never made any real impact on the electorate. But it has been trying to make its place as a third force in a political set-up dominated by the clash between Rugova's DLK and Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (DPK), to which most of the old KLA leaders belong. Hence the support of some international players, weary of the DLK's conservatism and cronyism and the DPK's drift into organised crime. But the venture will come to nothing if Haradinaj's criminal past does catch up with him.

The parliamentary elections in November 2001 were followed by a political crisis lasting several months. Three separate ballots had to be held before the Kosovo Assembly finally elected Rugova as president. The deal involved the appointment of a senior DPK member, Bajram Rexhepi, as prime minister. What this crisis showed was the extreme mediocrity of the politicians. The only way for the DLK, the DPK and the AFK to outbid each other, to achieve distinction and attract voters is to play the nationalist card. But this is likely to bring them quickly into open conflict with the international administration in Kosovo. Rada Trajkovic, spokeswoman for the Serbian members of the Kosovo parliament, thinks there will be an open confrontation between the Albanian Kosovars and the UN representatives this spring.

At this political stalemate, it is interesting to recall the objectives that the international community had when it took up arms against Yugoslavia. The avowed aim was to end the repression and violence that had been suffered by Kosovans, but there was another important political objective, which was to bring down Slobodan Milosevic. Albanian nationalists saw Western intervention as support for their objective of independence for Kosovo.

The Milosevic regime is now long over. But far from being a trump card in the Western strategists' hand, as it once was, Albanian nationalism is now regarded as a destabilising factor in the Balkans. The international community

Kosovo undefused

Kosovo has been a UN protectorate for almost four years. The situation there is unresolved. The economy is in a mess, Serbs have been overruled and ejected, and the Kosovans are fighting among themselves



agrees that Kosovan independence is not on the agenda. An independent Kosovo, it is argued, would not be economically viable and might well become a safe haven for organised crime and a focus for pan-Albanian ambitions to recover lost territories, especially in Macedonia.

Now that the peripheral nationalist movements in Kosovo and Montenegro are no longer of strategic interest to the West, there is anti-Western feeling among Albanian leaders. In Montenegro this resentment is shared by Milo Djukanovic and those close to him who feel, not without reason, that they have been used and then left to their fate.

The current European strategy in the Balkans seems to be simply to mark time. Discussions on the final status of Kosovo have been adjourned sine die and the European Union has spent the past year trying to evolve a provisional solution to the dispute between Serbia and Montenegro. Under the Belgrade agreement, signed on 14 March last year at the instigation of the high representative for the EU common foreign and security policy, Javier Solana, the present Yugoslav Federa-

tion is to be replaced by a new Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The joint powers of the future confederation will be limited but, in return, Montenegro will have to agree to a three-year moratorium before holding a referendum on self-determination.

The constitutional negotiations between Serbia and Montenegro have made no progress for almost a year and are unlikely to reach a successful conclusion without further pressure from the EU. In his annual review in December 2002, the federal minister of foreign affairs, Goran Svilanovic, said it had been a lost year. And the institutional stalemate has effectively blocked all plans for reform in both Serbia and Montenegro.

The new plan for Yugoslavia was intended mainly to forestall any idea of independence for Kosovo, as the break-up of the federal system linking Serbia and Montenegro might then be inevitable. But the agreement of 14 March explicitly restores to Serbia all Yugoslavia's rights to the southern province. Albanian leaders take a dim view of the negotiations on the future state. They have been completely excluded from the discussions and have

no wish to be involved. Western diplomatic logic is impeccable. According to UN Resolution 1244, Kosovo is still an integral part of the Yugoslav Federation. The new Union of Serbia and Montenegro will be the legal successor to that federation. Kosovo is clearly not part of Montenegro. Therefore, it must belong to Serbia. Should the union break up, it is explicitly stipulated that it will again come under Serbian sovereignty. In November 2002 the prime minister of Kosovo threatened a unilateral declaration of independence if the constitutional negotiations between Serbia and Montenegro are brought to a successful conclusion.

The few attempts at dialogue between the Albanian leaders and the Belgrade authorities have taken place outside the Balkans. The most recent was at a colloquy on the Albanian problem at Lucerne in Switzerland in November 2002, when Nebojsa Covic, deputy prime minister of Serbia with responsibility for Kosovo, formally apologised for the "excesses" Serbia had committed there. Bajram Rexhepi then had to make public excuses on his return home for having shaken hands with Covic.

The Albanian leaders' political strategy of raising the nationalist stakes is partly attributable to irresponsibility encouraged by the international community. The future of Kosovo will be decided by Western diplomats, so the Albanians feel that they might as well enjoy throwing their weight about, rather than trying to engage in a difficult but unavoidable dialogue with Belgrade.

In the first years after the war, there was a semblance of reconstruction, although it was usually haphazard without any regard for the environment or the historical heritage. But the Kosovo economy is bankrupt, and going to the West is the only option for most supernumerary young men and women. In these circumstances it is understandable that both Serbs and Albanians should find radical solutions attractive.

Kosovo is just as explosive now as it was in 1999. The only difference is that the international community is directly involved in the crisis. As in 2000-01, confrontation with the international community could again take the form of armed clashes in peripheral Albanian areas, particularly in the Presevo valley in southern Serbia. ■

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