

Election Gives New Hope For Kosovo

by Elke Fimmen

The Democratic League of the moderate Albanian politician Ibrahim Rugova scored a major victory in the first parliamentary elections held in Kosovo since the NATO air war of 1999: It won more than 46% of the vote, while the PDK, led by former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) leader Hashim Thaci, received only 25.5%. The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), of former regional KLA commander Ramush Haradinaj, got 7.8% of the vote.

There were 1.25 million eligible voters, among them 180,000 Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanians. The turnout was about 65%, with 46% of the Kosovo Serbs still living there, and 57% of those who fled Kosovo, making use of their right to vote. Only in the divided city of Kosovska Mitrovika was voter participation among the Serb population under 9%, which was probably because of intimidation used by representatives of a Serb "election boycott" action. Parties of the Serb minority, which ran as a united coalition under the name of Povrotak, got 11% of the vote all together. Ten of the 120 parliamentary seats had been guaranteed to go to the Serb minority, as well as the non-Albanian population groups, from the beginning.

The great confidence displayed for Rugova shows clearly that the people in Kosovo want a peaceful future, and that there is no great support for the former KLA. Already in the local elections last year, KLA representatives were dealt a deadly blow. This did not amaze anyone, because the KLA grew significantly thanks only to the efforts of then-U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Albright sidelined the moderate Rugova, in favor of the radical militia leader Hasim Thaci, as her interlocutor at the Rambouillet conference, and supported the KLA militarily and logistically. The NATO air war that followed, led to a dangerous political confrontation between the United States and Russia and China, as well as the collapse of the government of Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, who had led the process of Eurasian cooperation.

KLA Now Correctly Known As Terrorists

Since the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States, the situation has not been so rosy for the former KLA leaders. Even in Macedonia, the page is being turned, judging by the statements of a high-ranking American on the scene, who called the KLA rebels "terrorists." Finally, the strategic situation has shifted, as seen in the new relationship between President

George Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

One should remember, however, that at the end of the NATO war, many Albanians complained that they were being, in effect, held hostage by the KLA. In this atmosphere of terror, many people who did not adapt to the KLA line, and did not want to capitulate to KLA blackmail, placed their lives on the line, and some moderate LDK politicians were assassinated. In this context, it is through good luck that Rugova is still alive. Above all, this was thanks to the intervention of the Pope, who made it possible during the war for Rugova to go to Italy. A determined opponent of the war, Pope John Paul II intervened before and during the NATO war, to find a solution for Kosovo, if possible, with the help of the Russian government, whereby both the rights of the Kosovar Albanians and the sensitivities and history of Serbia would be respected.

Rugova is the only Albanian politician of Kosovo who could implement such a solution, even though the conditions for building a government with a coalition partner, do not make his task easy. When Rugova announced his election victory, he promised, "We will integrate the minorities into society." This will depend largely on what future will be offered the Kosovo population, which is now 50% unemployed. And it is a matter for the UN administration, UNMIK, which, in addition to police, justice, and customs, also controls the "parameters of the financial budget," even though the economics, social, education, and health ministries are under the government's control.

Considering Rugova's political and intellectual-moral background, it is clear that when he called for recognition of Kosovo's independence, it meant something completely different from what this has been associated with, since the creation of the KLA. Rugova is a man of dialogue, who, even under the most dire conditions, sticks to the principle of non-violence. In addition, the future status of Kosovo, the first official UN protectorate in history, depends on political decisions of international powers, especially the United States and Russia.

The maneuvering-room of the first elected Parliament of the "temporary self-administration" is limited, by the full decision-making power of UN Governor Haekkerup. The Parliament has no sovereign power to make decisions regarding the status of the province, and a referendum on independence is not foreseen for the next three years. Binding is the UN Resolution 1244 from 1999, which holds a final decision open. This makes it possible, juridically, to prevent a break with Yugoslavia, a break which could create problems for the new government in Belgrade.

Rugova's election victory presents a great opportunity for the beginning of a dialogue, which has to be seized now—and not only for Kosovo. As 2004 U.S. Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche stressed, following the election, the international war faction is anything but happy about Rugova's victory, because this also has an effect on the

situation in Macedonia. Rugova is for coexistence and not for war. "And if it works in Kosovo," LaRouche said, "then it can work in Macedonia, too."

Ibrahim Rugova, A Portrait

by Feride Istogu-Gillesberg

Ibrahim Rugova was born on Dec. 2, 1944, in the village of Cerrce/Istog in Kosovo. On Jan. 10, 1945, his father Uke and grandfather Rrusta Rugova were executed by the Yugoslavian communists. Ibrahim went to school in Pej, and completed studies in philosophy in Pristina. His great interest in literature led him to Paris in 1976-77, to the Practical School for Higher Studies, where he studied under Prof. Roland Barth. In 1984, he received a doctorate in literary science, in Pristina. At the time, he was already a well-known writer. In 1988, he was elected chairman of the Writers Union in Kosovo, and on Dec. 23, 1989, elected president of the Kosovo League (LDK), which was the first non-communist party of Kosovo.

In 1990, when former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic began his power struggle for a "Greater Serbia" in Kosovo, the Parliament there was destroyed, the Constitutional provision on the "autonomous status of the province of Kosovo" was annulled, and the ethnic Albanian population subjected to discrimination. All Albanian employees and workers were fired, and all school, radio, and television stations were shut down. Special troops were deployed and a state of emergency was declared.

Non-Violent Resistance

In this inhuman situation, Rugova was the hope of the population. His method of non-violent resistance was enthusiastically supported by the population. His philosophy is, that justice will win in the end. No matter how brutal the attacks may be, one must not give in to provocations. He said, "If we react to injustice with violence, we will lose our innocence. Violence provokes violence." He warned that, otherwise, one would be helping Milosevic achieve his goal, that is, to show the world that the Albanians are primitive separatists and terrorists.

To save the Albanian people from hunger and misery, the LDK, under Rugova's leadership, organized a 3% tax to be paid by Albanians working abroad. In this way, a school and health system could be built up. Maintaining school classes and university study was very close to Rugova's heart, as they would contribute to strengthening humaneness and self-confidence. His self-conscious attitude was an anchor of stability for the people. But because the situation did not improve, the LDK organized elections in 1992 and 1998, in which Rugova was elected president, by an overwhelming mandate. The elections were not recog-



Ibrahim Rugova (left), president of the Democratic League in Kosovo, with NATO former Secretary General Javier Solana.

nized by the Belgrade government.

President Rugova was always clear, that the Kosovo conflict had to come to the attention of world public opinion, if a peaceful solution were to be found. The LDK sent daily reports on the increasingly frequent, brutal attacks of the Serb military units, to its offices in Germany, the United States, Switzerland, and Denmark, which were then forwarded to governments, institutions, and press.

President Rugova's non-violent resistance thus won international recognition. The hopes that, despite the increasingly gruesome situation, war could be avoided, were growing. In 1995, Rugova was awarded the highest peace prize of Denmark, and in 1996, he was granted an honorary degree at the Sorbonne in France. That same year, the first American information center was opened in Kosovo. In 1998, the European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize, and the following year, the peace prize of Münster, which commemorates the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War. Rugova was given honorary citizenship in the Italian cities of Venice, Milan, and Brescia. He met with many heads of state, and was received by President William Clinton in the White House.

But, regardless, the war came. U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright abandoned Rugova during the Rambouillet talks, and replaced him as negotiating partner for Kosovo with Kosovo Liberation Army leader Hashim Thaci. On May 10, 1999, President Rugova, his wife, and his three daughters were welcomed in Rome, and blessed by Pope John Paul II.

The Albanian people of Kosovo, in the elections of Nov. 19, 2001, have shown that they have not forgotten the deeds of President Rugova.