

# A President Killed, New Violence Hits Balkans

by Rainer Apel

Senior political and intelligence sources from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina—with whom *EIR* had the chance of speaking during a mid-March Balkans visit—have pointed to the strikingly timely coincidence of the “strategy of tension” operation in Spain, and the unleashing of a violent and bloody destabilization in Kosovo only a few days later. In Kosovo, gunshots at a Serbian youth on March 15 and the drowning of three Albanian youth in a river the day after, were taken as pretexts by well-organized groups on both sides, to exhibit “spontaneous outrage” and attack each others’ homes, stores, and worship centers (the Serbs are Orthodox Christians, the Albanians majority Muslim). Attacks were also staged in Serbia, against mosques of the Muslim Albanian minority, in “response” to the events in Kosovo. For several days, peace-keeping forces of the United Nations contingent UNMIK and its auxiliary Kosovo Police Force clashed with several tens of thousands of agitated Serb and Albanian street mobs demonstrating wildly, or blocking roads. When the peace-keepers, reinforced by 2,500 soldiers from Germany, Britain, Italy and Austria, finally succeeded in calming the unrest, 21 Serbs and 7 Albanians had been killed, and another 900 wounded in the riots.

The obvious “message” of the perpetrators of the violent rampages was: “Ethnic co-existence is not possible in Kosovo!” This can have—across the Balkans—dangerous chain reaction consequences in Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, and also Croatia. A Balkan destabilization has ominous implications for the security of Europe as whole, absorbing its political energies for interventions in the region—as it already has during the three wars in 1991, 1995 and 1999.

## A Match to Poverty’s Tinder

Five years after the NATO military intervention against Serbia, most regions of Kosovo are still without a functioning infrastructure: Water and power are supplied only for a few hours a day; neither telephone nor public transport function in a reliable way; youth unemployment is at 80%; and economic life is dominated by mafia structures. As a result, conditions in Kosovo have been fragile, if not explosive, for some time; but the sudden, massive eruption of violence on March 17 was clearly a deliberate, well-planned provocation.

UNMIK officials, including its present military com-

mander, Gen. Holger Kammerhoff, have pointed to the network of operatives of the former Kosovo-Albanian liberation front, UCK, which still exists—at a strength of several thousand underground fighters—almost five years after it was officially banned in late 1999. The AKSh, as the UCK calls itself today, is charged with several hundred assassinations against former Serbian policemen and soldiers, “Albanian traitors,” and others, which have occurred in Kosovo during the past five years. The AKSh, surfacing with this name at the beginning of 2001, was banned shortly thereafter by the then-political leader of UNMIK, Michael Steiner, as a “terrorist organization.” Numerous members of the AKSh, some of them working under the cover of being members of the UNMIK-run Kosovo Police Force, have been arrested since 2001. These extremist Albanians, to a great extent, draw on funds and arms provided by right-wing networks abroad, which support the AKSh demand for a coherent geographical area in the Balkans for all ethnic Albanians: a “Greater Albania.”

As this would imply redrawing the maps of several Balkan states, it would destabilize the entire region, because similar movements also exist on the Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian sides. Macedonia would be in a particularly precarious situation, since 40% of the population are ethnic Albanians, so its existence could be threatened. In this context, questions are posed by many as to possible causes of the plane crash that killed Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski three weeks ago: Was it an accident under bad weather conditions, or was it a terrorist attack? With the loss of Trajkovski, Macedonia has lost the one politician who, three years ago, was able—because of his good contacts on both sides—to prevent limited armed clashes between Albanians and Macedonians from developing into a full civil war, and then re-pacify the country. Kosovo and Macedonia are the most fragile states in the Balkans.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, if a prominent neo-conservative hand became visible behind the recent outburst of Kosovo violence, because the paralysis of “old Europe” does rank very high on the wish-list of synarchistic circles of financiers, the various neo-con think-tanks, and the Bush Administration. The international right-wing connections of the “Greater Albania” current may point in this direction. But some neo-cons are active also on the anti-Albanian side: it is noted with particular attention in Europe, that Samuel Huntington’s latest book also deals with the “ethnic” development of populations in the Balkans: Within a few decades, the Muslim population, with its high birth rate, has outnumbered the Orthodox-Christian Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Huntington noted. For the most-extreme currents of the “Greater Serbia” movement, for example, elimination of Muslims as it was practiced by Serbs in the “ethnic cleansing” wars of the early 1990s in Bosnia, ranks prominently on their agenda. Incidents like those staged in Kosovo now, may easily provoke new population wars in the region.