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Serbian police arrests two former Albanian rebels, seizes weapons

KosovoCompromise Staff

Serbian police said they arrested two former ethnic Albanian rebels and seized large cache of weapons in a region of southern Serbia which was a scene of Albanian uprising back in 2000-01.

Serbian police stormed the houses of two former leaders of the „Liberation army of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja“ (UCPBM) near the regional hub of Presevo on Saturday, and found five assault rifles, two RPG's, 20 missiles, ten heavy machine guns, five pistols, two hand grenades and more than 20,000 pieces of ammunition.

The owners of those houses, brothers Nazmi and Adan Hajredini were immediately arrested, raising a storm of protests in the local Albanian community, whose leaders claim that police action presents yet another proof of Belgrade's pressure on Albanians in three southern Serbian municipalities.

„The arrest is, in a fact, the proof of Serbia's continuing pressure on Albanians. Serbia wants to, once again, destabilize the Presevo Valley,“ mayor of Presevo Ragmi Mustafa said.

A similar statement came from the organization of UCPBM veterans, which is headed by Nazmi Hajredini, who was a member of both Albanian rebel formations in southern Serbia and neighboring Kosovo.

During the UCPMB uprising, Hajredini was the head of logistics for the ethnic Albanian outlaws.

UCPMB, the local offshoot of Kosovo Liberation Army, KLA or UCK, has been disbanded following the Western-brokered Konculj deal in 2001, which halted hostilities and created the conditions for peaceful integration of local Albanian population into Serbian institutions.

Despite the relative calm, a number of armed incidents were reported in past seven years, with occasional discoveries of hidden weapons caches.

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Macedonia, several dozen violent incidents between rival Albanian parties casted a shadow over the campaign for the June 1 parliamentary elections.



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At least one member of the largest ethnic Albanian opposition party, Democratic Union for Integrations, or BDI, had been killed and several local branches of the party made of former guerrillas turned politicians came under small-arms fire in a series of clashes with rival Democratic Party of Albanians, PDSH.

In the latest incident, BDI's office in western Macedonian town of Gostivar was seriously damaged late on Friday, as "still unknown attackers" pelted it with stoned, breaking the windows in apparent attempt to terrorize the supporters of former National Liberation Army, NLA or UCK.

Prior to that incident, BDI leader and former NLA chief Ali Ahmeti came under fire, but had managed to escape the alleged assassination attempt unharmed.

After a series of public protests, BDI blamed Macedonian police for doing absolutely nothing to prevent violence against its membership.

Both NATO and the European Union warned Macedonian leaders that continuous violence might additionally postpone the country's bid for membership in those organizations, as Skopje hopes to secure the exact date of accession by the end of year.