

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE KOSOVO LIBERATION ARMY IN THE LAP OPERATIONAL SUBZONE DECEMBER 1995 – JUNE 1998



History

Keywords: Kosovo, Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), Liberation War, Lap Operational Subzone (LOSz), Zahir Pajaziti.

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Abstract

The study, "The beginnings of the organization of the Kosovo Liberation Army in the Lap Operational Subzone December 1995 – June 1998," as its object of study has the period of the Kosovo Liberation War in the years 1998-1999. This study touches upon the historical dimension of the efforts and sacrifices of Albanians found in the Serbian-Yugoslav area against their will. This study's main topic is the beginnings of the organization in the Lap Operational Subzone (LOSz) as a significant part of the KLA. The study has undergone a scientific analysis based on sources of all kinds. The analysis included LOSz's position in the KLA structure: the mission and duties during the liberation war, the governing bodies at the beginning of the LOSz organization and their functional organization, as well as the battles and downfalls of the freedom fighters. Historical literature, feuilletons, scientific papers, as well as interviews with famous personalities, were used to shed more light on the organization and the war in LOSz. This topic covers an essential segment of the Kosovo Liberation War period 1998-1999 and contributes towards the complete enlightenment of this historical period, especially in this region. Therefore, hopefully, this study will build interest and create perspectives for new studies of this nature.

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was a politico-military organization, which led the Kosovo Liberation War from 1994 to 1999 and held a special place in the Contemporary History of the Albanian people in the last decade of the 20th century (Krasniqi, 13).

At the beginning of its organization and activity (1994-1997), the KLA had a guerrilla organization and acted on the strategy of "hit and retreat" or, in other words, "unexpected attacks in time and space" (Baudouin, 71-95). Initially, the KLA's organizational structure resembled earlier clandestine political organizations of Albanians against Yugoslav rule in the 1980s. Based on this strategy, the KLA began to strike the Yugoslav-Serbian occupying apparatus stationed in Kosovo. Subsequently, during the war (1998-1999), the organization and structuring of the KLA were built on the idea of freedom, based on many organizations of political, national forces, which saw the chances of gaining freedom only through armed wars as well as through strategies based on the national, historical, moral, humanitarian and political aspect, but above all, on the democratic aspect.

The mission of the Kosovo Liberation Army was to develop, direct, coordinate, and lead all military operations in Kosovo's fight for liberation from the Serbian occupying forces. It aimed to protect and support the civilian population and engage in political as well as diplomatic processes regarding Kosovo's political status (Political Statement No. 2 of the KLA Headquarters (KLAHQ); (Krasniqi, Interview); (Selimi, press release); (Krasniqi, press release).

Until November 18, 1998, Kosovo was a KLA Military Zone organized in seven (7) operational sub-zones: OSz of Drenica, OSz of Pashtrik, OSz of Dukagjini, OSz of Shala, OSz of

Lap, OSz of Neredime (Nerodimes), and OSz of Karadak. On November 18, the KLA Headquarters (KLAHQ) decided to move from the organization of operational sub-zones to operational zones of the KLA (Lama, 543); (Krasniqi, 101-134).

Within the Kosovo Liberation Army and the liberation war, the Lap Operational Subzone (LOSz) was significant. With its structure, organization, preparation, and command at a high level, it served as an example of the KLA (Krasniqi, 123, 124). During the liberation war, LOSz, compared to other subzones, experienced some difficulties imposed by the social and economic situation, by the geographical (territorial) extent.

Geographically, LOSz was located in the northeastern part of Kosovo. It was bordered: to the northeast by Serbia, to the southeast by the Karadak Operational Subzone (KOSz), to the south by the Nerodime Operational Subzone (NOSz), to the southwest by the Drenica Operational Subzone (DOSz), and to the northwest by the Shala Operational Subzone (SHOSz). The area of responsibility of the Lap Operational Subzone included four centers (important economic, cultural, and political cities): Besiana - the center of Lap, Prishtina - the capital of Kosovo, Kastrioti (Obiliqi) - the industrial center and the bridge connecting the northern and northwestern centers of Kosovo, and FushëKosova - a suburb of Prishtina, at the same time interlinking with the center of Kosovo (Map of Kosovo municipalities).

However, it should be noted that the extension of the area of responsibility in geographical terms does not imply operational responsibility. This is since LOSz never had control over the entire area of responsibility since Serbian forces continuously controlled the cities. Therefore, the responsibility is only on the controlled area (of the organization and the functioning) by LOSz.

Approximately one-fifth of Kosovo's population lived in the area of responsibility of LOSz, 81% Albanians, 9.9% Serbs, 0.5 Turks, 2.3% Roma, and 5.6 others. (Institutions, 7). Kosovo's intellectual and academic people, high school youth, student youth, headquarters of political parties, and humanitarian organizations were concentrated there.

This extension was of particular strategic importance, as these centers were at the forefront of the entry of Serbian security forces: the Serbian Army, police and paramilitary forces, and several military barracks with hundreds of thousands of structured forces armed under the direction of the defense and security organs. When discussing the Serbian security forces, one often reads and hears about these forces' numbers and names. More precisely, in addition to the regular military and police forces, referring to various reports from the war and post-war studies, in Kosovo, Serbian paramilitary forces have also been engaged. However, it must be kept in mind that these forces have been led by political scene personalities, such as Vojislav Seselj, and personalities close to the Serbian regime, such as Zeljko Arznjatic-Arkan. Therefore, when talking about Serbian forces, in the case of Kosovo, one thing must keep in mind that behind these formations stands the Serbian country itself, and as such, it has been used to hide the Serbian crime regime. Bardhyl Mahmuti, in his study *"Kurthet terminologjike në funksion të mohimit të gjenocidit në Kosovë"* with total competence states, "Concealment of the crime of genocide

committed in Kosovo by Serbian armed forces and pointing the finger at "paramilitary" groups is part of Serbia's strategy to escape responsibility as a country," (Mahmuti, 46).

Moreover, through this Zone, three main roads passed that connected Serbia to Kosovo. First, the road Nis - Besianë (Podujevë) - Prishtina (which crosses the plain and the Lap Valley). Second, the road Leskovc - Tullar - Gallab (Orllan) - Llabucë (Lluzhan) - Prishtina (which is located on the side of Gallab (Gollak) along Lake Batllava). Third, the road Leskovc - Prapashtica - Prishtina (which crosses the central part of Gallab (Gollak) or southeast of LOSz), as well as the border with Serbia at a length of close to 100 km (from southeast to northeast of LOSz). Additionally, through LOSz, from Merdar on the border with Serbia, through the Lap Valley, passed the railway that joined Prishtina to the southwest and then Fushë Kosovë (Zhitia, 2008, 29, 30).

The patriotic activity, the clandestine anti-Yugoslav policy of the citizens of LOSz goes beyond the liberation war of the years 1998-1999. Many patriots and intellectuals disagreed with Kosovo's inclusion within the Yugoslav Federation against their will. Also, many did not agree with the Serbian occupation, who organized and demonstrated Albanian dissatisfaction. Among them are Adem Demaçi (Mandela of Kosovo), Bajram Bahtiri, Ali Ajeti, Afrim Zhitia, and Fahri Fazliu, Ylfete Humolli, and Hasan Ramadani.

Besides, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was organized, expanded, and built on the foundations of many activists, organizers, and ideologues who sacrificed everything for Kosovo's freedom. The KLA was being built upon the boys' and girls' multifaceted efforts who were disrupting the foundations of Serbian-Yugoslavian oppressors of Kosovo, bringing so an end to the Serbian occupation of Kosovo.

Among the creators of ideas and actions for the establishment and expansion of the KLA, not only of the Lap Operational Subzone (LOSz) but throughout Kosovo, which for the first time in Albanian history had exceeded the regional frameworks, forms, and borders of the internal territory of Kosovo, is one of the first fighters, Commander Zahir Pajaziti (Remi, "Ekskluzive" Interview; Krasniqi, 125).

Zahir was distinguished for his organizational work and his courage. From December 1995, in addition to contributing to the establishment of the KLA in the LOSz, he continued so in other territories, such as Shishman of Gjakova and the city of Gjakova, Ferizaj, and Vushtrri. Shortly before his heroic fall, he was in the process of forming guerilla units in Gjilan (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 40, 41). The first fellow fighters in the ranks of the KLA-LOSz are Hakif Zejnnullahu, Avni Ajeti, Hasan Zeneli, Isak Shabani, Agim Makolli, Jonuz Zeneli, and Sabit Lahu. (In 1997, after the heroic fall of Zahir, Isak Shabani, Hasan Zeneli, and Jonuz Zeneli were arrested. Isaku and Hasani were released in 2002. Whereas, Jonuz Zeneli, as a result of torture, dies in the Belgrade prison hospital on September 17, 1997. Sabit Lahu was arrested in October 1998 and dealt with the matter as a missing person case). Zahir, outside the LOSz, increased the cooperation with Edmond

Hoxha, RexhepSelimi, NaitHasani, LahiBrahimaj, Sokol Bashota, HysenDreshaj, Adrian Krasniqi, Qerim Kelmendi, and Luan Haradinaj. (Zejnullahu, 2000, 41, 47); (Sejdiu, conference paper).

Zahiri had HakifZejnullahu as one of his closest fellow-fighters. Hakifi was his closest fellow-fighter because he substituted Zahirin when he set out organizational and operational responsibilities. Hakif would mention him when the greatness and pride of the KLA war had to be shown, accompanied him when Zahiri walked freely and with the feeling that victory was close. (Zejnullahu, 2000, 29, 44, 45).

In early June 1996, ZahirPajaziti came in contact with Rustem Mustafa. (Zejnullahu, 2000, 37, 38). Rustem Mustafa was a graduate of the Faculty of Law at the University of Prishtina. From a young age, he was a well-known personality in the Lap region for his patriotic activity, who also had contacts with various leaders of legal and clandestine politics in Lap and beyond. His actions resembled those of influential personalities. This was especially noticeable with his unceasing patriotic activity in all directions of life and in the time's politics. These two personalities later reflected to be appropriate and reasonable as the two intertwined and agreed on the duties and the activities happening during the ongoing war. For Rustem Mustafa, it was a day awaited as he sought to realize what he had invested in previous years, while for ZahirPajaziti, his journey continued to expand the ranks of the KLA. After this meeting, Rustem Mustafa started to play an essential role in having capable boys join the KLA ranks. He had a wide circle of friends from the university, from the political and patriotic activity. Initially, he consulted with his cooperator-fellow-fighter Sejdi Rama, with whom, after consultations, Muharrem and Shukri Ismaili joined the ranks of the KLA (Zejnullahu, 2000, 29). Later on, in contact with ZahirPajaziti, Rustem Mustafa put Selim Haziri, who also after consultations with his fellow-fighters, IlirKonushefci, NaimHaziri, ShaipHaziri, and NaimHyseni joined the ranks of the KLA (Zejnullahu, 2000, 29). HakifZejnullahu, at the same time, had talked with RefikJashari, AvdiKicmari, and Hamdi Pollomi, who at the end of August joined the ranks of the KLA (Zejnullahu, 2000, 43). This coordination was the second extension of the KLA ranks in LOSz, and it can be said that in general, this was the time when the KLA created the contours of an army with a new philosophy because every political activity, but also field operation, were uniquely implemented and coordinated by the Main Headquarters.

The Lap Operational Subzone, like the entire KLA, was determined to face any cost in obtaining the rights of the people and the country, as well as to fight the Serbian occupier, who had already begun to come out openly through its leaders, who in the following years, among other things, demanded the destruction of Kosovo(Bajrami, 2001, 144). Fighting the invader required extra work and activities, which Zahiri especially was not lacking. The year 1996, and especially the second half of the year, was the KLA's expansion and growth year, which can now be seen in every part of the country.

In the middle of December 1996, after some successful guerrilla actions, ZahirPajaziti, after planning and appointing the organizers for further actions, started his last journey to Albania (Zejnullahu, 2000, 45). From Prishtina to Albania, up to the border, he was escorted by his fellow-

fighters Hakif Zejnullahu, Ilir Konushefci, and Shaip Haziri. Simultaneously, the journey continued with his fellow-fighter Qerim Kelmendi, who was wounded (Zhitia, 2008, 101).

During his stay in Albania, Zahir Pajaziti had met with various personalities, such as the KLA commander, Azem Sylja, who was appointed but not yet made public, where they discussed the ongoing structuring and organization of the KLA (Islami, 2006, 10). Azem Sylja requested that Zahir's experience in organizing actions would be transferred to other zones, for which Zahir agreed. At the same time, Zahir asked Azem Sylja for the decision-making to be moved and more concentrated in Prishtina as soon as possible, while the connections of the structures of war within the country with those abroad would be as representative and as robust as possible (Islam, 2006, 5). Zahir also met with the leaders of the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (NMLK), Bahri Fazliu and Agron Rahmani, with whom the topic of conversation was the provision, cooperation, and the joining of the forces in the joint war against Serbia (Zhitia, 2000, 3-12); (Zhitia, 2008, 101).

Zahir, sometime after January 20, after returning from Albania, met Nait Hasani in his apartment. (Hasani "Libri i Lirisë," 153). The meeting was held in the evening. It was a short meeting, where the two were mutually informed, Zahir about the meetings in Albania, while Nait about the work and tasks that were performed and about those in the process of being planned.

After this meeting, Zahir had held meetings with his fellow-fighters from Besiana and Prishtina, with whom they had debated about the current situation at that time, especially about the arrests that had begun in those days (from January 22, arrests of National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (NMLK) and KLA activists had begun). Zahir had had information only about the arrest of Avni Klinaku. According to his fellow-fighters, this was not an issue that made Zahir feel endangered because the two were not involved in any specific activity together. For that, Zahir had extraordinary faith in Avni's personality (Kıçmari, Rama, interview given to the author).

According to family members, Zahir was for the last time among his family on January 25. By this time, he was mainly focused on the preparation of new actions. He held his last meetings with his fellow-fighters on January 27 and 29, 1997. In these meetings, he discussed the organization of new actions in the following days. They planned for new actions to be executed on February 4 (Islami, 7).

On January 31, 1997, at a time when much work was expected to be coordinated and the initiative to implement the decisions of the KLA Central Headquarters to be initiated, after the fighting in Pestovo, Vushtrri, Zahir fell historically together with his two fellow-fighters, Hakif Zejnullahu and Edmond Hoxha (Islami, 2001, 113, 114, 115).

Nonetheless, as the historian Jakup Krasniqi estimates, "The fall of these three heroes was a great loss for the KLA. It was this "loss" that created the path to the freedom we enjoy today" (Krasniqi, 125).

ZahirPajaziti is synonymous with and personifies the centuries-old views and aspirations of Albanians, he was the organizer of military exercises inside and outside of the country, a member and one of the founders of the KLA Central Headquarters inside the country, co-builder of the original strategy, the triumphant strategy which was an original model, driven by strongwill and morality in conspiracy and actions. The fall of Zahir was a loss not only for the LOSz but also for the entire KLA. It was a setback in the achievement of the aspirations for the liberation of the country (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 48); The fall of Zahir, Hakif, and Edmond was a blow to the KLA, a blow which consequently resulted in the departure of some of their fellow fighters to Albania and the western countries, then to national prisons and LOSz(Zejnullahu, 2000, 48). IlirKonushfeci, Avni Ajeti, ShaipHaziri, and NaimHyseni within a short time (three weeks later, after the arrest of Isak Shabani, Zahir's fellow-fighter), after consultations with friends and after an assessment of the situation and circumstances, went to Albania, while some fighters for a while went underground (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 48, 49).

In these circumstances, Rustem Mustafa and Sejdi Rama, based on the mission and purpose of the oath taken by the KLA, began to maintain ties with fellow-fighters, respectively to seek ties with the KLA Central Headquarters, ties which were previously held in a deep conspiracy by ZahirPajaziti, as well as the completion, reorganization of LOSz (Zhitia, 2000, 19-23); (Zhitia, 2008, 107). They held such meetings with all fellow-fighters, such asMuharrem and Shukri Ismaili, Naim and Selim Haziri, RefikJashari, AvdiKicmari, and Hamdi Pollomi (Zhitia, 2008, 107-108). As part of these activities, around the end of February 1997, Sejdi Rama, as a representative of LOSz, went to Germany to meet with the KLA representatives. During his stay in Germany (February-April), Sejdi Rama held several meetings with the KLA representatives, such as Sabri Kicmari, FehmiLladrofc, Ali Rama, Ibrahim Kelmendi, Ismet Abdullahu, Qerim Kelmendi, and Avni Ajeti. Qerimi and Avniu, after the fall of Zahir, through Albania, had gone to Germany (Rama, Kicmari, interview given to the author). During these meetings, Sejdi Rama found the support, respectively the ties for the continuation of the reorganization of the LOSz, receiving the promise that they will have support both in the organization and logistics. After returning from Germany (April 1997), Sejdi Rama contacted and informed his fellow fighters about meetings held in Germany. In that meeting, it was decided that in the future, the funds that will come to LOSz (according to the agreement reached in Germany) through the Fund "Homeland calls" (through Ali Rama), to be managed by AvdiKicmari (Kicmari, Rama, Jashari, Pollomi, interview given to the author). It had also been decided to systematically expand and strengthen the ranks with members of different strata and professions, who were influential and capable of serving for the national cause.

During this time (end of February, the beginning of March 1997), Rustem Mustafa expanded the ranks of the KLA with new fighters, such asVllaznimMaçastena, XhevatHyseni, NexhatIbrahimi, KujtimRaçi, SheqirBunjaku, ÇelëGashi, Latif Gashi, MujëMetolli, SaliSejdiu and SkënderBeka. The involvement of new members was very significant for the organization and the ongoing war (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 48); (Zhitia, 2008, 107, 108).

The scope and reorganization at this stage were very significant not only for LOSz but also for the entire KLA. This step was proof that the KLA was not a coincidence but a necessity which was not broken but was strengthened during its journey and challenges ("Zërii Kosovës," Year XV, No. 12, March 27, 1997).

Within this activity, the next decision was to organize contact with fellow fighters who had gone to Albania after the fall of Zahir in order to coordinate activities. Ilir Konushefci-Mërgimi, after had gone to Albania, established contacts with Zahir's fellow-fighters, such as Rexhep Selimi, Luan Haradinaj, Adrian Krasniqi, Qerim Kelmendi, and Mujë Krasniqi. Ilir would continuously be known as one of the most influential personalities of the KLA. His role in all aspects of the organization, its growth, logistics, and especially action strategy, was highly significant.

On April 31, 1997, some of Zahir's accomplices and fellow-fighters-in-arms from the Gallup (Gollak) region were arrested: Hasan Zeneli, Jonuz Zeneli, Agim Makolli, and Latif Brajshori (Zhitia, 2008, 109). After these arrests, Rustem Mustafa and Sejdi Rama organized a meeting in Podujeva at the house of Rama Kamerolli (Rama, Kicmari, Pollomi, interview given to the author). Present were: Rustem Mustafa, Sejdi Rama, Latif Gashi, Hamdi Pollomi, and Selim Haziri. After examining the circumstances in which they were, they decided to continue their activity without any preoccupation because everything was organized in a deep conspiracy.

However, sometime in mid-July 1997, Selim and Naim Haziri, Rustem Mustafa, and Sejdi Rama met in Besiana, at Selim Haziri's house. In this meeting, for various reasons, above all for security reasons, it was announced that Selim and Naim Haziri were to temporarily move to Albania (Zhitia, 2008, 109).

Despite the dire circumstances that had arisen from January to July 1997, a successful reorganization was seen, above all, an operational functioning based on the strategy inherited from Commander Zahir Pajaziti. Evidence of this are the many different actions. For Zahir's fellow-fighters, this time was a time of rebirth, which highlighted their presence in every part of LOSz.

In this spirit, to contact and coordinate organizational actions, in August, after consultations with Sabri Kicmari and Ali Rama (who were in Germany), Rustem Mustafa and Sejdi Rama decided to go to Albania to meet with Iliri and friends who were there. In Albania met: Iliri Konushefci, Murat Ajeti, Ali Rama (Ali had come from Germany), Rustem Mustafa, and Sejdi Rama. In this meeting, the main topic of discussion was the organization (reorganization) of command (leadership) structures in LOSz. In this meeting, Iliri announced that a group of fighters would soon enter Kosovo, among them Ilir and Murati, to organize general actions at the national level. In the end, it was decided that, after entering Kosovo, a joint meeting would be organized with the heads of the units (the organization at that time was through 'threesomes,' where everyone had their own responsibility, there were exceptions when there were even more members) and governing (commanding) bodies were appointed. The Tirana meeting was the beginning of the reorganization and the appointment of those responsible for the Lap Operational Subzone (Zhitia, 2008, 110).

At the end of August 1997, several KLA fighters entered Kosovo from Albania: Rrahman Rama, IlazKodra, Abedin Rexha - Sandokani, Qerim Kelmendi - Dema, IlirKonushefci - Mërgimi, Murat Ajeti, NaimHaziri - Dilaveri and Selim Haziri - Bekria. Iliri with friends, who brought a considerable number of weapons, from Prekazi (Jashari family) to Lluca were accompanied by RexhepSelimi, Rrahman Rama, and Sokol Bashota. After arriving in Lap, Iliri and Murati settled in with the family of Mehdi Murati (Haxhija) in Sekiraçë, where they stayed almost most of the time, while Selim and NaimHaziri went to the village of Gurrat (Lladofc), in the family of RefikJashari (Zhitia, 2008, 110 - 111).

Regarding the weapons which were left to NaimHaziri, the next day Mehdi Murati and his son temporarily stored these weapons in their house in Sekiraca. From there, a few days later, Ilir and Murat, together with Latif and CelaGashi sent these weapons to Buzllap (Dobërdol), at the house of Latif Gashi.

In the evening of the second day of arrival in Lap, Iliri and Murati first met with Latif Gashi, and in the following days, they asked to contact Rustem Mustafa-Remi to organize a meeting following the Tirana agreement. Rustem Mustafa and Sejdi Rama (who had returned through Montenegro), upon arriving in Podujeva, were informed by their fellow fighters that Iliri and Murati had arrived. Therefore, a consultative meeting was organized between them, where it was decided that the next day in the evening the commanders of the units met at the same place, in Surkish. (According to Tirana's decision, only the units' commanders agreed to attend the meeting). The official meeting was held on the evening of September 2, 1997, in the village of Surkish near Besiana (Zhitia, 2008, 110-114). The meeting was attended by: Rustem Mustafa, Latif Gashi (these were in Kosovo) but IlirKonushefci, Murat Ajeti, and NaimHaziri. Sejdi Rama and RefikJashari did not attend.

In this meeting, it was decided: 1. Rustem Mustafa - Remi, head, and coordinator of the Lap Operational Sub-Zone with other Sub-Zones and the Central Headquarters of the KLA. 2. Latif Gashi - Lata, coordinator of the units for Lap (Remi's deputy). 3. IlirKonushefci, to continue the work of supplying weapons at the national level and to be a member of the Central Headquarters. 4. IlirKonushefci - Mërgimi, Murat Ajeti, and NaimHaziri - Dilaveri to return to Albania, while Selim Haziri to stay in the country, and as well the heads of the units were appointed.

At this time, the KLA members in LOSz (within the country) were organized into four units: 1. Sejdi Rama, Muharrem Ismaili, Shukri Ismaili and FahriBala. 2. ÇelëGashi, MujëMetolli, SaliSejdiu, SkënderBeka (ÇelëGashi after the creation of the weapons depot in Buzllap (Dobërdol) was appointed responsible for armaments). 3. RefikJashari, AvdiKiçmari, Hamdi Pollomi, Selim Haziri, and Naser Ramadani. 4. Brotherhood Maçastena, XhevatHyseni, SheqirBunjaku, KujtimRaçi and NexhatIbrahimi. (Rama, Kiçmari, Pollomi, interview given to the author).

During this time, in the framework of particular military tasks, the units' leaders had the duty of expanding the ranks with capable members. According to the responsibility arising from

the Surkish meeting, in order to organize general actions at the national level, on September 11, 1997, Rrustem Mustafa-Remi was given the number and contact point of the representative of the KLA headquarters. The Surkish meeting was of particular importance to the Lap Operational Subzone. From this time, everything started to function and be organized according to tasks and responsibilities. Above all, from that time, began the creation of organizational-command structures. Iliri with friends, on the first weekend of September 1997, from the house of Mehdi Murat (Haxhia) to the villages of Drenica were accompanied by Rrustem Mustafa, Hamdi Pollomi, Latif Gashi and, from Lebana, by ShaipHaziri and SajmirKonushefci.

The September 2 meeting was analytical and defining regarding tasks and responsibilities. Above all, the extent, organization, and assessment of the general circumstances were everyone's duty. After the Surkish meeting, Rrustem Mustafa, in the framework of expanding the ranks of the KLA, began meetings with representatives of various organizations, among them with the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (NMLK), with which, at the level of LOSz, had reached a cooperation agreement (Humolli. It is worth noting that the NMLK, in the second general meeting, its highest body, held in May 1997, among various decisions, decided to form military units for the KLA ("Çlirimit," 1997, 268).

At the end of September 1997, Rrustem Mustafa and FatmirHumolli, military representatives of the NMLK, met through HyzriTalla and FadilLepaja in Prishtina (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 50). In this meeting, among other things, it was decided that, at a particular moment of the beginning of the fighting against the Serbian-Yugoslav occupying forces, the guerrilla units of the NMLK would join the KLA. This decision was an agreement which later, as will be seen, will prove to be very reasonable and decisive for the extension and success of the Lap Operational Subzone. This step was a decision that was crowned due to previous discussions and cooperation between ZahirPajaziti and the leaders of NMLK, especially so with FatmirHumolli.

According to the above agreement, FatmirHumolli, by March 1998, had managed to expand the organization of units in the LOSz region, especially in Pristina, FushëKosovë, and Obiliq. He had created command structures that were at a high quality and function level.

Besides Rrustem Mustafa, during this period, an extraordinary contribution to the expansion and massification of the KLA was played by Latif Gashi, who, based on the responsibility given to him at the Surkish meeting, began to expand the ranks of the KLA. During this time, they had generally managed to overview Serbian police and military bodies' political situation, organization, and functioning in the LOSz region. In addition, it worked mainly on identifying respected, influential, and nationally proven personalities. Cooperation meetings on the organization and expansion of the KLA were held with BedriBajrami, XheladinRekalieu, FadilLepaja, BajrushBehramim, BehramBehluli, Hakif Mehmeti, Naser Bejtullahu, NaimKadriu, XhevdetMacastena, andSefedinBajrami. They were not a part of the operational units. However, they were needed in the service of the KLA (Kiçmari, Rama, Pollomi, interview given to the author).

Also, work was done on the supply and building of weapons depots. At this time, three weapons bases were established: Gurrat (Lladofc), Katunishte (Velikarekë), and Buzllap (Dobërdol), which since September 1997 has been the primary weapons depot in LOSz.

Meanwhile, IlirKonushefci, after going to Albania, entered Kosovo dozens of times and brought various weapons, from pistols to anti-tank weapons. He also took part in several actions, such as the one at midnight on October 15 and 16, 1997, when together with his fellow-fighters Adrian and MujëKrasniqi and Qerim Kelmendi attacked the police station in Klicina, Peja. On this occasion, the first martyr in KLA uniform, Adrian Krasniqi (Remi, "Ekskluzive"), falls on the altar of freedom. Ilir, together with Luan Haradinaj and Adrian Krasniqi were prominent and significant figures in the organization and functioning of the KLA logistics in general.

After the action of Klicina, a few days later, Rrustem Mustafa and Latif Gashi went to visit IlirKonushefci in the district of Malisheva. In the meeting, among other things, Ilir had indicated that in the coming days, he would visit his friends in Lap. After a few days, during his stay in Lap, Iliri had stayed with several families where he had met his fellow fighters. A work meeting was held in Buzllap (Dobërdol), where most of the heads of operational units were present. The meeting focused on the extent and organization of the KLA in LOSz. The meeting was held at Latif Gashi's house (L. Gashi, Jashari, Gashi, Kiçmari, interview given to the author). IlirKonushefci from Buzllapi (Dobërdol) to the villages of Drenica was accompanied by fellow-fighters Rrustem Mustafa, Latif Gashi, and Selim Haziri.

In the following time, there was increased activity and an increase in the number of fighters. Rrustem Mustafa began to distribute tasks and define responsibilities. From that moment, the responsibility according to the military hierarchy began to function, and respectively the actions began to be planned, delegated, and implemented accurately. The end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998 in LOSz had an evident and functional extension and organization.

With the Headquarters of the KLA and the ties through IlirKonushefci, Rrustem Mustafa had also established ties through HysenDreshaj and Rrahman Rama. From now on, LOSz based its development and expansion on the general flow of the KLA. The hostilities (Battle of Jasharaj on January 22, Battle of Likoshan on February 28, above all the heroic battle of the Jashari family from 5 to March 7, 1998, the fall of the Legendary Commander AdemJashari) were closely followed and strongly broadcast as a recitation of freedom to LOSz fighters (Remi, "Ekskluzive").

Rrustem Mustafa and Rrahman Rama, in early March, had traveled to Drenica, in a work meeting with members of the KLA Headquarters. On this occasion, on March 4, together with AdemJashari, RexhepSelimi, and Muja Krasniqi visited the wounded in the Battle of Likoshan, located in Tica. On the evening of March 4, they went to Açareva (Oqareva) with the family of SylejmanSelamito discuss the organization of the KLA (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 21); (Hamza, 2003, 42).

The fighting of March 5, 1998, had a powerful echo because every Albanian feeling was shaken; it was a call which was heard in every corner of Kosovo, issuing the message that this is how one fights and dies to live with dignity (Remi, "Ekskluzive").

While Commander Rustem Mustafa-Remi was in Drenica, Latif Gashi and his fellow-fighters in LOSz mobilized and, through their actions, informed the Serbian forces that the KLA is widespread and organized in every corner of Kosovo. This step was a time when mobilization and increase of LOSz ranks started. Contacts began with political parties, religion, cultural and educational institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The truth about the KLA fighters began to spread; the theses that the KLA did not exist were "these" or "them." Meeting places were mosques, schools, party headquarters, association headquarters, and non-governmental organizations (Rama, Kiçmari, Pollomi, interview given to the author)

Thus, in LOSz, the preparations for the frontal war began, the compilation of the strategy for action began, within which the priority was: Expansion of ranks and mobilization of citizens for war, collection and provision of resources for war, and evidence of the place for organizing the Training Center.

The new scope strategy changed the previous organization of guerrilla units. All were engaged in expanding ranks, gathering material goods, and preparing for open warfare. Thus, the beginning of March increased the KLA ranks. The KLA included personalities from all political, cultural, economic, and humanitarian scenes of LOSz. During this time, March-April 1998, with their activity around the KLA, in addition to previous members, with all-round commitment, Sabri Sh. Hamiti, Muhamet Latifi, Kadri Avdiu, Ali Potera, Hakif Mehmeti, Naser Bejtullahu, Hamit Hamiti, Sylejman Gashi, Faik Jashari, Beqir Hajrizi, Shefki Sejdiu, Hakif Statofci, and Sajmir Konushefci. were distinguished (Zhitia, 2008, 118).

From the middle of March 1998, to organize and extend the KLA, a meeting was held at Selim Haziri, where Rustem Mustafa, Latif Gashi, Selim Haziri, Sejdi Rama, Avdi Kiçmari, Naser Ramadani, Hakif Mehmeti were present, and Shefki Sejdiu. Among the major decisions, it was decided that the Municipality of Besiana would be divided into five regions, and those responsible for mobilization would be appointed. The following people were appointed in this meeting: Ali Potera, Kadri Avdiu, Hakif Mehmeti, Naser Ramadani, and Shefki Sejdiu. Each of them was accountable for mobilizing and expanding the KLA ranks in specific regions of responsibility. This organization functioned until mid-May 1998, when village representatives or KLA activists were identified (Rama, Pollomi, Kiçmari, interview given to the author).

Apart from the Besiana region, KLA units' organization had achieved great success in Prishtina, Fushë Kosovë, and Kastriot (Obiliq). Fatmir Humolli had completely covered these urban centers with guerrilla units. Guerrilla units had a high organizational and command structure. An extraordinary contribution to the organization from this time onwards played: Agron Rrahmani, Salih Mustafa, Brahim Mehmetaj-Bimi, Isa Kastrati, Isuf Shalaku, Rahman Dini, Flora Brovina, Shyhrete Gosalci, Ramize Abdullahu, Haki Prebreza, Hazir Borofci, Gani Sopi, Sabit Mushica, Fadil Fazliu, Sabit Krasniqi, Agron Rama, Fatmir Sopi, Ejup Makedonci, Bedri Gubetini, Agron Xhemajli, Ismail Brahimi, Lulzim Shabani, Kujtim Qerimi, Shemsi Kllokoqi, Besfort Demiri, Gani Mustafa, and Bahri Gashi. (Zhitia, 2008, 120).

Commander Rustem Mustafa-Remi together with fellow-fighters, during various meetings regarding the organization, especially after the meeting with Rahman Rama, sometime in early May, decided to jointly organize a public appearance, the beginning of training, the recruitment of fighters in the village of Lajthishtë (Zabërgja) Municipality of Mitrovica (Remi, “Ekskluzive”). This decision was based on the unification of human and material potential for the beginning of the organization of the two Operational Subzones. Lajthishta (Zabërgja) was a place where the relief (terrain) conditions were suitable for delivering the training, which created the possibilities of starting the organization from where the two Sub-Zones would be extended, having the back covered. Above all, it created a more effortless organization and scope opportunities in the initial phase for the urban centers

' two zones.

When each segment was functioning, and a high organization was seen, the Lap Operational Subzone and the entire Kosovo Liberation Army experienced triple blows; On May 7, 1997, Bahrifazliu fell in a joint front against Serbia. He was a martyr of the nation, a prominent activist of the secret movement with a liberating character, a man of both the rifle and the pen, who worked diligently to unify all political and military forces (“Çlirimi”; no. 55). Another painful decline for the nation was that of the early morning (around 02:00) of May 9, 1998, when IlirKonushefci, a senior KLA superior while carrying weapons for freedom fighters in Kosovo, was killed at the ambush organized on the way to BajramCurr. This was a significant loss for the fellow fighters in LOSz, for the KLA, and especially for the Albanian nation. Along with the fall of these fighters is the fall in the Muhaxhirëve neighborhood in Prishtina of AgronRrahmani, the commander of the first guerrilla unit of the NMLK “Rexhep Mala”. In this case, FatmirHumolli-Baci was also wounded in the fighting. He withdrew with the help of HyzriTalla and temporarily took refuge in the neighborhood “Kodra e Trimave” in the Brahimi family (“Çlirimi”; no. 55).

After this time, Rustem Mustafa intensified contacts with the KLA Headquarters leaders, where he presented the needs and requirements for the ongoing organization. He was on the move every day and in contact with personalities about the organization. In the framework of this activity and based on previous experiences, personalities and fighters were assigned to tasks. Thus, even before going to Lajthishtë (Zabërgja), the fighters were preparing for concrete tasks.

At this stage of the organization (end of May 1998), it is essential to note the entry into Kosovo of some military personnel, among them Kadri Kastrati - Commander Daja (Mulliçi, 1999, 47); (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 73, 74). Kadri Kastrati, according to the previous proposal of IlirKonushefci, had decided to come to LOSz. For this purpose, his reception was organized, respectively, his contact with Rustem Mustafa in Likoc. In Likoc, Commander Rustem Mustafa-Remi, together with his fellow-fighter VllaznimMacastena – Ximi, had received Kadri Kastratin. For a few days, Kadri Kastrati would settle in Katunishte (Velikareka) within the family of VllaznimMacastena - Ximi (Zejnnullahu, 2000, 74); (Zhitia, 2008, 122-123)

During this time, consultations and arrangements for the public appearance of the KLA in the Zone continued. Thus, after the preparations, food preparation, medical resources, technical material, and the creation of conditions for the training center's organization, on June 6, 1998, the Zone organized the exit to Lajthishtë (Zabërgja). Lajthishta (Zabërgja) lies in the northwestern part of the municipality of Mitrovica. Here began the journey towards the frontal war, the direct war against the military, police, and paramilitary forces of the Serbian government, a war that would later be crowned with victory and the Serbian occupying forces' expulsion of Kosovo.

Through contacts (from May to the end of June 1998), meetings in villages and towns after extensive consultations, KLA officials were appointed in almost all villages in the Zone. Thus, contribution to mobilization, extension, and organization of the KLA has also been given by: ShefqetHumolli, ShaipDushi, BedriAzemi, MilaimFejzullahu, Skender Zhitia-Profa, AgimEmini, Hasan Rudari, VehbiRushiti - Abeja, SejdiLahu, AgimGashi-Hoxha, IdrizHetemi, BedriEjupi, IsëRestelica, BajrushIbishi, Kadri Pajaziti, ImerHasani, UkshinRexhepi, SabitRrahimi, FehmiMiftari, AgimSheholli, RemziDemolli, EnverPlakolli, FahriSadriu, Nazmi Ismaili, Ismet Beqiri, AdemBeqiri, ZahirFetahu, HalilDibrani-Lila, Pajazit -Pajaziti, IsufLatifi, MustafëAhmeti, IlazSylejmani, Ismet Islami, Ali Halili, Murat Fetahu, EnverHalimi, Avdullah Rama, and SadikGjinolli. These personalities in the regions, villages, or cities where they came from began to expand the KLA ranks, creating units and cores of LOSz operational and tactical units (Zhitia, 2008, 130)

Subsequently, in the framework of the KLA war strategy, in the area of LOSz's responsibility was planned the establishment of three (3) brigades, the establishment, and extension of which was done in accordance with the strategy and the possibilities of resources (armament) for the opening of combat operations. In the strategic plan, the ground coverage area was foreseen: The western part of the Responsibility Zone (from Barilaj - Barileva, Llumnica neighborhood to the north) which was covered by the 151st Brigade "Zahir Pajaziti." The part of the Lap Valley and the eastern part, the villages that extend to Prishtina's municipality's border, was covered by the 152nd Brigade "Shaban Shala," and the eastern part. At all the villages of the municipality of Prishtina (up to the border with the Karadak Operational Zone), was to cover the 153rd Brigade "Hyzyri Talla" and the urban areas Prishtina, Kastriot (Obiliq), the town of FushëKosovë and where the war front does not open, to cover the Guerrilla "BIA" (Zhitia, 34).

This plan for the deployment of ongoing brigades, depending on the circumstances and developments, has partially changed, but the terrain coverage was in line with the planning and deployment of combat operations.

During the one-year war, the Lap Operational Subzone conducted several battles, fights, and operations characterized by their echo and weight in the national opinion and the international one. The battle in the Kaçanoll Gorge from 15 to September 18, 1998 is one of the most important ones for the KLA. This battle is where the morale and dignity of the KLA returned. External and internal factors were convinced that the KLA was not destroyed as claimed after the battle of

Rahovec and Bardhi (Great Bellac), but was organized and spread throughout the territory of Kosovo.

Another glorious battle was the Battle of Llapashtica (December 24-27, 1998), in which the belief that Serbian forces were invincible was shattered. Serbia admitted for the first time that military force had been used. This battle and other KLA battles were crucial in pushing the international community to raise Kosovo's issue as a primary issue that required urgent resolution. Among other battles we highlight: The Battle of Lkenas (Perani, on January 9, 1999, The Battle of Majac on January 27, 1999, The Battle of March 24, 1999 (this battle started on March 20 and extended to the entire western part of the area, from Koderza (Godishnjaku), Penuha, Urasi (Konusheci), Vendenisi (Gllamniku), Llapashtica i Poshtme and that e Epërme, Kastrati (Obrança), Lkenasi (Perani), Bajçina, Bardhashi (Bradashi), Livadhia (Dumnica), Llausha, Buzllapi (Dobërdoli), then Tasheci, Rrepa (Repa), Pollata), Battle of Prapashtica, April 7 1999, Battle of Surdulli 15-16 April 1999, Battle of 18-25 April (the battle extended almost to the entire eastern part of the Zone, in Dafinet (Vranidoll), Dardhishte (Bellopojë) in Halabak, Sharban, Dyz, Kolaj (Koliq), Rimanishte, Kala (Sicevo), Merion (Marec), Mramur (Mramor), The battle for the protection of the population and the wounded from April 25 to May 2 1999, conducted in Potok at Gurii Bardhë, and the operation to withdraw the wounded from April 28 until May 1, 1999 (See the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRcMmPtMIZA>)

During the one-year war in LOSz, 154 fighters fell heroically, martyrs of the nation, while 181 were wounded. Moreover, about 700 civilians were executed in various forms, while about 200 were treated as missing, most of them identified in recent years (Lists).

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