

Kosovo Security Force looks to become an army

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KSF Minister Agim Ceku expects 2013 to be the year that the country gets an army.

By Safet Kabashaj for Southeast European Times in Pristina -- 10/01/13

Kosovo authorities plan to transform the lightly-armed Kosovo Security Force into an army this year. The force, which was established in January 2009 according to the Ahtisaari Plan, is comprised of 2,500 active and 800 reserve multi-ethnic members. It is primarily responsible for crisis response.

In the last four years, the force operated under KFOR supervision to become a professional structure. KFOR mentored and supervised its development, reporting its achievements to NATO, which will make the final decision on the future of the force.

Alexander Willing, KFOR spokesman, told *SETimes* that the security force has made great progress, but its full operational capability will be determined by NATO.

"NATO nations are considering the right time for the KSF final endorsement," Willing said. "The North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest decision-making body, will make a political decision based on the assessment of NATO's military authorities."

The council is expected to decide on the force's status at its June meeting.

Kosovo officials are optimistic.

Remzie Zeqiraj, KSF ministry spokeswoman, told *SETimes* that KFOR's recommendation to NATO is clear – the force has reached full operational capabilities.

"Now, we are expecting a confirmation on KFOR recommendation for KSF," Zeqiraj said.

KSF Minister Agim Ceku told parliament last month that "2013 is going to be the year of the Kosovo Army."

Rada Trajkovic, a Serb MP in the Kosovo assembly, expressed concern that the transformation of KSF would be a source of instability.

"An army with a [Kosovo] Albanian command is a destabilising factor for the Serbs in Kosovo, as would be a [Kosovo] Albanian army with minor participation of other ethnicities," Trajkovic said.

Marko Savic, a researcher at the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, thinks that a KSF transformation to a full-size armed force will take time.



NATO will make the decision on the transformation of the KSF. [Laura Hasani/SETimes]

"The process may well be launched, but surely not completed in 2013," Savic told *SETimes*.

He said that despite the opposition to the plan from Kosovo Serbs, it is expected to be approved.

"Serbia will continue to work with NATO; it simply has to, giving paramount importance to regional security," Savic said.

Flirian Qehaja, executive director of Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, said that new developments in Kosovo, especially after a continuing decrease in KFOR presence, demand the authorities to review the KSF mandate.

"Kosovo needs a small army, slightly bigger than the KSF ... capable of civil protection duties, participation in peacekeeping missions and ensuring Kosovo integrity," Qehaja told *SETimes*.