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# Albania Revolt Devolves Into Tantrum

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*Washington Post Service*

GJIROKASTER, Albania — Far from the capital, towns in southern Albania still rattle with gunfire after midnight and are paralyzed in their efforts to quell upheaval and criminal chaos.

In this town about 270 kilometers (170 miles) south of the capital, Tirana, and in nearby Tepelena, residents are living amid rumors and fear. Neither citizens' groups nor local governments appear to be able to restore order.

Some of those who claim to lead the armed townspeople here say they aim to

topple President Sali Berisha. But it became clear during interviews this week that they have no plans to leave their towns to take their case to the capital.

Indeed, what began as a grass-roots civilian revolt, sparked by anger over failed investment schemes that were ignored by Mr. Berisha's government, has settled into a vague, lawless tantrum with no clear agenda.

Rampages through military weapons warehouses three weeks ago have spawned no clear momentum for a revolution or coup. What perhaps can best be described as a resistance movement has but one clear goal — Mr. Berisha's

resignation — but no obvious means or organization to make that happen.

Telephones work erratically in some places in this impoverished country and fax machines are nonexistent in many others. Communication, therefore, appears to be slim among towns in the south, where the revolt flared on March 2. Some protest leaders here spout bellicose warnings that they will arrest Mr. Berisha, even hang him, but at day's end their words stand as empty threats.

"About 50 people are leaving this town to put him under arrest — to force him to resign," said Gjolek Malaj, a rebel leader from the mining town of Memalija. Short of specifics when pressed, Mr. Malaj offered up another plan if Mr. Berisha refused to heed his threat: "If President Berisha will not resign, we are prepared to bombard him."

Mr. Malaj was one of a handful of protest leaders who met in Gjirokaster on Thursday with political leaders from Tirana representing Albania's opposition parties. Three hours into their discussion, in an old military officers' club guarded by about a dozen men holding assault rifles as sheep grazed in the front yard, the politicians and the protesters had reached no decision about their next move.

A threat to march on Tirana if Mr. Berisha did not resign by Thursday was nothing more than a threat, the participants agreed.

The leader of the Social Democratic Party, Paskal Milo, said from Tirana that many people in the protest movement would like to confront the government somehow, but that "we are trying to convince them that the best solution is dialogue and to go step by step."

But it is unclear what must be done to regain control of the south and who is in charge of any single town. Agim

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Gozhita, a retired general who has taken charge of the uprising in Gjirokaster, said that the municipal government was operating under orders from his new military command.

Mr. Gozhita allowed that "there are problems with criminals and thieves, but we are putting things in order." He said the police department would be reorganized under his direction and, he hoped, that would soon bring calm.

But he emphasized that Gjirokaster, like other towns, was "absolutely sup-

portive" of Prime Minister Bashkim Fino and the rest of the new, broad-based government that Mr. Berisha grudgingly appointed in Tirana — as long as it proves independent of Mr. Berisha.

Mr. Fino "will normalize the situation," Mr. Gozhita said. "But if Berisha doesn't resign, there will be problems. People have weapons and they will give back their weapons only when Berisha is out."

### ■ **Rebels Demand a Voice**

Rebel leaders in the south again called on President Berisha to resign,

but drew back from an earlier threat to set up a rival government, Reuters reported Friday from Tirana.

Representatives of 14 rebel-held southern towns who have formed a National Committee of Public Salvation said they were ready to cooperate with the new national unity government under Prime Minister Fino.

But they called for a voice in the political discussions and demanded that the government "neutralize" institutions helping Mr. Berisha remain in power, such as the state-run media and the secret police.