

## Stay or Flee? / An Albanian Dilemma

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**Hope Battles With Fear**By Jane Perlez  
New York Times Service

**T**IRANA, Albania — When the bullets were flying around the dusty alley at the front of her apartment, Elsa Ballauri, a poet and mother of two children, was torn. Should she go? Should she stay?

"I'm doing well. I have a job. I have friends I love," Mrs. Ballauri, 36, said in her book-lined living room where Albanian and French language editions of her works are on the shelves. "But again I was thinking perhaps we should leave."

Now that the shooting has subsided, Mrs. Ballauri has persuaded her husband, Viktor, 40, an engineer, that it is best to remain, even though she knows it is an uneasy calm. On Monday they turned down an offer to be evacuated by helicopter with a group of Russians.

Thousands of educated Albanians, many of whom were persecuted under the Communist dictatorship of Enver Hoxha, have already gone into exile. Others, despairing of the broken promise and misrule of the six years since the collapse of communism, wonder if their poor country on the periphery of Europe will ever recover from the shock of the last two weeks of violence.

But some, better off than most and with dreams of a democratic future, are eager to show that not all Albanians are potential refugees.

For Gazi Haxhia, 28, who attended Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and is now the first General Motors dealer in Albania, staying is a matter of patriotism.

"We are Albanian and if I leave this country it means I'm leaving when this country needs me," he said. Even so, Mr. Haxhia is buying a house in Turkey as a hedge.

A veneer of normalcy has returned to the capital with government offices open and traffic back on the streets. But there was no sign of any surrendering of the weapons that were handed out last Thursday by loyalists to President Sali

Berisha. At the main agricultural university at Kamez, on the outskirts of Tirana, a group of armed men looted the campus and set fire to the library of 150,000 books.

In southern Albania, rebel leaders in Gjirokaster set a deadline of Thursday for the resignation of Mr. Berisha. Their demand followed a call by Fatos Nano, leader of the main opposition Socialist Party, for Mr. Berisha to stop meddling in the affairs of the new coalition government headed by Bashkim Fino, a Socialist.

Mr. Nano fled from jail during the mayhem last week. He had served four years of a 12-year sentence on charges of misappropriating state funds, but was considered a political prisoner by human rights groups.

For Mrs. Ballauri, the appeal for national healing from Mr. Nano and the new government was a tentative start to reconstruction.

"We are at ground zero," she said. "People are not only worse off economically. They are also angry. And to have people armed in this situation is a real tragedy."

**W**ITH much of the country out of government control and after three days of terror in Tirana during a total breakdown in law and order, Mrs. Ballauri said she seriously thought of leaving.

"For my daughter the shooting outside the apartment was traumatic," she said. "She hears rumors, she is afraid."

Everyday life, bringing up Anya, 8, and Jay, 18 months, is difficult and likely to get worse, she said. Even though she can see her daughter's school from their apartment window, she or her husband had been walking her there because of the prevalence of kidnappers. The school has been closed for two weeks and it is unclear when it will reopen.

But despite the stress, Mrs. Ballauri said she was stirred by her long family history in Albania and a sense that she cannot abandon it.

Her grandfather, Agneli Ballauri, was im-



The New York Times

*Elsa and Viktor Ballauri with Anya, 8, and Jay. "The poverty in this country is extreme, not only of material things but of the spirit. But I belong here; only a terrible war will make me leave."*

prisoned for eight years after the Communists came to power because of his bourgeois background. She was tormented by schoolmates because it was rumored, she said, that her family once maintained 12 housekeepers.

"My sister and I were always dreaming how could we leave this country," she said, recalling the bleak Hoxha era when foreign literature was scarce and foreign travel banned.

Their desire to leave was heightened by a copy of "We, the Living," the partly autobiographical first novel of Ayn Rand, published in 1936, which she found in her father's library. The novel describes the deterioration of spirit and mind under Soviet communism and features a

young Russian girl who eventually manages to go to the United States.

"After reading that, we were determined to leave," Mrs. Ballauri said. "But then when the changes came in 1991 and there were all these crowds outside foreign embassies with people wanting visas, we couldn't enter."

Instead, Mrs. Ballauri began to work as a journalist and established the Albanian Human Rights Group.

"The poverty in this country is extreme, not only of material things but of the spirit," she said. "Historically we've not had anyone who is engaged in politics who has any idealism. But I belong here; only a terrible war will make me leave."