

Europe ready to send token force to Albania

BY CHARLES BREMNER IN APELDOORN AND MICHAEL EVANS

THE European Union held back yesterday from any large-scale intervention in Albania, agreeing only to offer a team of civil and military advisers.

An advance team of officials will leave for Tirana today to prepare for the advisory mission, whose aim will be to help with building up Albania's police and military infrastructure.

Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, meeting his European counterparts at Apeldoorn in The Netherlands, said the number of advisers would be "dozens", not hundreds.

The 15 ministers were divided, with some favouring military intervention to restore order and others who backed a more modest approach.

Despite pressure from Italy and France to send a military peacekeeping force of up to 3,000 troops to secure Tirana airport, government buildings

and foreign embassies, Britain, Germany and Sweden insisted on only a limited EU mission.

Klaus Kinkel, the German Foreign Minister, warned that Europe could not get involved "in another adventure". Yugoslavia had been a lesson for the EU, he said.

The ministers had met after a request by the Albanian Government for troops to restore order, and a suggestion by Franz Vranitzky, the former Austrian Chancellor who headed a team sent to Albania by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, that troops and police be sent in to quell the violence.

In London, Michael Portillo, the Defence Secretary, said there were no plans to send troops. Speaking on GMTV's *Sunday Programme*, he said: "I am not in a hurry to offer up new targets for these irresponsible people."

The Foreign Office reported that 40 Britons still remained in Albania, about 15 of whom were unaccounted for. But some of them may have left without reporting to the British Embassy, the Foreign Office said.

As the foreign ministers met in Apeldoorn, American Marines stormed out of CH53 Super Stallion helicopters onto Golem Beach six miles south of the Albanian port of Durres to rescue American, Turkish and Italian citizens from the continuing anarchy.

Two Sea Stallions lifted foreign nationals out to safety on ships standing by in the Adriatic. The Marines, who carried automatic rifles, anti-tank weapons and night-vision goggles, used rifle butts to beat off Albanians trying to board the aircraft to escape anarchy.

Child vandals, page 12
Leading article, page 21

THE TIMES
18.3.98
p.12.

Anarchy feeds arms trade in Balkans

By JAMES PETTIFER

REPORTS yesterday of Kosovo Albanians buying weapons in Durres and Vlore are bound to send chills down regional spines and Albania's neighbours are preparing for the worst. The \$300 package in Durres is for about a dozen AK47s and a vanload of ammunition.

Controlling small arms transfers in the Balkans is a near-impossibility. Closing borders may help, but not much. In the north, the Dinaric Alps on the Montenegrin border are a good barrier and crossings are heavily policed by tough squads of Milosevic-trained heavies. But the Buna River, once the frontier of the Ottoman world, let through gallons of diesel despite United Nations sanctions.

To the northeast, 90 per cent Albanian-inhabited Kosovo in southeast Serbia is problematic. It seems inevitable that the Kosovo Liberation Army can move supplies on remote paths in the Black Drin valley to their growing guerrilla movement.

It is in Macedonia, in the east, that the risk of a wider conflict may be greatest. The 25 per cent Albanian minority live along the border and are dissatisfied with their status.

To the south, Greece's problems concern people, not guns — thousands more will swell the normal refugee flow.

The bringers of humanitarian aid face a dilemma. Crossing any Albanian border is not a step a neighbour will take in a hurry. Their overwhelming impulse is to seal off the country.

Exile for the fortunate and desp

Child vandals join the destruction at King Zog's palace

FROM TOM WALKER IN DURRES

ITTFE was left in the palace of the former King Zog yesterday as the orgy of looting that has despoiled the Albanian port of Durres ground to a close.

Left to their own devices, a gang of children systematically smashed the fittings and masonry of one of Albania's finest buildings, shrieking with delight as they sent tons of marble crashing down its elaborate central stairwell.

The Italianate palace, built in the 1930s on an old Roman site, commands a fine view. Neither the king nor his usurper Enver Hoxha would have been amused.

While the *Lord of the Elies* mayhem continued inside, a crowd of 4,000 would-be boat people thronged the harbour front, pushing a rusting iron launch towards the water. Further south along the beach, 150 Turks queued for dinghies taking them to a waiting frigate. American marines hovered over the churning surf in Cobra helicopters.

Zog, Hoxha, Sali Berisha, the beleaguered President,

each is responsible for today's anarchy. A tribal society isolated from the world for half a century and then suddenly catapulted towards capitalism: something had to give, and the scenes in Durres yesterday were the consequence.

Police and vigilantes in garish fleece balaclavas had returned a sort of order, and the frenzied shooting and anarchy that prevailed last week was over. But in its place has come a tide of despair: while children and government-hired thugs rule the roost, ordinary people and the few foreigners prepared to invest in Albania want to get out — quickly.

"I'm not happy thinking about jumping into a boat or swimming for it, but this is what the Government has done to me," said a six-month-pregnant Eteva Lalaj as she joined the waterfront crowd. "The country's heading for civil war," said her husband Steven. Occasionally, automatic fire provoked a massed rush for cover.

"Berisha should be hanged. I'll do it with my own hands," said Kulltim Alush, a 22-year-old clothing retailer. Many said they had tried to jump on boats in the past, most notably in the 1991 exodus, when 40,000 made the perilous trip to Italy. Many had already been abroad illegally, only to be deported.

Among the prosperous beachfront villas in the government compound, those who had invested in Albania's flawed experiment in market democracy were trying to pick up the pieces. Simona Braci, the district manager of Incat, a British construction and trading firm, pointed out bullet holes in the ceiling, the result of her husband Luli's attempts to keep out looters last week.

Later the raiders stuck guns in his stomach and stole the company lorry. But in comparison to many in the compound they were lucky. Most savagely wrecked was President Berisha's own seafront residence: all that remained in the grass outside were a pair of pink slippers, a German magazine and a broken lavatory seat.

The compound gate is now guarded by a Kalashnikov-carrying youth in a purple ski mask with tassles. Albania's tradition of blood feuds is still very much alive and terrorist disguises are now *de rigueur* among the new forces of authority. "If they have to shoot anyone, they may have trouble in the future with the victim's families. It's best not to be seen," explained Mrs Braci. "We are quite an ancient society."

As evening drew in, two women emerged from King Zog's palace with the last remaining furniture — half a door, ten feet of ornately fluted hardwood.

"It'll burn nicely," said Hamida, a nearby resident. "These people were all scum."

Italy defends delay

FROM RICHARD OWEN IN BRINDISI

ITALY defended yesterday its evacuation on Friday of British refugees from the Albanian port of Durres, denying that Italian special forces had deliberately left the Britons to endure a night of terror at the mercy of armed Albanians before coming back to rescue them nearly seven hours later.

Officials said the rescue had been temporarily suspended because of shooting and fog, and had resumed at daylight. "An evacuation is not a picnic," an Italian Foreign Ministry official said. "We carried out the operation to the very best of our ability in extremely difficult circumstances".

The British Embassy in Rome praised the Italian rescue effort. "We asked them

to get the British out safe and well, and that is what they did," said Keith Broomfield, the British Minister in Rome.

Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, said it had clearly been a difficult operation, with "large numbers of people milling around on the beach, including many Albanians, some of whom were violent, some of whom were themselves trying to flee". There were only 20 Italian troops at the quay.

Sixty-four British evacuees emerged angry and exhausted from the *San Giusto*. They said they had driven in convoy from the British Embassy in Tirana to Durres, where their cars, including the British Ambassador's Discovery, had been stolen.

Leading article,
Letters, page 21
Photograph, page 24

air for those left behind follow Albania's descent into chaos

YANNIS BEHRAKIS / REUTERS



Albanians watch a US Marine helicopter take off yesterday near the port of Durres as America continued to evacuate foreign citizens

War gives Coke taste of the real thing

THE Coca-Cola war at the edge of Tirana is being fought with assault rifles and hand grenades rather than advertising campaigns.

While American expatriates have all but fled the anarchic Albanian capital, airlifted out in a fleet of Marine helicopters, the factory's smooth Italian director is holding out in Albania's only Coke factory with 20 armed deputies, repelling marauding gangs in a series of gunfights along the perimeter fence.

"Why should I leave?" Francesco De Candia, the director, asks coolly inside his office. "It's not war at the moment, just a problem with people who don't know the meaning of democracy or law."

His efforts to protect the



Anthony Loyd reports from Tirana on the determination of an Italian executive and his helpers to defend their factory

factory rely so far on the loyalty of the Albanian family which owns the site. The heavily-armed Loreka cousins have organised themselves into a series of patrols and defensive positions, determined to protect the three-year-old factory — which produces 80 million bottles of Coke a year — and its 40 vehicles from looters.

So far they have had four firefights in 48 hours, holding their ground against the equally well-armed gangs outside. Every few hours a police armoured personnel carrier cruises in to support them. "We trust the police," Signor De Candia says. "They are brave boys and they will protect Coca-Cola as it is a symbol in Albania — a symbol of freedom."

Yesterday President Berisha vowed to retain his position in the face of insurgent demands to resign. Speaking to the Dutch Ambassador in Tirana, Mr Berisha said he would remain President of Albania at

least until the results of planned elections in June, according to Hans van Mierlo, the Dutch Foreign Minister.

"The President has not yet resigned but he told the Dutch Ambassador in Tirana that he would stand down if his party loses the upcoming elections," Mr van Mierlo said.

Tirana's shattered authorities are now further divided between those whose sympathies lie with Mr Berisha, those loyal to the fledgling four-day-old Government of National Reconciliation and others supporting the insurrectionists.

As the capital grapples with lawlessness and rebellion vigilante groups are trying to retake control from the mobs. The defence force at Tirana airport, for example, includes baggage handlers and waiters who have fortified their positions using luggage trolleys and check-in desks.

It is ironic that the insurrection, which began to over-

throw Albania's perceived dictatorship has given rise to even worse repression. Responding to a call from the new Minister of Justice on Saturday, hundreds of volunteers have joined isolated police units for a bounty of \$200 dollars (£125) a month plus police pay of a further \$100. They do not have to produce any references but are given a gun and ammunition, and impose their own law at will.

"We are going through a new dictatorship," said a youth in Lezhe, a small town north of Tirana. "The police can beat you up for offences

that once you would be fined for. We are fed up with these fascists."

The arrival of the new auxiliaries has stabilised the situation in the centre of Tirana more through a climate of fear than anything else, but elsewhere Albania's roads resemble scenes from a spaghetti western. Children stop travellers to sell them ammunition while rival police forces vie for control.

One northern Tirana suburb is held by a group nicknamed "the Cheekens". Originally from mountainous country in northern Albania, birthplace of Mr Berisha, the heavily armed men are hardcore Berisha loyalists, and vow to fight any attempt to remove him with force.

"If he resigns it's war," one of the group's commanders said. "We don't care about the Government, but we'll fight to protect our President."

On a roadway between Tirana and Borziane government police and their newly hired gunmen fought with each other after the "volunteers" began beating up the driver and passenger of a car for no apparent reason. "Until yesterday they were killers," said a young uniformed policeman in disgust. "Now they are killers with a licence."



Berisha, yesterday: says he will stay on for polls



ALBANIAN ANARCHY ^{p21}

The EU should deploy an elite brigade of accountants

Apparently haunted by their collective failure in Bosnia, European Union foreign ministers meeting informally in The Netherlands yesterday issued their response. The communiqué emphasised their strong commitment to assisting Albania in its efforts to restore civilian structures and the rule of law. With that, the 15 politicians decided to dispatch military and political advisers, but not troops, to Tirana.

In truth, there was little more they either could or should do. Those fine words will have little impact in Albania, not least because there is no organised authority available to be so affected. Europe's poorest nation has slipped into a condition of simple anarchy, more akin to the "failed states" of Africa — Liberia and Somalia — than to any this continent has recently experienced. To detect subtle political manoeuvres behind the current conditions of total lawlessness is to be too rational. Albania is a country in a state of implosion. This might well be exploited by partisan forces, including the former Stalinists, but it has not been created by them nor is it under their control.

For that reason, a comparison with the former Yugoslavia is inaccurate and unhelpful. In that case organised factions emerged along ethnic lines and in a highly orchestrated fashion deliberately committed the worst atrocities seen in Europe since 1945. That this happened, with little restraint, and could ultimately be dealt with only by American intervention, even then of an inconsistent sort, was a shameful indictment of Western Europe. Albania is different. The whole country is embarked upon an apparently unstoppable uprising; a revolt without leaders, philosophy, or strategy in the conventional sense. Its sole coherent objective is the removal of Sali Berisha from the presidential palace. Beyond that, even the participants are clueless.

President Berisha's new offer to resign if his party is defeated in fresh elections would, in ordinary circumstances, be seen as magnanimous and a reasonable formula for the restoration of order. Unfortunately, events have travelled beyond the point at which reason can be applied. The EU are unlikely to meet Mr Berisha: the anarchy and obvious indifference of the armed forces do not bode well for his survival. Those who wish to limit the damage that Albania inflicts upon itself, which is a proper objective for Europe's statesmen, had better turn to how best to restore confidence once events have run their course.

In that context the original cause of this crisis, fraudulent pyramid schemes and their aftermath, must be revisited. To outsiders it might seem odd that the Albanian Government should suffer for commercial malpractice. Matters are rather more complex. The Democratic Party headed by Mr Berisha was lavishly funded by the directors of these dubious enterprises. It also benefited from the artificial "feel-good" factor they encouraged. By these means it won a rigged parliamentary contest last year. This may well have influenced its decision not to apply appropriate regulations to the pyramid companies. Street violence may be destructive, but it is based on more than unfocussed anger.

The EU should indeed act in Albania but through an elite brigade of accountants and economists. The essential issue now is how to get that country through to parliamentary elections in one piece and then perform the necessary fiscal surgery that will enable whoever is elected to ensure stability. This may necessitate considerable humanitarian aid in the very short term and financial contributions in the short-medium term. It is the only route by which anarchy will be abated and the rule of law restored.