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EU Refuses to Send Troops to Albania

Resisting France, Italy and Greece, It Approves Small Unit of Advisers

By Tom Buerkle
International Herald Tribune

APELDOORN, the Netherlands — Resisting calls from France, Italy and Greece for military intervention to help restore order in Albania, the European Union agreed Sunday to send a small group of civilian and military advisers there.

The Union did not exclude a wider intervention, but its foreign ministers declined to commit themselves to anything beyond an advisory role until they receive a report from a European diplomatic team that was due to arrive in Tirana on Monday for talks with the government and opposition groups.

Amid signs that some calm was returning in Albania, meanwhile, President Sali Berisha raised hopes of a political solution to the crisis.

Mr. Berisha informed the Dutch government, which as EU president is steering Europe's response, that he would resign if his party loses the parliamentary elections that all parties are seeking to organize for June.

Several European governments have called on Mr. Berisha to resign, and Malcolm Rifkind, the British foreign minister, called the offer "a helpful indication of flexibility."

The compromise decision to send only advisers, made by EU foreign ministers at a weekend meeting in the central Dutch town of Apeldoorn, was dictated by the reluctance of Britain and Germany to be drawn into what they regard as the Albanian quagmire.

The open display of European divisions on the region's most urgent security issue evoked memories of Europe's failure to respond to the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister who is overseeing civilian reconstruction efforts in Bosnia, said Europe's ambitions to become a political and security power "risk looking

pathetic" if the Union cannot agree on intervention in Albania.

Foreign Minister Herve de Charette of France said the European Union, as a rich bloc of some 370 million people, needed to take responsibility for stopping the chaos in a dirt-poor nation of 3 million on its doorstep. He argued for a stabilization force of 1,000 to 3,000 people to help the Albanian Army and the police restore order and secure airports, highways, embassies and government buildings.

Italy and Greece, which as immediate

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neighbors are receiving most of the refugees fleeing from Albania, also appealed for significant European intervention, even if troops were supplied only by a coalition of willing EU countries.

But several EU countries warned against the risk of being drawn into a conflict with no clear battle lines and of appearing to give military support to Mr. Berisha.

In a vivid reply to Dutch arguments for armed intervention, EU officials said, Klaus Kinkel, the German foreign minister, told Hans van Mierlo, the Dutch foreign minister, "You know best what happens when you send soldiers without a clear mandate."

He referred to the Dutch peacekeeping team that was driven out of the Bosnian town of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb troops in July 1995 — an ouster that was followed by the disappearance and presumed murder of several thousand Muslims.

Mr. Rifkind underscored Britain's opposition to any military role for the EU, which London fears might undermine transatlantic defense ties in NATO. "The EU as such has no defense role, no military role," he said.

Under the agreement, the EU advisers — who Mr. Ri-

kind said would number "in the dozens, not the hundreds" — should arrive in Albania this week, Mr. van Mierlo said. The EU's Executive Commission will increase its monitoring team in Tirana to 16 persons from 4.

The ministers also offered to provide "substantial economic and financial assistance" once stability is restored. The EU is by far Albania's biggest donor.

"The first thing we need to do is to provide assistance to the Albanians to restore their structures so they can restore order and build peace," said Mr. van Mierlo, the current EU president. He called the plan a "very prudent, very sensible course of action."

Mr. Kinkel said Germany's insistence on a political solution, and on helping Albanians to help themselves, was in line with the position of the United States. "We want to aid the Albanians, but they have to make it possible," he said.

Mr. de Charette acknowledged the limits of action, insisting that France was not proposing to impose order by outside force. "We're not in a civil war," he explained, "it's total anarchy."

But he did not try to conceal his frustration at the failure to win support for more-robust intervention. "It's the European Union habit," he said with a sigh.

U.S. Copters Kept Busy In Albania

Marines Land at Port To Lift Out Foreigners

Reuters

GOLEM BEACH, Albania — U.S. Marines stormed out of helicopters onto Golem Beach, south of Durres, on Sunday to rescue American, Turkish and Italian citizens from the chaos of Albania.

The Marines' helicopters kicked up blizzards of stinging sand as they landed and they used rifle butts to repel Albanians trying to board the aircraft and escape.

"I tried to get on the helicopter but a soldier hit me in the face with his gun," said 50-year-old Ymer Motroku, his face streaked with blood from a cut above his nose. At least one Marine was also cut in the face in the melee.

Two helicopters lifted an unknown number of foreign nationals to safety on ships standing by in the Adriatic in the early afternoon.

At least five other helicopters circled the beach during the evacuation.

Shortly after the helicopters lifted off the beach, which lies about 10 kilometers (6 miles) south of Albania's largest port, a small skiff carrying about 20 refugees capsized near shore.

Several people came close to drowning and had to be saved by men who swam out through the breakers.

A second pair of helicopters then returned to the beach, and a U.S. Marine said they had come for any people bearing Turkish, Italian or U.S. passports.

None of the hundreds of people still gathered had such documents, and the Marines waited for about an hour.

The combat-ready company of carried automatic rifles, anti-tank weapons, night-vision goggles and so much ammunition that many staggered through the sand to their positions.

Some of the Marines were deployed alongside mushroom-shaped concrete bunkers that were built in the tens of thousands by Albania's former Communist dictator, Enver Hoxha, to protect his country, the poorest in Europe, from invasion.

The problem Sunday was not that foreigners wanted to get in but that virtually everyone, Albanians included, wanted to get out.

■ Tirana's Streets Quiet

Jane Perlez of *The New York Times* reported earlier from Tirana:

The streets of the Albanian capital were quiet Sunday as the wild gunfire that erupted three days earlier subsided and militiamen armed by the authorities patrolled the city.

A defiant President Sali Berisha issued a statement saying that he would not resign before parliamentary elections to be held before June and would step down only if his party lost in the voting.

The rest of the country remained out of government control, with wide sections of infrastructure destroyed by looters and armed gangs.

More than 800 refugees who took off from the lawless southern town of Vlore on the Adriatic were rescued Sunday from a rusty navy boat that ran aground near the end of their voyage to the Italian port of Brindisi.

The exhausted refugees, plucked from heavy seas, included a woman who was about to give birth, a 10-day-old baby and dozens of young children.

Italian port officials said the refugees had commandeered a boat that was so crowded that men were perched atop the communications mast. "They were piled one on top of each other," said the Brindisi port commander, Giovanni Biso.

Three fishing boats packed with 317 refugees berthed at the Italian port of Bari on Saturday night, adding to the fear among Italian officials that a huge exodus of Albanians, reminiscent of the tens of thousands who turned up in 1991 after the fall of communism, might be underway.

In Durres, uniformed policemen who had been cajoled back to work with a promise of dramatic pay increases, shot over the heads of more than 1,000 bedraggled-looking people who were attempting to surge onto a dock and command a boat that could take them to Italy.

Some of those repulsed from the dock by gunfire said they had spent four days waiting for a boat that never came.

Those trying to escape said that they feared continue anarchy in Albania.