

A SPECIAL REPORT
Pages 11-13
FASHION Part 1

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AGENDA

TODAY:
MONEY
Health Page
SPECIAL AIR SERVICE
D.R.S. 380
35.470
HELLENIC DISTRIBUTION AGENCY



Reuters/Blaha/The Associated Press

Guarded by Marines, U.S. citizens filed into a helicopter Friday near Tirana to be evacuated from Albania.

Albania's Chaos Deepens

U.S. Evacuation Is Suspended As Gunmen Fire at Helicopters

By Jane Perlez
New York Times Service

TIRANA, Albania — The collapse of authority in Albania deepened Friday as close confidantes of President Sali Berisha fled the country.

Looting and gunfire continued as efforts by the government to urge armed bands to give up their weapons failed.

The U.S. military effort to evacuate Americans was suspended after gunmen fired at two helicopter gunships sent to pick up families waiting, with bags packed, in a large field at the diplomatic compound in the capital.

Only 408 people had been lifted out by the time of the suspension, according to the Pentagon, leaving nervous Americans having to spend another night in a city racked by gunfire and widespread looting. There are an estimated 2,000 Americans in Albania.

Italy also mounted an evacuation by helicopter at a sports field in the center

of town and through landing craft at the chaotic port of Durres, where gunmen fired into the air. One Italian helicopter was hit by gunfire but not badly damaged.

Mobs of desperate Albanians wanting to flee pushed themselves onto the landing craft and had to be pushed off by Italian soldiers, Western diplomats said.

German troops exchanged fire with Albanian gunmen during a perilous rescue of Western residents from an airfield near Tirana on Friday, Reuters reported.

[The gunmen started shooting at evacuees and German military helicopters, and the German soldiers fired back, a diplomat said. An Albanian was lightly wounded but no foreigners were hurt.]

In the capital, the government tried to set up checkpoints manned by secret

See ALBANIA, Page 5



NYT

Europeans Reject Calls To Intervene

NATO Officials Report No Interest in Albania

By William Drozdiak

Washington Post Service

BERLIN — European governments spurned on Friday calls by President Sali Berisha for outside help to restore order in Albania despite growing fears that a refugee exodus could soon ignite a wider conflict in the volatile region.

Even as the United States and various European powers sent helicopters to Albania to rescue their citizens, officials at NATO headquarters in Brussels said there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm among member states to consider any further military intervention to end the chaos in Europe's poorest country.

Reflecting Europe's reluctance to take forcible action on the latest security crisis in its own backyard, Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany insisted that Albania's political problem was largely internal, and that sending outside forces would not help solve the conflict.

"To put it quite bluntly, if you say we should send troops, then you would have to tell the soldiers what they would do there," Mr. Kohl said after consultations in The Hague with Dutch government leaders.

"And if I put this question to you, which I can't answer, then you can see my response."

But with Europe's failure to act decisively in Bosnia stirring painful memories, others warned that a dithering, do-nothing approach could soon lead to wider instability if a surge of refugees caused unrest to spill beyond Albania's borders.

Some 20,000 Albanian refugees

See EUROPE, Page 5

ALBANIA: High Figures Fleeing Chaos

Continued from Page 1

policemen, who demanded that motorists give up weapons.

But there appeared to be only a few checkpoints and there was no sign of any confiscated weapons.

In midafternoon, an armored personnel carrier paraded up and down Tirana's main street. On board, eight gunmen in tattered clothes brandished automatic weapons.

It was impossible to tell whether the men supported or opposed the president.

The anarchy reached the previously calm eastern part of the country near the Macedonian border, where a \$10 million cigarette plant, one of the biggest new investments in Albania, was destroyed by fire after looters carried off everything they could.

"They took doors, toilets, everything," said Vehi Velija, the owner of the plant and one of the most prominent businessmen in Albania.

Mr. Velija, who had been critical of the president, said he was worried that his recently built four-story center in the heart of Tirana would not last long.

In Shkoder, the biggest city in the north of Albania and one regarded as a center of culture and education, all government institutions were set afire.

The headquarters of the secret police were destroyed, as was the local bank.

The main street, dating from the Middle Ages and including buildings considered national treasures, was also burned.

As his country descended into chaos, a defiant President Berisha appeared to be standing firm, so far ignoring demands from the people and the politicians that he resign.

He sent his 25-year-old son and 18-year-old daughter to Italy on the last ferry from Durres to Bari, Italy, on Thursday night, Italian officials said.

On Friday, the former defense minister, Safet Zhulali, his wife and 14-year-old daughter fled to Italy in a boat that docked in Brindisi, the Italian government said.

But the president had no intention of leaving, his press office said, according to a report on Italian television.

He was invited to attend diplomatic negotiations held Friday aboard an Italian frigate in the Adriatic, but apparently did not want to venture even that far out of the country, a diplomat said.

Instead, the new prime minister, Bashkim Fino, was head of the Albanian delegation at the meeting with a former Austrian chancellor, Franz Vranitzky.

Whether the Albanian president actually understood how dark the situation was in his country was open to question.

A Western diplomat who visited him described a bizarre scene at the presidential palace on Thursday. As weapons depots were being ransacked and the city was exploding with gunfire, the president was alone in his suite of offices. The presidential staff had apparently abandoned him, the diplomat said.

The president's first concern, the diplomat continued, was to get foreign troops to curb the violence that had threatened one of Albania's most precious assets — "We have to get action because they have burned the Coca-Cola plant," the diplomat quoted Mr. Berisha as having said.

The bottling plant on the outskirts of Tirana is one of the biggest multinational investments in Albania and close to the heart of the president, who sees himself as a strong capitalist.

But in fact, the Coca-Cola plant was intact on Friday and, according to men guarding it, had survived four attempts by gunmen to storm the gates.

French Court Blames Pilot in 1988 Crash

Reuters

COLMAR, France — A French court on Friday sentenced the pilot of an Airbus Industrie airliner that crashed at a 1988 air show, killing three people, to six months jail for manslaughter with another 12 months suspended.

The verdict vindicated Airbus, the plane's makers, blaming human error and irresponsibility by the airline, Air France, for the disaster.



Eric Cabanis/Agence France-Presse

French soldiers pushing away Albanians from helicopters sent to evacuate French citizens from the country.

EUROPE: Lack of Action on Albania

Continued from Page 1

cept into Italy when the Communist regime collapsed at home in 1991. On Friday, hundreds of Albanians were arriving in Italy in a flotilla of stinging boats, fishing vessels and inflatables.

Ethnic Albanians form a majority in Albania's tense Kosovo Province and large Albanian communities also live in Greece and Macedonia.

Franz Vranitzky, the former Austrian chancellor who is trying to mediate the crisis, contended that order could be restored only with help from abroad.

Mr. Vranitzky, who was forced to cancel a trip to Tirana because of the uncertain security situation, held consultations Friday aboard the Italian frigate Aliseo in the Adriatic with Albanian government leaders.

"They pointed out that the Albanian crisis is not a civil war," Mr. Vranitzky said. "It is chaos and anarchy, and they believe they can overcome it if there is support from abroad."

He added that "a coalition of those willing" to take action should be organized by governments belonging to the European Union or the 54-nation Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The acting chairman of that organization, Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen of Denmark, summoned members to an emergency meeting Saturday in Vienna.

He said that an "international stabilization force" was needed to end the anarchy.

"I believe we need military troops," he said.

He pledged to investigate possibilities "setting up such a force and added: Speed is decisive."

President Jacques Chirac said Friday that he was deeply concerned about the situation in Albania and wanted the European Union to contribute to any operation to enforce a political settlement there. Reuters reported from Montevideo, Uruguay, where the French president was visiting.

"France thinks the Europeans must take responsibility," his spokeswoman noted him as having said.

Senior NATO diplomats said Italy

and Greece urged the alliance to take a stronger military response before the chaos in Albania spreads beyond the borders.

But the diplomats said that, with some 30,000 NATO-led troops already patrolling Bosnia, there was no willingness among other member states to undertake new peacekeeping responsibilities.

Britain and Germany say that their armed forces have been stretched by the existing duties in Bosnia and that there is no public clamor for urgent action in Albania.

France's calls for an intervention force to be sent to Zaire to alleviate a humanitarian crisis caused by civil war have been ignored.

"The painful truth is that Europe is not ready to take on such missions because governments have neither the capacity to carry them out nor the will to do so," said a senior NATO diplomat.

"This alliance has shown time and again that unless the United States takes the lead, then nothing gets done."

In the Albanian crisis, the EU's response has again been limited to a display of hand-wringing.

After two days of consultations, officials representing the 15 member governments issued a statement Friday that merely expressed "grave concern" at the breakdown of civil order in Albania.



Eric Cabanis/Agence France-Presse

Justine Palette, left, an 81-year-old French citizen who has lived in Albania since 1939, waiting with her husband, Xhavit Gjata, for a French army helicopter to take them away to safety on Friday.

Inter. Her. Trib. p. 5.
15-16/3/98