

The new president's entry into politics is a recent one. He joined the Socialist Party in early 1996 and shortly afterward was named secretary general, the party's second highest post. Prior to that, he served as chairman of the election commission during the country's first democratic elections in 1991. Robert Papa, an officer at the Albanian embassy in Washington, DC, expressed concern over the Socialist Party's ties to the old Communist regime, but said that Mejdani "looks more moderate than the others [in his party]."

It remains to be seen what, if anything, Mejdani's election means for the scientific community. Agim Minxhozi, president of the Albanian Physical Society and a researcher at the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Tirana, described the current status of physics in his country as "very, very poor. We have a problem just of survival sometimes. We have lost many young promising people who have emigrated." Political instability has made it impossible to set a long-term strategy for research, he said, which in turn has hampered requests for funding from foreign agencies.

Minxhozi said he had a "friendly" conversation with Mejdani after the election and hopes the president will indeed support science. Although Mejdani's recent interests have been more political than scientific, "I still believe that he is our friend," Minxhozi said. "But in this country, we have many problems, small ones, big ones. I am not sure how it will evolve."

JEAN KUMAGAI

A Physicist, Rexhep Mejdani, Now Leads Albania

On July 25, the People's Assembly of Albania elected physicist Rexhep Mejdani to be the country's next president, following general elections at the end of June in which the Socialist Party overwhelmingly defeated the incumbent Democratic Party. Mejdani will serve a five-year term, sharing governing responsibilities with the new prime minister, Fatos Nano.

Since February, the troubled Balkan nation has experienced what some describe as a "meltdown," triggered by the collapse of pyramid investment schemes, which wiped out an estimated \$1.2 billion of Albanians' personal savings, and fed by street violence, looting and mob activity. Restoring stability will be a difficult task, and Mejdani has said he intends to pursue a course dedicated to "national reconciliation."

A professor of physics at the University of Tirana when he was elected, Mejdani has more international ties than the average Albanian. He holds a 1984 PhD in physics from the University of Paris South and has been a frequent visitor to the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy. In addition, he served on the council of the European Physical Society and has been vice president of the Albanian Physical Society since its founding in 1991. Mejdani's research in condensed matter theory has focused on disordered crystals.