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IMPACT ANALYSIS

European Protests

23 October 2026

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Further protests and localized unrest are likely in France and elsewhere in Europe as high living costs and dissatisfaction with government responses persist. However, these remain distinct national movements, and the scale and severity of disruption will depend on local grievances, government concessions, and security force responses.

Significant protests rocked France this week, with an estimated 500,000 – 800,000 people taking to the streets after smaller student-led protests of school conditions expanded to include grievances against the government for cost of living. The protests impacted major cities, including Paris, Marseille, Lyon, and the smaller city of Limoges, where an arson attack burned down city hall. Protests in other cities devolved into looting and rioting, with over 1,000 police injuries and thousands of arrests.

The French government has set curfews and banned further protests, blaming the rioting and looting on ultra-left groups. Talks between Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu and protest leaders to avert further action failed on 21 October, setting the stage for further protests.
Protest leaders have already announced mobilizations on 24 October despite protest bans, followed by nationwide protests on 5 November with potential labor strikes. French security forces are likely more prepared going into this weekend, which may limit the overall impact of the protests.

Elsewhere in Europe, similar cost of living protests have taken hold in Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Greece, and Italy, with all primarily driven by domestic economic and political conditions but sharing grievances against their governments. In Albania, protestors are demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Edi Rama after a series of corruption allegations.

The United States government formally issued a travel advisory for France on 21 October due to the ongoing risk of terrorism and unrest, recommending travelers stay away from large crowds or significant police activity. The British government has warned travelers to France that curfews may be introduced on short notice and to pay attention to local media for relevant updates.

We assess that the protests in Europe are likely to continue in the near-term, as protest drivers, including economic conditions, high fuel prices, and rent prices, remain difficult to address in a timely manner, with these factors exacerbated by notable fiscal problems in France and other countries.

Despite their scale and common grievances, the protests remain disparate and are not currently organized into continent-wide events. Government responses to the protests differ, with the Spanish government calling an early election on 29 November to address housing concerns. Alternatively, a crackdown by security forces may inflame tensions and lead to larger mobilizations by protestors.

While the majority of protests have been peaceful, opportunists and criminal elements continue to take advantage of the disorder to engage in looting and violence, particularly at events in France. As such, all large gatherings should be avoided as a precaution, especially after dark when even peaceful protests tend to devolve. Those travelling or operating in affected countries are advised to monitor local media for the latest developments, anticipate disruptions and road closures, and consider contingency planning.

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