



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

European capitals at risk of pro-Hamas protests escalating - do governments have an efficient response?



Hamas's call for mass street support for action against Israel is limited to the Muslim world, where the Palestinian diaspora is the most numerous.

But Europe should not feel exempt from this militant appeal by Hamas's former leader and now head of its diaspora operations, Khaled Meshaal.

In the past week, since Hamas launched a terrorist attack against Israel, there have been tensions in European capitals over public outpouring of support for Hamas's operation.

The Hamas leader's call for "mobilisation in the Arab and Islamic world and among the free people of the world" does not sound like an appeal for peaceful protests and is not limited to supporters of the Palestinian cause in the Muslim world. Particularly when he said, "this is the moment of truth".

Is Europe prepared for a possible escalation of unrest after the Hamas leader's call?

Germany resorts to a ban on rallies

The European capitals were taken aback by the scale of Hamas's attack on Israel and, at first, treated the more or less spontaneous outpourings of street support for Hamas action quite casually.

In the past week, governments and city authorities across Europe have consolidated and enacted a series of measures, primarily to protect Jewish community facilities. But will that be enough for the next "mobilisation" of pro-Hamas supporters, which is apparently underway?

The German government acts more decisively than others, so Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a ban on all Hamas activities and the ban on the local pro-Palestinian group Samidoun from Berlin, which was behind the previous pro-Hamas protests in Germany.

"Anyone who supports a terrorist organisation like Hamas is committing a criminal offence", said Scholz in the Bundestag.

No other European government, except the French one, has so far joined in criminalising Hamas and pro-Palestinian organisations activities, which have organised rallies in support of its action in Israel in recent days.

Even though the top EU court (General Court of the EU) ruled 9 years ago to remove Hamas from the list of terrorist organisations, the EU still considers it a terrorist organisation.

Is the EU's defensive enough?

The European dilemma over the treatment of Hamas continues even after its terrorist actions in Israel, so most governments put themselves on the defensive regarding European support actions.

Last week, French authorities deployed as many as 10,000 police officers to secure around 500 Jewish facilities in the country.

As the country with the largest Jewish population in Europe, France is at risk of attacks by militant expatriates who support Hamas's attack on Israel.

The police have so far reacted quite decisively to these incidents and arrested more than 20 rioters for anti-Semitic statements in the past week. At the same time, they banned several pro-Palestinian rallies, believing there could be a repeat of anti-Semitic riots and support for Hamas.

Two synagogues in Spain had pro-Palestinian graffiti daubed on them, and several Jewish schools were closed due to fear of violence in Amsterdam.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's announcement of an additional £3 million for the protection of synagogues and Jewish schools across the country seems more like an increased measure of self-defence and less like a pro-active move directed against potential

violence by Hamas supporters.

On the other hand, there is no indication that pro-Hamas actions across Europe could subside, even under the pressure of repressive decisions by governments and local authorities.

Since the ex-Hamas leader's call for mobilisation and street protests have been the most severe warning yet that the violence might only get worse rather than better, there is a chance that it will escalate.

Hassan Albalawi, the official diplomatic representative of Palestine to the EU, refused to condemn Hamas's brutal attack on Israel in an interview, criticised the EU for supporting Israel, and announced the denial and review of European support projects for the Palestinians.

Digital prevention

A significant offensive step in preventing escalation came from the EU administration, which does not have rapid reactions to crises.

The EU regulator has asked the 2 largest tech companies, Meta and X, to remove content that favours terrorism and spreads misinformation, hate speech and anti-Semitism from their social media more promptly than before.

Meta owner Mark Zuckerberg was given 24 hours last Wednesday by European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton to assure him that efficient systems to remove violent content from Meta's social networks were in place.

This is a significant preventive step, which would undoubtedly reduce the resources for the pro-Hamas campaign and the capacity to mobilise demonstrators and potential rioters.

However, European governments face security risks which exceed the defensive response so far and are more in line with the active approach of the governments in Berlin and

Paris.

Their decisions to ban pro-Hamas rallies and organisations have drawn criticism for allegedly restricting the right to freedom of expression and assembly. However, that is a risk any government in the Bloc will have to face.

There are only reports of growing public support for Hamas terrorist activities from the other side, which signals a move towards open hostility in the tolerant, multicultural European cities.