



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Why will the US student protest wave not spill over to Europe?



The escalation of student protests at Columbia University, including the violent **seizure** of Hamilton Hall, forced the university's management to face fresh trials shortly after deciding to discipline the protesters.

Last Monday, Columbia University's administration, where protests were the principal focus on the campus, started suspending and sanctioning students for participating in violent protests.

Given the order to leave the encampment, some students will be unable to complete the semester or participate in classes and extracurricular activities.

However, the radical response of the "autonomous group" (occupying one of Columbia's buildings) has created the possibility of a new confrontation where the administration has few options except to once again seek the support of law enforcement.

If the protests resolve in this manner, it will probably signal the end of the second wave of protests at some US universities after the storm last January.

Then, also due to pro-Palestinian demonstrations, followed by anti-Semitic outbursts, the presidents of Harvard and Penn University resigned.

## Solidarity with US students is not enough

Neither wave of controversial student demonstrations in the US spilled over to European universities, at least to the extent of receiving public attention or strong politicisation, as was the case in the US.

As the end of the school year approaches, the prospect of American student protests continuing in Europe is almost non-existent. However, there were many reasons why they did not exist until now.

## Copying the protests of American students in Europe, apart from generational solidarity, has no stronger shared ground to indicate the spread of the rebellion across the Atlantic

European students only sporadically tried to follow the example of their American colleagues, so pro-Palestinian protests, followed by a short-term blockade of university buildings, happened in Paris (Science Po, Sorbonne) and London (University College London, Warwick).

Police **broke up** a small group of protesters who had attempted to set up camp in front of the German Bundestag, apparently inspired by a similar protest at Columbia University.

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## Differences dictated by tradition

A crucial demand from students at Columbia and some other US universities regards terminating university funding from sponsors with ties to Israel.

While this demand has prompted Columbia students to break into and occupy buildings, their European counterparts are unlikely to be driven to act for the same reasons.

While US universities are traditionally financed from private funds, European ones (except the UK) have a long tradition of state support.

A typical European university still gets about two-thirds of its income from state contributions. Despite the slight increase in the share of private financing, higher education in Europe is still considered a public good; therefore, the attitude of students

towards these institutions is different than in the US.



*This is not demonstrating, it's delinquency - Giorgia Meloni*

At the same time, requests in the US to cancel donations connected to Israel and even stop cooperation with institutions that have not condemned the Israeli action in Gaza have been deeply politicised and, as a result, are unlikely to find support among European academic institutions.

Since the start of the Gaza conflict, many European governments have been using harsh measures regarding protests with an anti-Semitic tone, including occasional student protests.

"Devastation, attacks, assaults on a Rectorate and on a police station, with a police director getting punched. This is not demonstrating, it's delinquency," said Giorgia Meloni, Italian PM, after clashes between pro-Palestinian students and police at Rome's La Sapienza University.

German authorities have so far been particularly harsh on any display of anti-Semitism in street protests, discouraging their potential spread to university campuses.

Pro-Palestinian protests are already frequent in cities practically every weekend, and students regard them as a suitable outlet to voice their displeasure; therefore, there are no significant protests taking place on UK campuses.

## Protest culture

The spread of waves from US universities to Europe is also unlikely due to a different protest culture, which has its source in the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

European mechanisms for banning anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, and hate speech are more restrictive, even in cases that border on the broad autonomy of universities.

**Many European governments simply banned rallies in support of the Palestinians, as they usually turned into anti-Semitic ones**

At the end of last year, many European governments simply banned rallies in support of the Palestinians, as they usually turned into anti-Semitic ones.

It is unlikely that the wave of protests from American universities will spread to those in Europe, given that the end of the school year approaches when students leave campuses.

Thanks to relatively low tuition fees and favourable education programmes, the **mobility** of European students is traditionally high, as about 1.5 million students from other countries will shortly finish their obligations and return home.