Civil Unrest

21
NOV
10:00 UTC

Europe Alert: Anti-lockdown protests manifest regionwide, as Netherlands witnesses violent unrest on November 19-20; further unrest, clashes expected as lockdowns reintroduced

Please be advised

- In Vienna, **Austria**, up to 40,000 people protested the government's decision to impose a new lockdown and nationwide vaccine mandate on November 20. Members from the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs (FPO), the ant-vaccine Osterreich Menschen – Freiheit – Grundrechte (MFG) party, and the extreme right Identitare Bewegung Osterreich (IBO) attended. Around 1,300 police were deployed and at least five demonstrators were arrested. Protesters threw projectiles at police, did not wear masks, and wore yellow stars resembling those the Nazis forced Jews to wear during the Holocaust.
- In Zagreb, **Croatia**, thousands protested COVID-19 restrictions on November 20. Flags portraying nationalist and religious symbols, as well as banners against vaccinations were reported. Several journalists were physically assaulted, with one journalist punched in the ribs and slapped multiple times.
- In **Italy**, protests denouncing the Green Pass took place in Milan and Rome on November 20. In Rome, an estimated 3,000 people participated in the demonstration.
- In Belfast, **Northern Ireland**, hundreds protested vaccine passports outside the city hall on November 20, following the government's decision to introduce vaccine passports beginning December 13. Protesters carried signs comparing restrictions to Nazi Germany.
- In the **Netherlands**, violent unrest broke out at anti-lockdown demonstrations in The Hague and other cities on November 20. In The Hague, hooded rioters set fire to bicycles and threw projectiles at police, as riot police used batons, dogs, and horses to disperse crowds. One individual threw rocks at an ambulance carrying a patient. Five police officers were injured. Thousands also protested in Amsterdam, although the demonstration proceeded peacefully. The unrest follows severe riots in Rotterdam on November 19, during which 51 people were arrested and at least seven people were injured, including three who sustained gunshot wounds after police fired shots.
- In **Switzerland**, around 2,000 people from different regions participated in a protest against COVID-19 measures in Zurich on November 20. In Lausanne, a similar protest attracted 1,500 people.

Assessments & Forecast

1. The attendance at protests regionwide on November 19-20 indicates that anti-lockdown movements are capitalizing on the reintroduction of COVID-19 measures and vaccination mandates. **FORECAST**: Considering that more countries are expected to enact stricter measures in the coming weeks due to increasing COVID-19 infection rates, demonstrations are expected to

increase in the near term, resembling the protest movements in 2020 and early 2021.
2. Based on recent protests, coupled with increased anti-government sentiments, future protests carry with them a heightened potential for unrest, including clashes with police and instances of vandalism, particularly in countries where large gatherings are banned. Given the likelihood of police intervention, even initially peaceful protests are liable to record escalating unrest. While unrest in the form of riots and looting has, so far, been limited to the Netherlands, this is likely to spill over to Belgium, as evidenced by protests in 2020, which saw violent unrest in both countries, with other countries liable to follow. **FORECAST**: Given recent unrest, authorities are expected to continue deploying more police at protests regionwide as a precaution, heightening anti-authority sentiments and thereby increasing the potential for unrest and risk posed to police.
3. Moreover, as evidenced by the demonstration in Vienna, far-right groups and conspiracy theorists are expected to participate in these demonstrations regionwide. Considering that these groups, such as Querdenken 711 in Germany, already gained traction earlier in the pandemic, their support bases have grown dramatically, suggesting that protests they organize are likely to witness turnouts in the thousands. That 40,000 people attended the demonstration in Vienna supports this. While these groups are present regionwide, they are likely to be most visible in German-speaking countries, namely Austria, Germany, and Switzerland.
4. **FORECAST**: Far-right groups are expected to continue using anti-lockdown protests as a platform to spread misinformation and as a recruitment platform, given that these demonstrations have provided an opportunity for protest movements to project their movement beyond a niche target audience. With that, the risk of far-right radicalization is expected to remain heightened in the near-to-medium term.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Europe are advised to maintain vigilance in the vicinity of all large gatherings due to the potential for unrest at protests.
2. Companies are advised to monitor protest groups related to their sector, as businesses are liable to be targeted through protest actions.