

Riots across Europe fuelled by economic crisis

Tension over the global economic slump have fuelled May Day protests and riots across Europe with trouble breaking out in Germany, Greece, Austria, Turkey and France.

By Henry Samuel in Paris

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Workers of ArcelorMittal hold Bengal fires during the annual May Day demonstration in Marseille, France Photo: EPA

Police in Berlin arrested 57 people while around 50 officers were hurt as young demonstrators threw bottles and rocks and set fire to cars and rubbish bins. There were also clashes in Hamburg, where anti-capitalist protesters attacked a bank.

In Turkey, masked protesters threw stones and petrol bombs at police, smashing banks and supermarket windows in its biggest city, Istanbul. Security forces fired tear gas and water cannon at hundreds of rioters and more than a hundred were arrested with dozens more hurt. There were also scattered skirmishes with police in the capital, Ankara, where 150,000 people marched.

The government had declared May Day, traditionally marked by rallies by labour unions, a public holiday this year under pressure from unions.

In Greece, officers fired flash grenades to disperse rioters in Athens after attacks on banks and traffic cameras. Transport strikes disrupted bus, train and ferry services as well as flights by Greek carrier Olympic Airlines.

Twenty people were injured and five arrested after police clashed with demonstrators at a traditional labour day rally in Linz in northern Austria. The incident came after police intercepted some 50 hooded protesters among a procession of up to 700 people at a Communist Party rally.

In France, unions joined forces for the first time since the Second World War, but turnout was not as high as a protest day in March in which up to three million attended 300 rallies against President Nicolas Sarkozy's economic recovery plan.

Some politicians have warned of the threat of "revolution", following radical action such as "boss-napping" factory executives and an ongoing strike that has crippled dozens of French universities.

They are wary of the growing power of leftist radicals linked to the New Anti-Capitalist Party of Olivier Besancenot, a Trotskyist postman.

There were also marches in big cities in Spain, burdened with the highest unemployment rate in Europe. More than 10,000 people gathered in the centre of Madrid in a demonstration organised by the country's two largest trade unions.

In Italy, union leaders shifted rallies from major cities to the earthquake-stricken town of L'Aquila as a sign of solidarity with thousands who lost

their jobs after last month's deadly quake.

In Russia, about 2,000 demonstrators gathered by a statue of Karl Marx in Moscow waving banners and red Soviet flags and calling for a return of communism.

In St Petersburg, birthplace of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, police arrested about 120 members far right militants armed with knives and knuckle dusters, police said.

Cuba's ailing former leader, Fidel Castro, chose May Day – a key event in the Communist calendar – to attack Barack Obama, the US President, saying the United States only wanted Cuba to return "to the fold, like slaves."

There has been growing concern among European governments about a groundswell of social unrest and violent street protests that have spread amid the economic downturn.

Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Greece and Iceland all faced social unrest and rioting earlier this year as unemployment soared and countries were forced to impose severe cuts to government spending.

A March summit of European leaders examined the increasing unrest and "intensive sharing of information" has been carried out among key EU governments, including France and Germany.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/5258634/Riots-across-Europe-fuelled-by-economic-crisis.html>