

Breaking Point: Europe Is in Revolt Against Lockdown

Description



by [Paddy Hannam](#) Source: [Spiked](#)

“And to make matters worse, governments are trying to silence public anger. They are arresting people for daring to protest against the most severe restrictions on our freedom in living memory”

Across [Europe](#), Covid restrictions have changed life beyond recognition. From London to Ljubljana and most places in between, people have been shut up indoors and huge economic, educational and health sacrifices have been made.

But something is starting to stir among the people of Europe. There has been a wave of protests – and, in some cases, riots – across the continent.

In the [Netherlands](#), there is a national lockdown. Pubs, bars and non-essential shops are shut. There is also a 9pm curfew, enforced by fines. Last week, there were several days of [rioting](#) against that curfew. Rioters burned cars and pelted police with stones.

These riots helped expose two things: the public’s growing impatience with lockdown rules on the one hand and the arrogance of the ruling elite on the other.

Dutch finance minister Wopke Hoekstra [dismissed](#) the mounting anger. ‘It’s scum doing this’, he said. Rotterdam mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb attacked what he called ‘shameless thieves’, asking, ‘Does it make you feel good that you’ve helped ruin your city? To wake up with a bag full of stolen stuff beside you?’

Destruction of people’s businesses is wrong and the looting should be condemned. But the violence points towards growing frustration among the people of Europe.

Discontent is brewing in France, too. Emmanuel Macron appears to have [decided against a new national lockdown](#) – for now. But his hand has arguably been forced by the French public, who have

been out on the streets in large numbers, protesting against both [an authoritarian security bill](#) and any imposition of further Covid restrictions.

Macron's decision against a new lockdown may have been a reaction to a [warning](#) given by ex-interior minister Christophe Castaner. Castaner said recently that a new lockdown could result in significant '[civil disobedience](#)'. Meanwhile, 24 restaurants in Paris were raided by police last weekend after opening illegally.

Polls suggest that less than 50 per cent of French people support 'strict confinement measures', while [tens of thousands](#) joined the recent marches against both pandemic rules and the security bill. Popular resistance to restrictions on freedom has become a threat the French government can no longer ignore.

In Brussels, police [arrested](#) over 200 people at an anti-lockdown protest at the weekend. 'We remind you that there is no authorisation to come and demonstrate this Sunday', tweeted the city police. In the age of Covid, public protest is only permitted with the approval of the state.

In Budapest, protesters gathered to show their objection to Covid rules which they say have wreaked havoc on the hospitality industry. Activists called on restaurants to open in defiance of the law. A protest organiser, Aron Ecsenyi, said, 'Every tool that we have used until now has been depleted so, beginning now, every business should open in the spirit of civil disobedience'. And in Poland, police [raided](#) a nightclub which had opened illegally, using teargas to clear people out.

Meanwhile, the EU's [dismal vaccination programme](#) has dented public confidence in their governments.

But will any of this prompt a rethink in policy? It's unclear. Protesters in France appear to have made the government pause before imposing a third lockdown. But life is far from normal and [civil liberties](#) are still curtailed. Elsewhere, there has been even less progress toward normality.

Is it really any surprise, then, that people are taking to the streets? Across Europe, large numbers of people have reached breaking point. Covid measures have destroyed economies, wrecking livelihoods and thrusting people into poverty. Ordinary people have been ordered to make huge sacrifices, some of which are simply too great to bear.

And to make matters worse, governments are trying to silence public anger. They are arresting people for daring to protest against the most severe restrictions on our freedom in living memory.

Countries that do not tolerate protest cannot fairly call themselves democracies – whether there is a pandemic to deal with or not.

The EU must get its house in order on vaccines. And national governments must come up with clear plans for reopening society in the near future. Otherwise the anger will grow.