



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Are European pro-Palestinian policies becoming tolerant of terrorism?



Several European cities welcomed the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel on the streets. Berlin, London, Rotterdam, Malmö, and Barcelona are just a few cities where protesters waved Palestinian flags and banners in support of Hamas and the destruction of Israel during the weekend.

It was similar in dozens of cities in the US and Canada. Most people were present in New York City, at Times Square. Pro-Palestinian organisations have been calling for the continuation of protests throughout the week in Europe and North America, mostly in front of Israeli consulates and embassies.

These protests have a significantly different purpose from all the previous ones organised in support of the Palestinian people to exercise their rights, "remove the occupation" and gain full international recognition.

The terrorist nature of Hamas's attack on Israel, the mass killings, the kidnapping of civilians, and the bombing of civilian settlements contributed to this distinction.

The governments of the countries where Hamas's action was celebrated characterised it as terrorism and supported Israel.

The opinions of governments do not restrict citizens' rights to the subject of their protests as long as the protests are non-violent. But for the first time, large-scale street protests supporting terrorist activities were held in European metropolises.

Authorities caught off guard by pro-Hamas rallies

Nothing similar happened after 9/11, the July 2005 London subway bombings, the 2015 Paris Bataclan attack, or the Brussels subway and airport a year later.

Nearly nowhere did the local authorities take action against the pro-Hamas protestors, suggesting that they were caught off guard by the situation in the cities where Hamas's act

was celebrated with songs and occasionally fireworks.

The duration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has made pro-Palestinian rallies across Europe a common thing, a perfectly permissible and acceptable expression of political views tolerated in democracies.

However, Hamas's attack on Israel went beyond the scope of political action with legitimate goals and legal means, thus denying its supporters the right to celebrate it publicly.

"There must be zero tolerance for antisemitism or glorification of terrorism on the streets of Britain", Suella Braverman, UK Home Secretary, posted on the platform X.

Robert Jenrick, UK immigration minister, called the pro-Hamas supporters who celebrated the action in Israel "disgusting people glorifying the terrorist activities" and added that "there was no place for that in the UK".

New York Governor Kathy Hochul called the rally of Hamas supporters in Times Square "abhorrent and morally repugnant".

Will there be a more decisive response to the glorification of terrorism?

However, these and other similar statements from authorities in Europe and the US arrived after the celebrations honouring the terrorist attacks by Hamas.

They needed time to overcome the confusion and face the fact that these were no longer the usual pro-Palestinian support rallies but acts glorifying a massive outpouring of terrorism in allied Israel.

Given that the police protection of facilities significant for the Jewish community has been increased in several European capitals, they have already partially amortised the initial confusion.

Their reactions after the weekend celebrations honouring Hamas offer a hint at more forceful action against demonstrations celebrating terrorism.

Consequences for the political scene

However, given that domestic political organisations, particularly on the left, have been in solidarity with Palestinian activists for decades, their acts will spark debate in the political sphere throughout Europe, including the US.

The stars of the Democratic Socialists of America, members of Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib and Jamaal Bowman, have been severely criticised, even by their Democratic colleagues, for not explicitly dissociating themselves from condemning the pro-Hamas rally in New York City last Sunday.

The long-time mayor of Rotterdam, the Labour Party Ahmed Aboutaleb, has also been criticised because last Saturday he refused to display the flag of Israel at the city hall as a sign of solidarity and condemnation of Hamas's terrorism.

There were street rallies in Rotterdam and The Hague last weekend supporting Hamas's action. Participants said it was "an act of struggle for decolonisation", declaring that "Israel was a terrorist state".

Early parliamentary elections are due in the Netherlands in slightly over a month.

With migrants high on the list of pre-election issues, celebrating Hamas's attack on Israel could be an unexpected gain for right-wing and anti-immigrant options, and losses for the left, where there were disagreements over its position on the war in Israel.

Silence and "bothsidesism" of international NGOs

The initial positions of large international NGOs dealing with human rights protection and promotion could influence the European political situation, particularly the forces of the left, traditionally classified as the protectors of the Palestinians.

The majority was indifferent to Hamas's strikes on Israel or repeated the previous routine clichés about the danger of Palestinian and Israeli violence.

Amnesty International asked the Israeli government "to refrain from inciting violence and tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem".

Save the Children characterised the attacks by Hamas as an "escalation in violence between Palestinian armed groups and Israeli forces". Doctors Without Borders had a similar position ("escalation between Israel and Gaza"). They did not react to the action of Hamas in Israel but reported that Israeli forces targeted a hospital and a dispensary in southern Gaza, with which this organisation cooperates.

The former long-time executive director of Human Rights Watch, Kenneth Roth, called for refraining from using the term "terrorists" in the context of Hamas attacks on Israel.

"Better to remind both Hamas and the Israeli government that humanitarian law makes it a war crime to target or indiscriminately fire on civilians", Mr Roth wrote on the X platform.

Politicians and activists in Europe, who have historically supported the Palestinian option and established it on the protection of human rights, continue to hold views dominated by this type of "bothsidesism".

They stood by these views even after the Hamas attack on Israel, putting themselves in an unheard-of position of tolerance for terrorism on the European political scene.