

France Suffers Renewed Terrorist Attack

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Attacks spark new debate on national security ++ Labour Market reform passed at a high cost ++ Euro 2016: No happy ending for "les bleus". by Matthieu Choblet

Attacks spark new debate on national security

A truck ploughed into a crowd during the celebrations on French national day in Nice, killing at least 80. The driver was shot dead. So far, his motive is unknown, but appears to be of a "terrorist nature" as French President François Hollande declared. Only one month ago, the murder of a police officer and his life companion in north-central France had sparked a debate on national security. Commanding officer Jean-Baptiste Salvaing and his life companion Jessica Schneider were murdered in their own house in the Île-de-France region by an alleged member of the jihadist militant group Daesh also known as the 'Islamic state'.

The murderer had previously been trialled for all kinds of petty theft and was sentenced to three years in prison in 2013 for participating in a jihadist network in Pakistan. Shortly before being shot on the crime scene by the French National Police's elite forces RAID, the offender boasted about being a part of jihad. However, a brief exchange of words between the self-proclaimed jihadist and the police forces shortly before his death indicate that a private dispute may have been the actual motive. The incident calls into question how secure French police officers are outside their period of service.

A worried member of the Police Union reported that suspicious people regularly linger around the commissioner's offices, taking notes of the officer's license plates and possibly tracking them to their homes. As a consequence, Hollande promised to allow police officers always to carry arms even when off duty. "We must enable police personnel to defend themselves at any time", said the President.

Labour Market reform passed at a high cost

The [loi El Khomri](#) which loosens labour legislation and limits collective bargaining power, passed the National Assembly against severe protests. Clashes between protestors and the police were accompanied by a battle of opinion in the media and in parliament.

After a particularly brutal confrontation in the streets of Paris, Manuel Valls, Prime Minister and main proponent of the reform, blamed protestors and unions for ransacking the public hospital "Necker". Indeed, among the demonstration hundreds of black-clad and hooded rioters bombarded the police with a hail of stones. The latter responded with tear gas and water cannons. During this event front windows of the hospital were smashed. One man was also seen braking a window with a hammer. "No one entered the hospital, nothing was damaged inside the building", specified professor Noël Garabédian, doctor at the Necker hospital.

The government had been discussing for some time how long it would take for the public opinion to tip during what became the longest and most violent social conflict of François Holland's presidency. Yet, in June, despite of blocked fuel depots, railway strikes and street violence about 60 percent of the population were still in favour of the protests. "The rocket went into the wrong direction", sighs an anonymous ministerial adviser, pointing at the communication errors right in the beginning of the legislative process for the reform. "People think this law is about nothing than making licensing easier".

In between terrorist alerts, the ups and downs of the Euro 2016 championship and yet another violent protest against the planned airport Notre-Dame-des-Landes in Brittany, the conflict about the labour reform did put the French administration under a lot of stress. It went so far, as for the government to consider a ban on protest marches through Paris.

The law finally passed the National Assembly and was sent back to the Senate, where it is expected to be adopted on 20th July. As in March, the opponents inside Parliament – some socialists, ecologists and communists – were too few to impede the government from using the notorious Article 49.3 in order to force through the law. The strategic victory came at a high price for the Prime Minister. Once praised for his firm stance, the trial of strength with the unions cost him much popularity. According to recent polls, only 20 percent of the French see him as "a good president" for 2017 – down from 40 percent in 2015.

Euro 2016: No happy ending for "les bleus"

It took France some time to fully embrace the European football championship. The first days of the 2016 tournament in France were overshadowed by the fear of terrorism, strikes and hooliganism. In northern French city of Lille, the police arrested 36 people following clashes between French riot forces and mainly English football fans. In southern Marseille English, Russian and French fans went on the rampage.

Meanwhile, the French national team ("les bleus") had a rather dull start in a group with Switzerland, Romania and Albania. The real highlight came with a 5-2 victory against Iceland in the quarter finals. In the subsequent semi-final two goals from top scorer Antoine Griezmann delivered the first French victory against Germany in a major tournament since 1958. Thierry Henry, former striker, jubilated: "We have a hero again, a striker who can win us tournaments". Alas, the euphoria came to its bitter end, with a Portuguese goal in the extra time of the final match. "How cruel to lose a final in this way, it's really hard", said a downcast French team coach Didier Deschamps.



Source: Alexas_Fotos | [pd](#)
