

**Youth riots in France**  
**Brief overview of the events**  
**November 10th 2005**

Since two weeks, France has faced youth rioting in the suburbs of big cities and popular districts. Night after night, young people have torched cars, hurled rocks at the police forces and firemen and wrecked public buildings. The violence that erupted suddenly and spread over all France was firstly cause by the accidental death of two young people in Seine-Saint-Denis. But the root causes of these disorders may be find in the living conditions of inhabitants of “grands ensembles” and popular districts. For years, local politicians, community workers, the police, teachers and residents themselves had been warning about the worsening problems in the suburbs of big cities: joblessness, poverty, poor housing, mediocre education, racial discriminations, rampant crime and drug... all have helped turn these places into pits of boredom and despair. Young people, mostly from immigrant origins, do not feel understood, heard and respected<sup>1</sup>.

If all politicians and associative personalities condemned severely this violence, several of them claim for political, financial, social measurements in favour of popular districts and a plan to fight against unemployment and discrimination.

The government plans to increase opportunities for young people, but firstly emphasizes the importance of restoring order.

## Chronology

### **Thursday October 27<sup>th</sup>**

Ziad (17 year old) and Banou (15 year old) died electrocuted after they fled a police identity check in Clichy-sous-Bois (Seine-Saint-Denis).

### **Night from October 27<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup>**

Tens of young people, persuaded that the victims tried to escape the police, hurl rocks at the police forces and firemen and wreck public buildings. About 30 cars are torched in Clichy-sou-Bois.

### **Friday October 28<sup>th</sup>**

First controversy about the circumstances of the two young men death. The minister of Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, affirm that the teenagers were not physically pursued by the police forces, they ran away after a burgling.

### **Night from October 28<sup>th</sup> to October 29<sup>th</sup>**

400 young people face the police officers in Clichy and Montfermeil (a neighbouring town). For the first time, a real bullet is fired on a police van. 29 vehicles are burnt, 23 police officers are wounded and 14 people are arrested.

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<sup>1</sup> The article of Catherine Field (08-11-2005) “The sickness in France’s heart” in International Herald Tribune is a very good and synthetic evaluation of the root causes of the disorders.

**Saturday October 29<sup>th</sup>**

500 people take part in a silent demonstration in memory of the two young men. The Republic prosecutor of Bobigny say that the teenagers ran away in order to escape a police identity check, believing they were wrongly pursued.

**Night from October 29<sup>th</sup> to October 30<sup>th</sup>**

Confrontations in Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil. A teargas grenade used by the police officers reaches a Clichy mosque.

**Night from October 30<sup>th</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>**

Riots begins to spread over in seven neighbouring town of Clichy: 68 cars are torched.

**Monday October 31<sup>st</sup>**

Three people arrested on Friday are condemned to a two months prison sentence. Ziad and Banou families refuse to meet Nicolas Sarkoy.

**Tuesday November 1<sup>st</sup>**

Domminique de Villepin, Prime Minister, received the two families, with Nicolas Sarkozy. The Minister for Promotion of Equal Opportunity denounce the word "racaille" (scum) used by Nicolas Sarkozy in order to qualify the rioters.

**Night from November 1<sup>st</sup> to November 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Violence touches 4 departments in Ile-de-France: 228 torched cars.

**Night from November 2<sup>nd</sup> to November 3<sup>rd</sup>**

Violence becomes extensive. A great part of the bus service the circulation of tramway are stopped in Seine-Saint-Denis "for safety reasons". Four gunshots with real balls aim police and firemen without making victims. A police station is ransacked in the suburb of Paris, buildings are set on fire and nearly 300 vehicles are burnt. Nine persons are wounded and a 56 year old handicapped person is seriously burnt when a bus is torched.

**Thursday November 3<sup>rd</sup>**

The Republic prosecutor of Bobigny opens legal information against X for "non-assistance to somebody in life danger". The court of Bobigny condemns a young man to two months prison sentence for "degradation of public property".

**Night from November 3<sup>rd</sup> to November 4<sup>th</sup>**

More than 500 vehicles are torches, several warehouses are burnt down in Paris region. Violence spread over other regions, 77 cars are torched in province. 78 people are arrested and 6 police officers are wounded.

**Friday November 4<sup>th</sup>**

The government multiplies the consultations to try to find an exit to the crisis. Violence of the night involves disturbances in public transport. At the end of the day, about 30 mayors and municipal elected officials of Seine-Saint-Denis gather in front of the prefecture of Bobigny to appeal for calm.

**Night from November 4<sup>th</sup> to November 5<sup>th</sup>**

Almost 900 vehicles are torched (656 in Paris suburbs, 13 in Paris, 241 in Paris). In Garges-lès-Gonesses (Val d'Oise) and in Pierrefite (Seine-Saint-Denis) a kingpin is launched on synagogues. 250 young people are arrested.

**Saturday November 5<sup>th</sup>**

The appeals for calm multiply. Parents of the two deceased young people but also elected officials and inhabitants of some cities demonstrate against violence. "Sarkozy must apologize or resign" for the young people of the cities, the "lack of respect" of the minister is at the origin of the disorders.

### **Night from November 5<sup>th</sup> to November 6<sup>th</sup>**

Recrudescence of degradations. Buildings and trades are attacked, and 1.300 vehicles are torched in all the country, including 554 in province and about 30 in Paris. 312 people are arrested. In province, the most touched departments are the Nord, Eure-et-Loir, Haute-Garonne, Loire-Atlantique and Eure.

### **Sunday November 6<sup>th</sup>**

According to the Ministry of Justice, since October 27<sup>th</sup>, around 20 people have been condemned to a prison sentence.

Several fires of cars and dustbins in Nantes, Orleans and Rennes. in Saint-Etienne: after the arson of abus, the service is stopped, in Orleans, rocks are hurled on the town hall and police cars.

### **Night from November 6<sup>th</sup> to November 7<sup>th</sup>**

Most important degradations since the beginning of the disorders: 1.408 burnt vehicles including 982 in province (554 the day before). 395 people are arrested (345 the previous day and 253 the previous night) and 36 wounded police officers. Violence touches 274 towns. In Paris area, the number of burnt vehicles fell down to 426 against 741 the day before. In province, the most touched cities are Marseilles, Saint-Etienne, Toulouse, Grenoble, Metz and Lille

### **Monday November 7<sup>th</sup>**

A 61 year old man beaten the previous week into a coma by youth died, becoming the first victim of the violence.

During the following nights the situation calm down, appeals for calm of local organisations and personalities seem to have cool tempers.

On Thursday November 10<sup>th</sup> the assessment of the riots is the following:

- around 8.000 torched vehicles
- several schools, gymnasia, trades, warehouses burnt
- around 2.000 arrested young people (among them 50 per cent are minors)
- 100 people were submitted in front of a court, a score was condemned to prison sentences and 30 people were placed under committal order.

## Reactions and Responses of the French Government

During the first days of violence, Nicolas Sarkozy, as Minister of Interior, was in charge of solving the problems: he sends additional police officers in the troubled areas. The priority of the government is to restore order, the Prime Minister affirming that "*The law must be respected*".

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Dominique de Villepin announces an "action plan" for the end of November affirming that there is no "*miracle solution to solve the popular district problems*".

On Sunday November 6<sup>th</sup>, the President of the Republic call a restricted Minister Councils, gathering the Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of National Education, the Minister for Social Cohesion and the Minister for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity. After this council, he gives his first public intervention since the beginning of the riots. He asks the "*re-establishment of safety, law and order*" while insisting on the "*respect of each one*".

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, Philippe de Villepin gives an interview to the first French TV channel, announcing that "*Communities can, under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, invoke curfew if they believe it will restore calm and protect residents*". Indeed, the Minister Council has decided in the morning to set out the Law of 1955 establishing the emergency state in 45 French towns. The Prime Minister

ruled out army intervention, but says 1.500 police officers would join 8.000 already deployed in the troubled areas.

The mayor of Le Raincy, in Seine-Saint-Denis, was the first to announce a curfew that it said would help "avoid tragedy". On Wednesday November 9<sup>th</sup>, only few mayors have decided to invoke curfew (for instance Amiens, Nice, Orleans, Rouen, Evreux). There are no curfew in Ile-de-France towns, as the situation has really calmed down.

On Tuesday November 8<sup>th</sup>, the Prime Minister also announces, in front of the deputies in National Assembly, several measurements to help popular districts.

#### Employment:

- In the three following months, every unemployed young people less than 25 year old and living in the 750 sensible zones will be received by ANPE (Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi – National Agency for Employment) for a "deep interview" and a specific solution will be proposed to them (training course, job...)
- 20.000 contracts of accompaniment for employment reserved for the underprivileged districts will be created in order to develop proximity job.
- 15 new urban frank zones will be founded

#### Education:

- Creation of 5.000 teaching assistants in the 1 200 colleges of the troubled districts.
- The number of teams of educational success envisaged by the plan of social cohesion is multiplied by 2 (1.000 at the end of 2007).
- Possibility to access to professional training (and leave school) at the age of 14 year old, instead of 16 currently
- 100.000 merit grants will be created for the next school year 2006, against 30.000 currently.

#### Housing:

- The means of the Agency of Urban Restoration will be increased by 25 % over two years.

#### Integration:

- - Creation of an agency for social cohesion and equal opportunity which will be "the interlocutor of the mayors".
- Creation of prefects delegated to the equal opportunity.

#### Associations:

- 100 additional millions euros will be allocated in 2006 to the 14.000 associations subsidised by the State.

#### Security:

- The ministry of Interior will recruit 2.000 additional agents for the disadvantaged districts, within the framework of the devices of the contracts of access to employment.

On Wednesday November 9<sup>th</sup>, Nicolas Sarkozy, in a speech in the National Assembly, asks the prefects to deport all foreign people condemned because of the urban disorders of the previous nights, the legal immigrants (holding a residency permit) included. 120 foreign people are concerned by this demand

## Responses of the French Political Parties

All the French political parties have condemned the riots and called for calm and order.

Socialist personalities consider that the government and especially the Minister of Interior are highly responsible for the disorders. They accused them to “instrumentalise” the fear and the insecurity. Jean-Marc Ayrault, president of the socialist group, declared that the Socialists were not hostile with the curfew, but “*be careful that this curfew does not become a mask-misery, a new mark of segregation. The emergency state it is initially the social emergency state*”.

In the name of the UDF group, Jean-Christophe Lagarde estimated that the curfew “*could perhaps be useful in certain districts*”. “*Do not make decisions without consulting the mayors of the towns concerned,*” he however prevented. “*Do not impose curfew where we do not need it, it may revive the tensions.*” The deputy, proposed to all the great political parties a republican pact for the suburbs.

The Communist Party and the Greens rejected the introduction of the curfew, as according to them it is not the response to the social insecurity in the country. They claimed for a re-examination of the budget because it is not any more in conformity with needs of the citizens who live in these districts.

#### Extreme-right

200 inhabitants and elected officials of Epinay-on-Seine observe one minute of silence in homage to Jean-Claude Irvoas, killed by three young men on October 27<sup>th</sup> (before the beginning of the riots). The ceremony is disturbed per “Identity Bloc”, a movement of extreme-right, which shouted that the authors of violence in suburbs “*do not like France and the French*”.

Jean-Marie Le Pen the leader of the Front National declared in an interview to a British radio channel that he wanted the young people who had been arrested to be deprived of French nationality. He also said that he was very pleased to see Mister Sarkozy used his own propositions.

#### Reactions of the NGO community

Several local associations (women associations, sport clubs, youth organisations etc...) appealed for calm and also took on the task to cool temper by demonstrating, dialoguing with the young people and walking in the streets during the night in order to prevent young people to set fire.

On November 6<sup>th</sup> The UOIF (Union of Islamic Organisations of France), which is one of the most important French Muslim organisations (it won ten seats on the administrative council of the CFCM at the last elections which set up in June 2005) wrote a communiqué in which it condemned the violence with firmness and called with insistence for the return of calm as soon as possible. It called all the young Muslims implied in such events to calm their anger, to meditate and to conform to the Fatwa enacted this day by ` Dar el fatwa'. It also condemned the desecration of the Clichy mosque.

<http://www.uoif-online.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=415&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

The Fatwa says: “*It is formally forbidden to any Muslim [...] to take part in some action which strikes, in a blind way, the private or public properties or which can make an attempt on the life of others. To contribute to these exactions is an illicit act. Any alive Muslim in France, who he is French citizen or host of France has the right to claim the scrupulous respect of his person, his dignity and his convictions and to act for more equality and for social justice. But this action that it is undertaken in a concerted or spontaneous way should not, in no case, be done in contradiction with the pointed out lessons (previously in the text) and the right which manages the common life*”.

<http://www.uoif-online.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=414&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

JMF (Jeunes Musulmans de France – Young Muslims of France) wrote a communiqué to call for calm but also denounced the deficiencies of the government and political men.

<http://www.uoif-online.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=416&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

Huge association such as SOS Racism or the LDH (Ligue des droits de l' Homme) condemned the violence, but claim for political, financial, social measurements in favour of popular districts and a plan to fight against unemployment and discrimination.

In a common communiqué on November 10th , several organisations (*Act Up Paris, Les Alternatifs, Alternative citoyenne, Alternative libertaire, L'Assemblée citoyenne des originaires de Turquie (L'ACORT), ATF, ATMF, ATTAC, CDSL, CEDETIM, CGT, CRLDHT, DAL, Fasti, FTCT, Gauche Républicaine, JCR, Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, Ligue des droits de l'Homme, MRAP, MARS – Mouvement pour une alternative républicaine et sociale, Parti communiste français, Rassemblement des associations citoyennes de Turquie (RACORT), Ré-So (Réformistes et Solidaires), Syndicat de la magistrature, UNEF, Union syndicale Solidaires, Les Verts*) denounce the willing of Nicolas Sarkozy to deport foreign people. They remind that it is illegal and non-conform to the European Human Right Convention. It is also a very discriminatory device, as it may get confused between immigrant people in general and rioters. It may also revive the tensions.

[http://www.ldh-france.org/actu\\_derniereheure.cfm?idactu=1144](http://www.ldh-france.org/actu_derniereheure.cfm?idactu=1144)

For more details see the LDH website: <http://www.ldh-france.org/>