

Hundreds injured in Romania protests as emigrants return to fight corruption

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Riot police in Bucharest use tear gas and water cannon on Friday night

Tens of thousands of protesters have rallied in cities across [Romania](#) against the ruling Social Democrat (PSD) government, with riot police in the capital, Bucharest, firing tear gas into the crowd and hundreds needing medical attention.

Friday's protests were organised and promoted by groups of Romanians working abroad, angry at what they say is entrenched corruption, low wages and attempts by the PSD to weaken the judiciary in one of the European Union's most corrupt states.

In Bucharest, some protesters attempted to force their way through security lines guarding government buildings. Others threw bottles and rocks at riot police, who called the groups "provocateurs".

As the protest continued well into the night, riot police used a water cannon and increasingly sprayed tear gas into the crowd. Video footage posted on social media show police beating non-violent protesters holding their hands up.

Hundreds of Romanians have been injured in the protests. Photograph: Bogdan Cristel/EPA

More than 400 people required medical assistance, the emergency intervention agency ISU said, including two riot police who became separated from their unit.

Tens of thousands of people staged peaceful protests in other Romanian cities.

Centrist Romanian president Klaus Iohannis condemned the police's use of force as disproportionate. "I firmly condemn riot police's brutal intervention, strongly disproportionate to the actions of the majority of people in the square," he said on his Facebook page. "The interior ministry must explain urgently the way it handled tonight's events."

Among the crowds in Bucharest were truck driver Daniel Ostafi, 42, who moved to Italy 15 years ago in search of a future he says Romania could not offer his family, and Mihai Podut, 27, a construction worker who left in 2014, first for France and later Germany.

They joined tens of thousands outside government headquarters in scorching temperatures, waving Romanian and European Union flags and demanding the cabinet's resignation. Messages projected on buildings around the square said "We are the people" and "No violence".

An estimated three to five million Romanians work and live abroad, the World Bank has said, up to a quarter of the state's population, taking roles ranging from day labourers to doctors. They sent home just under \$5bn last year, a lifeline for rural communities in one of the EU's least developed

countries.

"I left to give my children a better life, which was not possible here then," said Ostafi.

"Unfortunately, it is still not possible, the ... people who govern us are not qualified and they are corrupt," he said, adding he hoped the next parliamentary election would see a bigger turnout.

Peaceful protests have repeatedly been held since the PSD took power in early 2017 and tried to decriminalise several corruption offences.

This year it pushed changes to the criminal code through parliament that have raised concerns from the European commission and US state department. The changes are being challenged in the constitutional court.

Romania ranks as one of the EU's most corrupt states and Brussels keeps its justice system under special monitoring.

Some politicians from the ruling coalition derided the rally, saying they did not understand why the diaspora would protest.

Podut said: "Almost all of the public sector is malfunctioning, it must be changed completely and replaced with capable people.

"I would ask our ruling politicians to switch places with us, work the way we do and see what that is like."

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