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COVID: Berlin court bans anti-lockdown protests

DEUTSCHE WELLE

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The Querdenker is Germany's main anti-lockdown movement, that has organized numerous protests since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Photo: Christian Mang/Rückblende 2020/dpa/picture alliance

Judges in the German capital have moved to ban a number of weekend demonstrations amid fears they will lead to a rise in coronavirus infections. Police expect protesters to travel to Berlin nonetheless.

Berlin authorities have banned more than tens of thousands of anti-lockdown protesters demonstrating during the last weekend in July.

Judges at the German capital's administrative court refused to authorize 13 demonstrations, some of which had been organized by the Querdenker (Lateral thinker) anti-lockdown movement. Organizers said 22,500 people had registered to take part in one of the rallies.

Court officials said the protests were banned amid fears of a rise in coronavirus infections sparked by the Delta variant. A separate march planned for Sunday has also been forbidden. The "For Peace, Freedom, Truth" rally had been expected to draw 3,500 people. Several of the demonstrations had been organized in support of Berlin's nightclubs.

Why were the demos banned?

But the court said the risk to public health was too high. Berlin police fear that many of them will still decide to travel to the German capital. The bans affect all protests "whose participants regularly do not follow legal regulations, specifically to protect against infections," said police spokesman Thilo Cablitz.

He cited the refusal by demonstrators to wear a mask.

What is the 'Querdenker'?

The Querdenker, or lateral thinker group is Germany's main anti-lockdown movement. It has been monitored by the country's intelligence agencies amid fears of its links to far-right and extremist groups.

The group has helped spread conspiracy theories about the pandemic and vaccination efforts. They claim that COVID-19 and the federal and regional laws aimed at halting the spread of the virus, infringe on citizens' liberties. Critics, including the far-right Alternative for Germany party, say the ban is hypocritical because authorities allowed a march of 35,000 people to take place last weekend.

jf/mm (DPA, Reuters)