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Efforts to remove protesters are continuing

A train carrying a consignment of nuclear waste to a storage site in northern Germany has been temporarily reversed to a secure location after protesters blocked the railway.

Demonstrators have cemented themselves to the tracks, and while efforts to remove them have been going on through the night, it may be several hours before the route is clear.

Earlier on Tuesday, police fought running battles with protesters at Dannenberg, where the six waste containers are due to be transferred to lorries on Wednesday for the final leg of their journey to the Gorleben storage site.

The spent nuclear fuel from German power plants is returning from reprocessing in France.

Highly-charged debate

The looming confrontation at Gorleben follows a highly charged debate in Germany about nuclear power.

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Last year, the coalition government of Social Democrats and Greens struck a deal to phase out nuclear energy.

But the compromise reached with the nuclear industry would



Officials expect more clashes on Wednesday

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allow some reactors to remain in service for more than 20 years - far too long for some anti-nuclear campaigners.

The German Government says it has tightened safety rules for the transports since the previous administration suspended shipments in 1998 because of radioactive leaks on some containers.

Spent nuclear fuel from German power plants is sent abroad for reprocessing, but the contracts oblige Germany to take back the resulting waste.

Massive security

Riot police reinforcements were sent to Dannenberg on Tuesday after clashes in which protesters threw stones and fired flares. A police car was also set on fire. Police replied with water cannon and baton charges.

About 20,000 police were in action in Germany's biggest security operation in years after protesters turned the last transport of nuclear waste in 1997 into chaos.

Clashes died down overnight, partly because bitter cold forced protesters to retreat, police said.

But officials expected more clashes on Wednesday as the waste is transferred from the train to the lorries.

Protester Jascha Luedeke, 17, said: "We'll sleep in the open tonight and come back in the morning."

"The government has got to see how many people are against this."

Throughout Tuesday, the convoy was greeted by sporadic protests as it moved north east from France, where the waste from Germany was reprocessed.

It took a detour to avoid the university city of Goettingen, where hundreds of people briefly occupied the tracks. Dozens of people were arrested along the route.



A protester flashes a victory sign from on top of the train



Police arrive in Dannenberg

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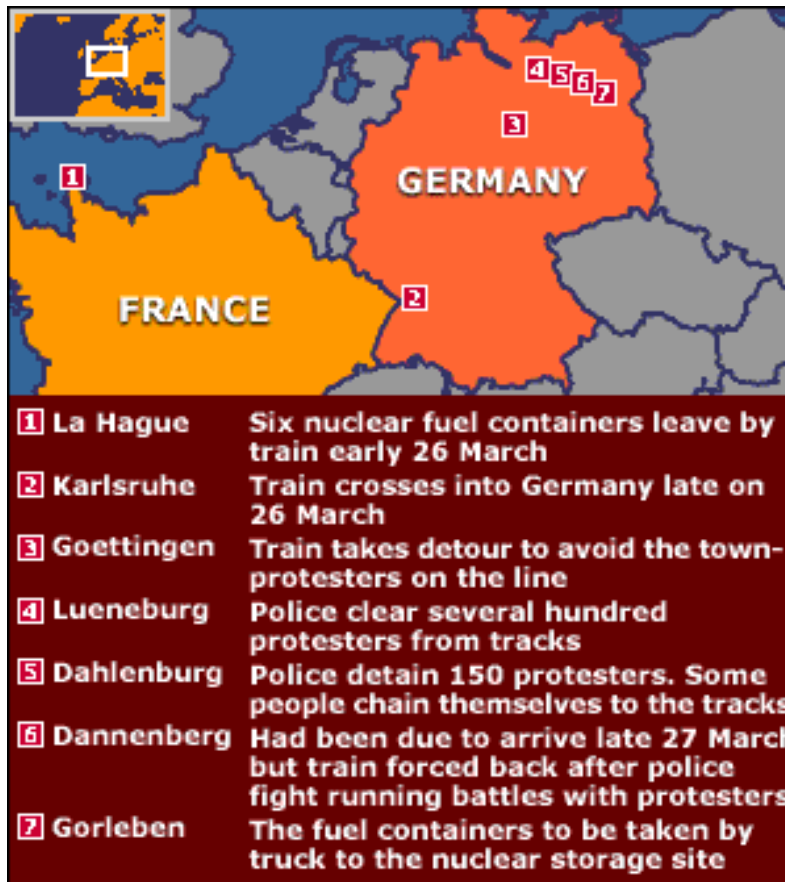
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