

Thousands rally in new Greece protests over train crash

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Protesters hold banners during a demonstration in front of the parliament building, following the fatal collision of two trains, in Athens, Greece, March 12, 2023. The banners read "They were students. The car sank with students' blood." REUTERS/Louiza Vradi

Athens, March 13 (RHC)-- Thousands of people have rallied in central Athens to protest over Greece's deadliest rail disaster, which killed dozens of people last month. The demonstrators expressed anger over safety deficiencies in Greece's railway network and demanded punishment for those responsible for

the head-on collision between a passenger train and a freight train that killed 57 people on February 28. Police said that more than 8,000 people in Athens gathered outside Parliament to protest on Sunday.

Protesters flooded Athens's Syntagma Square, waving banners that read "We won't forget, we won't forgive" and "We will become the voice of all the dead". "It was anger and rage that brought me here," Markella, a 65-year-old Athens protester who gave only one name, told the AFP news agency.

Another demonstrator, 26-year-old Alexandros, added: "We're getting desperate. You don't know what to say, what to do – all you can do is join the protest."

The protesters later marched to the offices of privatised train operator Hellenic Train. The company, which has been owned by Italy's Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane since 2017, isn't responsible for the maintenance of the railway network. State-owned Hellenic Railways is in charge of upkeep.

Reporting from Athens, Al Jazeera's John Psaropoulos said "the message on the street today ... was one of scepticism and confrontation towards the government." Authorities shut down four metro stations on two lines running through central Athens because of the protest.

Sunday's rallies, which passed off without serious incident, weren't as well-attended as similar events earlier in the week, when more than 30,000 had turned out in Athens and more than 20,000 in Thessaloniki.

A memorial service was conducted for 12 students of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece's largest university, who were killed in the train crash. A stationmaster accused of placing the trains on the same track has been charged with negligent homicide and other offences, and the country's transportation minister and senior railway officials resigned the day after the crash.

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