

King gives more time to find Belgium a government

The waiting goes on for frustrated Belgians demanding the formation of a new government

King Albert has recently given his chief mediator some time to try to break a political deadlock after the elections. The challenge for the mediator was to bring together increasingly fractious rival French and Dutch-speaking parties.

The deadlock is over the country's linguistic and economic divide. The foreign press was closely watching developments. Tony Connelly, a journalist from Ireland, said, "It is embarrassing for a modern Western democratic country that it is now being compared to Iraq." Pascal Verdeau, a French journalist, said, "I think Europeans should now put pressure on the Belgian government, because if this doesn't work between the different communities in Belgium — which is after all a small European laboratory — how is it going to work elsewhere in Europe?"

Recent demonstrations have called for more efforts to resolve the impasse. On the Internet, people could also join a virtual protest camp in front of the Prime Minister's office. Parliamentary elections were held on June 13th, but a struggle between French- and Dutch-speaking parties over money, regional powers and influence in Brussels has so



A woman wearing a Belgian national flag and a wig stands outside Notre Dame de Laeken church

far stymied every attempt to form a working coalition government.

The King met his chief coalition negotiator, acting Finance Minister Didier Reynders, and 'prolonged his mission ... to allow him to complete and refine his report,' according to a pal-

ace statement. Mr. Reynders is the sixth person to have tried his hand at brokering a deal between the feuding language groups. He is to focus on the division of power in the Brussels region, the more general share of power between all regions and the federal

government, and the long-term financing of the state.

Belgium has already broken the European record for the longest period without a mandated government, and is now widely expected to lift the world record from Iraq.

EU finance ministers agree on 500bn Euro future rescue fund

Eurozone finance ministers agree that a permanent rescue mechanism to be set up from 2013 would total 500bn Euros, but are waiting for EU leaders' guidance to agree changes to the existing bailout fund

The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) will be part of a 'comprehensive package' of measures European leaders are hoping to agree in late March to resolve the year long debt crisis. Apart from the Eurozone, the ESM would also get cash from the IMF and, possibly, from voluntary contributions from non-Eurozone EU countries. Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn said the IMF's contribution could be 250bn Euros, but noted the size had not been discussed with the IMF yet.

The ESM is likely to include the possibility of private investors having to mark down their holdings if a Eurozone state becomes insolvent. It is to be created in mid-2013 to help solvent countries through liquidity problems and replace the 3 year European Financial Stability Facility and the European Financial Stability Mechanism, which now together have, nominally, the same 500bn Euros at their disposal.

European Parliament approves new fake medicine directive



A Santhera employee works with test tubes in Liestal

A new directive to protect patients from fake medicines has been approved by the European Parliament

It paves the way for new safe-

guards including extra safety features on drug packaging and new measures for Internet pharmacies. An estimated 1 percent of medicines sold to the public in Europe through

legal channels are fake. Experts say they are 'silent killers', either because they do not work or contain harmful substances. The 27 EU governments — the Council — will now study the directive and they can still make amendments before it becomes law. The final text will then be incorporated into national laws EU-wide within two years.

The National Pharmacy Association, which represents community pharmacists in the UK, said the legislation aimed to reduce the risk of counterfeit medicines reaching patients by introducing a product authentication system and new safety features on packaging. The key to the system is a two-dimensional barcode added to prescription medicines that can be read by a new scanner.

Student visa limits dire for universities

Proposed new restrictions on student visas would result in 'dire consequences' for the UK's universities, a report warns

A study for the Higher Education Policy Institute says the measures would cut the number of foreign students coming to UK universities, losing billions of Pounds in income. The plans are better designed to cut recruitment than visa abuse, it adds.

The government said talented overseas students were vital to the economy. Its plans include reducing

the number of foreign students studying below degree level, raising the students' language requirement and limiting their entitlement to work and bring their family to the UK. It also proposes to improve the accreditation process and inspections for education providers to weed out bogus colleges.

The report by Professor Edward Acton, Vice Chancellor of the University of East Anglia, points out that overseas students bring in vital income worth nearly £5bn a year in

fees and off-campus expenditure. They are often charged much higher tuition fees than home students. "In a tricky funding period most universities plan to expand international numbers in the immediate future. The ability to do so reflects and enhances the reputation of UK higher education internationally," the report says. It also points out that many science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses are only made viable by the presence of overseas students.

IBM's Watson supercomputer crowned at quiz show 'Jeopardy'

IBM's Watson supercomputer has trounced its two competitors in a televised show pitting human brains against computer bytes

After a three night marathon on the quiz show 'Jeopardy', Watson emerged victorious to win a \$1m. The computer's competitors were two of the most successful players ever to have taken part in 'Jeopardy'. But in the end their skill at the game was no match for Watson.

The victory for Watson and IBM was about more than money. It was about ushering in a new era in computing where machines will increasingly be able to learn and understand what humans are really asking them for.

The technology behind Watson has the ability to scan and analyse information from many more resources than a human can in a short period of time, potentially aiding doctors in diagnosing patients quickly. Other possible applications for Watson's technology include dealing with big sets of data commonly found in the legal and financial worlds.

Dutch museum to lend Picasso for display in West Bank

The painting will go on loan from Eindhoven

Palestinian art lovers are to get a rare chance to view a Picasso when the painting goes on display in April, on loan from a Dutch museum.

Eindhoven's Van Abbe Museum is lending the 1943 canvas *Buste de Femme* to the Ramallah International Art Academy. A film is due to be made of the painting's journey, including the Israeli border and other checkpoints. A special, temperature-controlled room is being prepared to house it. It is believed to be the first time a Picasso masterpiece will go on display in the Palestinian territories.



The *Picasso in Palestine* exhibition is a joint project between the Van Abbe and the Ramallah Academy.

Other works in the Eindhoven Museum's collection include pieces by Kandinsky and Mondrian, and paintings by Dutch artists such as Isaac Israels and Carel Willink.

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