

# Switzerland re-imposes work permit quotas

Switzerland is to re-impose quotas on workers from Central and Eastern Europe as it faces domestic criticism of soaring immigration. The move will in effect cut the number of permits granted annually by two thirds.

Swiss Justice Minister, Simonetta Sommaruga, explained the Swiss Cabinet was reacting to several concerns in the country including issues of integration. "The Federal Council is not afraid but rather it is sensitive to the fears and the concerns of people who say while its positive there are so many people who want to come to work here, there are also things that make us worried," she said.

The Government will impose a quota of 2,000 permits for the year from May 1st on eight European member countries. They are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Bulgaria and Romania are separate cases.

Switzerland says it's within its rights to invoke a 'safeguard clause' in its agreement with the European Union but EU Commission has accused it of discrimination. EU Commission spokesperson Michael Mann said, "It vio-



Seasonal workers cut lamb's lettuce during harvest on a field in Niederbipp

lates the agreement on free movement of people. There were exceptions for the new member states until 2011 but these exceptions

are over now and according to us Switzerland does not have the right to make a difference between the different member states.

We are 27, full stop."

Switzerland's unemployment rate is currently a low three percent although it has seen a recent

influx of immigrant workers. A right-wing party has blamed immigration for what it calls 'the erosion of cultural values'.

## Strikes hit Slovenia as public sector down tools

**Eurozone witnesses another protest as 80,000 public sector workers down tools in Slovenia in protest against stinging wage cuts**

The strike closed schools and other public institutions as tens of thousands rallied against Government plans to slash the budget deficit from 6.4 per cent to 3.5 percent. Public sector pay and benefits will bear the brunt of the cuts.

Prime Minister Janez Janša said the country's economy was 'on the edge' and major changes to his Government's austerity measures were not possible. "The strike didn't solve a single problem. There isn't any more money in the budget because of it. There will be less because those who worked will have to pay for the damage caused by the action," he said.

The country's export reliant economy was hit hard by the global economic crisis in 2009 and re-entered recession in 2011 with predictions that 2012 will see Slovenia plunged further into the mire.

## Floral display marks 100 days to London Olympics



Tourists take photos of London Olympic countdown clock

**A special clock in London's Trafalgar Square counts down to the city hosting the Olympic Games 100 days from now**

England's capital is expecting an estimated five million extra visitors and the Chairman of the International Olympic Committee's Co-ordination Commission, Denis Oswald, said, "This summer will be a summer like no other."

Standing in Trafalgar Square, Fabrice Levasseur, a tourist from Toulouse, also thought it was a day worth marking. "It's a symbolic number — 100 days to go before the Olympic Games. It's going to be

a great event for London and for the whole world. The city looks beautiful today, it's looking great, and after all the works that are going on have been completed, it will look even better," he said.

Celebrating 100 days to go, a depiction of the Olympic rings made up of 25,000 flowers is on display at London's famous botanical Kew Gardens. At the same time, it is full speed ahead on essential work needed to update London's transport system. The city's underground train network is the oldest in the world and will need to cope with visitors as well as the everyday needs of Londoners.

## Italy goes for growth over austerity

**Italy is to shift its focus from austerity to growth — so delaying by a year its plan to balance the budget in 2013**

Prime Minister Mario Monti has decided that reviving economic growth now had to take priority over belt tightening that could plunge the country deeper into recession. After a Cabinet meeting that accepted new economic targets based on a much deeper than

originally forecast recession, Mr. Monti said, "Italy has found itself — and still finds itself in a difficult situation and we wanted to avoid the same tragic fate as Greece. But rebalancing the Italian economy will take many years. Everything, everything that we are doing now is aimed towards helping growth."

Italy's new forecasts raise the 2012 deficit target marginally

to 1.7 percent of gross domestic product from 1.6 percent, while the 2013 goal is raised to 0.5 percent from 0.1 percent. An almost balanced budget, with a 0.1 percent deficit, is now targeted in 2014. The reaction from the markets was muted, in contrast to fellow Eurozone struggler Spain which saw its borrowing costs soar when Madrid relaxed its deficit targets.

## Nazi-looted painting returns

**A 474 year old painting stolen by Nazis during WWII returned to the heirs of its Paris-based Italian Jewish owner**

*Christ Carrying the Cross Dragged by a Rascal* by Girolamo de Romani was one of 70 items stolen from the collection of Frederico Gentili di Giuseppe. US officials confiscated the work in November as a 15 year effort to return the painting came to a head. Gentili died of natural causes in 1940, a month before the invasion of France. His collection was sold by the Vichy French Government in 1941.

"Thanks to the tireless efforts of those involved, we are now righting a wrong perpetrated more than 70 years ago," Susan McCormick, a special agent with US Homeland Security investigations, says. "70 years is a very



Girolamo Romano's painting

long time but it shows that it is never too late to right a wrong." The painting was one of 50 works on loan to a museum in Tallahassee, Florida from the Pinacoteca di Brera Museum in Milan, Italy. The Italian museum had purchased the work in 1998.

An employee at Christie's auc-

tion house tipped off Interpol investigators last June that the painting may have been stolen. Gentili's grandchildren filed a suit in 1997 to get his art collection back. A few years later, the Louvre Museum in Paris returned five paintings belonging to the collector to his family. The paintings are among the estimated hundreds of thousands of works stolen from Jewish families by the Nazis. Homeland Security officials have repatriated almost 2,500 works to 23 countries since 2007.

Gentili's grandchildren plan to sell the work. "For a cake, it is relatively easy cutting it into six, not totally easy but quite easily," Lionel Salem, one of the heirs, says. "But for a painting, you see, it is more difficult."