

Egg-throwing protesters blockade Bulgaria parliament

Anti-government protests have been continuing outside Bulgaria's parliament over the weekend

Demonstrations have been held for more than five weeks calling for the coalition led by Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski to resign. Thousands of people turn out in Sofia daily to take a stand against the corruption they believe is endemic within the government.

Bulgarian leaders sought to ease tensions in the EU's poorest country but protests continued through the evening, with demonstrators booing the Socialist-backed government and calling for its resignation after less than a month in office. About 1,000 Bulgarians had gathered outside the parliament building in central Sofia in the morning, shouting 'Mafia!' and 'Resignation!' and preventing lawmakers from entering the building.

Only 112 out of 240 lawmakers braved it through the protesters, prompting a cancellation of the parliament



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tary session. Deputy Speaker and Socialist party lawmaker Maya Manolova was pelted after trying to address the angry demonstrators, who prevented MPs from leaving the building. Up to 10,000 people have protested every night since June 14th after the controversial appointment of a media mogul as head of a powerful security agency, a move which angered Bulgarians fed up with corruption and cronyism.

Although the appointment has been rescinded and

Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski apologised, the demonstrations have widened into protests against the government and politicians in general, who are seen as too easily swayed by corporate interests. Mass protests forced the previous right-wing government of Premier Boyko Borisov to resign in February, triggering elections in May that saw the installation of a Socialist-backed administration headed by the non-partisan Oresharski.

"This instability can con-

tinue indefinitely, I am afraid. Of course, we will not be able to work without Parliament," Oresharski told journalists, while President Rosen Plevneliev urged protesters to remain peaceful. In a special address, parliamentary speaker Mihail Mikov lashed out at the 'aggression against parliament unseen in years.' "The situation in Sofia escalated today, creating anxiety in the whole country... Unlike the peacefully protesting people over the past days, today a relatively small group took part in violent affrays out-

side parliament," Mikov said.

"We are unable to perform the duties we were chosen for by the Bulgarian people," he said, urging all institutions to help restore peace and enable parliament to push through urgent legislation, including changes to the electoral code demanded by protesters. Without respect for the vote of the people, constitutional order and the institutions, a democratic way out of the crisis is impossible, even if snap elections are called," Mikov warned.

Work begins on revising Egypt's constitution

Egypt's interim Prime Minister was joined by a panel of experts to begin revising the country's Islamist-tinged constitution

It is the first step towards fresh elections after the removal of Mohamed Mursi as president. The original constitution was approved in a referendum last year but critics said it failed to protect human rights and social justice. The work began against a backdrop of further protests — thousands of female Mursi supporters held a rally calling for the ousted president's reinstatement.

On the whole the weekend was marked by an absence of violence in Cairo, however, in the Sinai peninsula three members of Egypt's security forces were killed recently — the latest in a string of attacks blamed on Islamist militants opposed to the army.

Vodafone under pressure in Europe, sees no let-up

Vodafone has said it continues to be hit by regulator-ordered price cuts, economic pressures and competition around Europe

Its latest results did meet expectations, but it suffered a worse than expected 5.1 percent drop in service revenue in Germany, its biggest European market, and a 4.5 percent fall in its home base — Britain. Spain was down 10.6 percent and Italy down 17.6 percent, as cash-strapped customers made fewer calls and did not upgrade their handsets.

The world's second-largest mobile operator said it sees no prospect of improvement in the near future.

"Conditions in Europe remain challenging in northern and central and southern Europe," Chief Executive Vittorio Colao said. The falls across the core region of Europe took the shine off some of Vodafone's better-performing businesses, including India which showed signs of stability and an increasing demand for internet services after years of a ferocious price war.



Downtown Detroit is seen through a window from the State Of Michigan offices

Down and out in Detroit

Detroit is an economic basket case. More than 75,000 abandoned buildings mean the city's income from property taxes has fallen by 40 percent in the last 13 years as residents flee to the suburbs.

With no money it can afford to run only a third of its ambulances and 40 percent of the street lights are burnt out. It has been borrowing to keep going and so owes upwards of \$18 billion, perhaps as much as 20 billion. That left emergency manager Kevyn Orr, who was appointed to clear up the mess, with no option but bankruptcy. He said, "I'd be happy to listen to any other plan someone can

come up with, given the restraints we are working under. The reality is with \$12 billion in unsecured debt there is precious little we can do."

That \$12 billion in unsecured debts means many investors will only get back a fraction of the money they lent to Detroit. Last month the emergency manager offered them just 10 cents for every Dollar they were owed. He now has to sell off city assets to raise money for those creditors and pension liabilities, as well as other benefits and health coverage for city workers and ex-employees. The mess will take a bankruptcy court years to sort out, and has investors worried that this could happen to other big US cities.

Detroit has tens of thousands of creditors and the city already faced a number of lawsuits before filing for bankruptcy and experts expect the court case could last years and cost tens of millions of dollars.

Orr acknowledged that the court battle could be protracted and difficult, saying that straight off the bat the city will 'have an eligibility fight, I suspect' over his right to file for bankruptcy. News of Detroit's bankruptcy, meanwhile, sent prices tumbling across the \$3.7 trillion municipal bond market, which has been on a weak footing for weeks thanks to uncertainty about the future of the US Federal Reserve's massive stimulus programme.

G20 backs plan to stop international tax avoidance

Finance ministers from the G20 group of leading nations have formally backed plans to tackle global tax avoidance and evasion

A statement issued earlier supports the automatic exchange of tax information between countries. It also backs plans by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to stop firms moving their profits across borders to avoid taxes. The OECD said some firms 'abuse' current rules to avoid tax. UK Chancellor George Osborne said the announcement, which came after a two-day G20 meeting in Moscow, was an 'important step towards a global tax system that is fair and fit for purpose for the modern economy'. Last month, the G8 group of leading economies agreed a deal to 'fight the scourge of tax evasion', and nations including the UK, France, Germany, the USA and Aus-



Christine Lagarde

tralia are taking part in a pilot information exchange scheme.

The G20 said the changes should be in place within two years but this is very ambitious, because hundreds of tax treaties exist between countries and 'thousands of amendments' might be needed. Many multinational firms currently avoid tax — legally — by means including loopholes and tax havens, but the new rules could require them to pay more in the countries where they do business.