

Europe Sees Way Out Of Crisis

Fiscal Union Would Require Countries To Submit Budgets, Limit Deficits

BY GABRIELE STEINHAUSER AND DON MELVIN
Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Working almost to exhaustion and persuading countries one by one, European leaders agreed Friday to redefine their continent — hoping that by joining their fiscal fortunes they might stop a crippling debt crisis, save the euro currency and prevent worldwide economic chaos.

Only one country said no: Britain. It will risk isolation while the rest of the continent plots its future.

The coalition came together in a marathon negotiating session among the 27 European Union heads of government — hard bargaining that began with dinner Thursday evening and ended after 4 a.m., when red-eyed officials appeared before weary journalists to explain their proposed treaty.

It was a major step forward in the long, postwar march toward European integration. It was two decades ago, on Dec. 9 and 10, 1991, that European negotiators drafted a treaty in Maastricht, Netherlands, to unite their politics, create a central bank and, one day, invent a common currency.

"This is the breakthrough to the stability union. We are using crisis as an opportunity for a renewal."

ANGELA MERKEL

Friday's agreement — 23 countries are in favor and three more say they are open to the idea — would force countries to submit their budgets for central review and limit the deficits they can run.

The hope is that it will stem a crisis over sovereign debt that consumed Greece, spread to Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and threatens to explode into a worldwide financial crisis capable of pushing the global economy into recession.

"This is the breakthrough to the stability union," German Chancellor Angela Merkel said. "We are using the crisis as an opportunity for a renewal."

To prevent excessive deficits, countries in the treaty will have to submit their national budgets to the European Commission, the ex-

ecutive body of the EU, which will have the power to send them back for revision.

They must also bring their budgets close to balance. Except in special circumstances, the budget deficit of a country won't be able to exceed 0.5 percent of gross domestic product, the amount of goods and services produced by its economy. An unspecified "automatic correction mechanism" would punish the rule-breakers.

Germany and France insist that fiscal union is the best way to regain market trust, badly shaken by the escalating financial crisis. Most economists think it will not be enough.

They say the euro countries also need enough money to guarantee that they can pay the massive debts that have resulted from running budget deficits year after year. Euro leaders put off until March a decision on whether to provide money on top of a (euro) 500 billion, or \$668 billion, bailout fund for euro countries.

European leaders did agree to add (euro) 200 billion to the International Monetary Fund to help ailing countries.

Police ID Va. Tech Gunman

BY BOB LEWIS AND ZINIE CHEN SAMPSON
Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — A part-time college student at a small school near Virginia Tech was identified Friday as the gunman who shot a police officer to death and then killed himself, triggering a lockdown on a campus still coping with the nation's worst mass slaying in recent memory.

The day before the shootings, police said Ross Truett Ashley, 22, stole a sport utility vehicle at gunpoint from a real estate office in Radford. He dumped the car on the Virginia Tech campus.

Authorities have not been able to say what led Ashley to kill a police officer he did not know at a school he had never attended.

"That's very much the fundamental part of the investigation right now," state police spokeswoman Corrine Geller said Friday at a news conference.

Police said Ashley walked up to patrolman Deriek W. Crouse and fired, then took off for the campus greenhouses, ditching his pullover, wool cap and backpack. He made his way to a nearby parking lot and when a deputy spotted him, he took his own life.

Ashley was a business management major at Radford, the school said on its website. He was from Partlow, Va., about 160 miles northeast of Virginia Tech. In Radford, he lived in a second-floor apartment above a yogurt shop, consignment store, barber shop and a tattoo parlor.

Neighbor Nan Forbes, a Radford senior, said Ashley was quiet, rarely seen or heard from.

Romney Weighs In On Gingrich

THOMAS BEAUMONT
Associated Press

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney dived into his campaign's full-scale critique of rival Newt Gingrich on Friday, standing by top supporters who described the former House speaker as self-serving and mocking some of his ideas about science and technology.

In return, top Gingrich backers described Romney's criticism as a sign of panic less than four weeks until the Iowa caucuses begin the 2012 nominating contest. Gingrich has risen to the top of Iowa polls in the past two weeks and is leading in some other states, too.

While Gingrich kept to his pledge not to criticize his GOP rivals, he reignited criticism for being a loose cannon by referring to the Palestinian people as being an "invented" people.

Romney said in Des Moines that he stood by former New Hampshire Gov. John Sununu, who described Gingrich on Thursday as "self-serving" and "anti-conservative" for criticizing a Medicare provision in House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan's budget.

"I fully support John Sununu," Romney said when asked about the comments during a meeting with The Des Moines Register's editorial board. The former Massachusetts governor noted their differences on immigration and environmental policy and poked at Gingrich's futuristic ideas.

"He talked about putting a permanent colony on the moon to mine rare materials from the moon. He even talked about a series of mirrors that we could put in space that would light our highways at night," Romney said. "I think we have some other priorities before we do that. I have some better ideas for our resources."

Romney also hinted at their larger career differences, a theme that could come up during Satur-



CHRISTOPHER GANNON/MCT
Mitt Romney speaks during a town hall meeting to discuss jobs and the economy at Diamond V, an animal nutrition company in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on Friday, December 9, 2011.

day's nationally televised debate in Des Moines and in television ads before the Jan. 3 caucuses.

"We're very different people, my background and his. We followed very different paths," he said. "And someone who has spent their time in the private sector has by far the best chance of defeating the president."

It was Romney's most thorough critique of Gingrich since the former Georgia congressman leaped past him to the top of national GOP preference polls and to the top of surveys in Iowa in the past two weeks.

Gingrich's top backers in Iowa

attributed Romney's comments to worry that Gingrich could beat him and weaken his chances of winning in the must-win New Hampshire primary, which comes a week later.

"What we're seeing from Mitt Romney in Boston is desperation and panic and I think that's going to be very frustrating to people moving forward," said Iowa state Rep. Linda Upmeyer, Gingrich's Iowa campaign chairwoman. "That isn't what wins you caucuses or elections here in Iowa."

The back-and-forth was the latest in a quickly intensifying two-candidate race for the nomination.

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Fire At Hospital In India Kills At Least 89

KOLKATA, India (AP) — Fleeing medical staff abandoned patients to a fire that killed 89 people Friday as black smoke poured through the seven-story hospital in this city in eastern India, officials said. Six administrators were arrested.

Dwellers of a nearby slum who first noticed the smoke and fire rushed to the AMRI Hospital to raise the alarm, but security guards kept them back, saying it was only a small blaze, witnesses said.

It took firefighters in the city formerly known as Calcutta more than an hour to respond, said Pradeep Sarkar, a witness whose uncle was hospitalized but was among those safely evacuated from the private facility. Some of the slum dwellers helped with the rescue.

The neighborhood's narrow streets apparently made it difficult for fire trucks to get close to the building and to bring in big hydraulic ladders. Eventually, they smashed through a main gate to make way for the ladders.

Six hospital directors surrendered to police and were charged with culpable homicide, according to police who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

Man Condemned To Die For Killing 3 In Conn.

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — A jury condemned a Connecticut man to death Friday for killing a woman and her two daughters during a night of terror in their suburban home, a gruesome crime that evoked comparisons to Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" and halted momentum to abolish the death penalty in the state.

The jury took five days to deliberate defense attorneys' request to spare the life of Joshua Komisarjevsky in light of abuse he suffered as a boy. Komisarjevsky, who will join his accomplice Steven Hayes on Connecticut's death row, stood rigidly with his arms behind his back and had no visible reaction.

The two paroled burglars tormented a family of four in the affluent New Haven suburb of Cheshire before killing Jennifer Hawke-Petit and leaving her daughters, 17-year-old Hayley and 11-year-old Michaela, to die in a fire.

The only survivor, Dr. William Petit, was beaten with a baseball bat and tied up but managed to escape. He appeared calm as the verdict was pronounced, his eyes blinking rapidly and his hand clenched in a fist on the seat in front of him. He later bowed his head and closed his eyes.

Universities Buying Up .xxx Website Names

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The University of Kansas is buying up website names such as www.KUgirls.xxx and www.KUnurses.xxx. But not because it's planning a Hot Babes of Kansas site or an X-rated gallery of the Nude Girls of the Land of Aaahs.

Instead, the university and countless other schools and businesses are rushing to prevent their good names from falling into the hands of the pornography industry. Over the past two months, they have snapped up tens of thousands of ".xxx" website names that could be exploited by the adult entertainment business.

"Down the road there's no way we can predict what some unscrupulous entrepreneur might come up with," said Paul Vander Tuig, trademark licensing director at the Lawrence, Kan., school.

The university spent nearly \$3,000 in all. It plans to sit on the .xxx names and do nothing with them.

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