

# G20 agrees measures to tackle high global food prices

Agriculture ministers from the G20 group of nations have agreed a series of measures they hope will reduce food price volatility and boost supplies

In a communiqué following a two day meeting in Paris ministers said they would adopt a new collective rapid response system to help calm any spikes in prices. They have also agreed to look at new rules to tackle food price speculation. However, it remains to be seen whether these will be adopted.

This is because any moves to target speculators in the food commodity markets will have to be agreed by G20 finance ministers at a later date. France had led the call for tough action on speculation, while the UK has instead said that the focus should be on better aligning supply and demand of food products.

Other policies agreed at the meeting include the creation of a new international agricultural market information system to improve access to food output statistics. In addition, the G20 has agreed to exclude humanitarian aid from export restrictions, and explore the implementation of humanitarian food aid stocks. Regarding bio-fuels, agriculture ministers said they recognised the need for further analysis of the issue.

There is controversy over whether bio-fuels contribute to higher fuel prices by using up



A trolley laden with fresh and processed food sits parked in an aisle as customers shop at a supermarket

land that otherwise could grow crops for human consumption. The US Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack, called the agreement 'an historic union of resolve in combating the pressing challenges of hunger and food price volatility confronting our world'.

However, the French branch of charity Oxfam was much less complementary, saying the G20's agreed measures were 'very far from the massive surgery needed to attack the food crisis'. Global food prices have hit all-time highs over the past year.

The World Bank says that, since June last year, rising and volatile food prices have led to an estimated 44m more people living in poverty, defined under \$1.25 a day. It estimates that there are close to one billion hungry people worldwide.

## Spain successfully auctions T-bills

As the market awaits clarity over a second Greek bailout, another troubled Eurozone country, Spain has successfully sold 2.99bn Euros worth of government bonds

Madrid did have to pay slightly higher interest rates to encourage investors to buy the bonds which are to be paid back in three and six months' time. The treasury bills attracted solid volumes of bids from investors. The Spanish auction was being closely watched for signs of contagion from Greek uncertainty. Markets have long been jittery over whether Spain could follow Greece, Portugal and Ireland into the Eurozone debt crisis.

## Special 'K' fastest computer ever

World's fastest computer is being built in Japan — as strong as a million desktop PCs

The supercomputer can perform a quadrillion calculations a second. By the time scientists at the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research in Japan have completed the 'K' computer next year, this will rise to 10,000 trillion calculations a second. The machine is three times faster than the previous number-one, China's Tianhe-1A supercomputer, and comprises 672 circuit board-filled cabinets containing nearly 70,000 processors.



Thousands of protesters have been marching in Luxembourg

## European workers' unions protest dog-bone austerity

Thousands of protesters against spending cuts and austerity have been marching in Luxembourg, with Trade Union members from all around Europe showing their disgust

They said that while incompetence by banks continues with impunity and vast billions are sunk into a proven faulty financial system, social programmes are stripped to the bone.

One activist said, "Now what we need is not a policy of austerity. We need growth, we need investment, we need Eurobonds, we need a financial transaction tax to find a solution for the Greek people and for the other countries in Europe that are in danger."

Another marcher said, "It is important for us that Europe not be destroyed. We have to ensure Europe's social dimension has a future.

The Greeks are a part of us, as well as the Germans, and German politics has to stop acting in favour of the interests of capital. Politics must work for a social Europe."

The protesters also condemned the 'Euro plus pact' for economic governance of the European Union, set to go before the European Parliament and Council, fearing the effect of the pact on salaries, collective bargaining and social protection.

## Environmental doomsday possible unless oceans are respected

Life in the world's oceans is heading the way of the dinosaurs, says an alarming expert study

The International Programme on the State of the Ocean says manmade causes are propelling us towards the worst multiple extinctions the planet has known for the past 65 mil-

lion years.

Excessive carbon dioxide, pollution and overfishing are named among the annihilating culprits. The study says that, unless immediate, globally collective actions are taken 'we face losing marine species and entire marine ecosystems, such as coral reefs,

within a single generation'. Fish are the main source of protein for a fifth of the world's population, and the seas help absorb carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas from human activities. Crucially, the experts say, reversal for survival would require policy change away from fossil fuels.

## Egon Schiele rare cityscape sells for a record £24.7 million

A rare cityscape by Austrian artist Egon Schiele has sold for a record £24.7m at a sale in London

Despite the work setting a new auction benchmark for the artist, it sold at the lower end of the estimated price of between £22m and £30m. *Hauser mit Munter Wasche Vorstadt II* was painted in 1914, four years before Schiele's death at the age of 28. The previous auction record for a Schiele oil on canvas was £13.9m. Only three notable Schiele cityscapes have been offered for auction in the last decade.



Audiences enjoy rare painting

An anonymous telephone buyer successfully bid for the painting at the Sotheby's auction in Vienna. Proceeds from the sale are expected to be used to help settle a long-running dispute over Schiele's 1912 *Portrait of Wally*, depicting his lover Walburga Neuzil.