

# *Belgians Stage Protest Against Government Reforms*

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Brussels, October 20 (RHC)-- Thousands of Belgians have taken to the streets of the capital, Brussels, to protest against broad reforms planned by the new government. The Sunday protest was organized by the Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB). According to the police, some 4,800 people participated in the demonstration. Organizers, however, put the number at over 7,000.

Protesters are opposed to the new coalition government's plans to increase the retirement age from 65 to 66 and subsequently to 67 by 2030.

"Make the millionaires pay. The old at rest, the young at work," the demonstrators chanted. Belgians are also furious at reforms that would delay the next pay rise under a wage indexation system which links pay rise to inflation.

The center-right government of Prime Minister Charles Michel, which was sworn in on October 11, has been planning unspecified tax reforms and more cuts in public spending. European countries are struggling with an economic crisis that erupted in early 2008, leaving millions unemployed and in financial distress.

According to official figures, over 125 million people across the EU, about a quarter of the bloc's entire population, either live in poverty or are at the risk of poverty. The latest figures show the bloc's jobless

rate stands at 11.5 percent. The unemployment rate is even worse among those aged between 15 and 24, as 23.3 percent are without work.

The worsening debt crisis has forced EU governments to adopt harsh austerity measures and tough economic reforms, which have triggered massive protests in many European countries.

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