

Belgium forms unity government -- finally

by UPI

BRUSSELS -- Rival parties in Belgium reached an agreement to form a coalition government following months of turmoil threatening to divide the 177-year-old country. While the agreement in the heart of the European Union concerned immigration and taxes, it failed to resolve demands from politicians representing the Dutch-speaking Flemish north for more autonomy from the economically depressed, French-speaking south, The Washington Post said Wednesday. The formation of the coalition government comes two days before the Flemish Yves Leterme of the Christian Democratic Party is sworn in as the new prime minister. Belgium's King Albert II made a rare call for unity in June following national elections that threatened Belgian unity. Five parties -- three Francophone and two Flemish -- ended a 21-hour marathon session to form the government, though they are still in negotiations of assigning cabinet positions. But the political crisis is far from over, as Leterme gets only 10 percent approval ratings from Francophones and just 45 percent from the Flemish, Voice of America said.

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