

Eurozone's gov't debt level continues to rise in 2011: Eurostat

BRUSSELS, April 23 (Xinhua) -- Eurozone's government debt level continued to rise in 2011 despite efforts by heavily-indebted member countries to curb the ballooning debt, the statistics office of the European Union (EU) said on Monday.

By the end of 2011, overall debt in the single-currency area rose to 87.2 percent of the countries' gross domestic product (GDP) from 85.3 percent registered at the end of 2010, Eurostat said in a statement on its website.

The highest ratio of government debt to GDP was recorded in Greece at 165.3 percent, followed by Italy at 120.1 percent, Ireland at 108.2 percent, and Portugal at 107.8 percent, according to Eurostat.

The Eurostat figures also showed that the overall debt-to-GDP ratio in the EU's 27 countries rose from 80 percent at the end of 2010 to 82.5 percent at the end of 2011.

Estonia, Bulgaria and Luxembourg registered the lowest ratios, at 6 percent, 16.3 percent and 18.2 percent respectively, while those of Europe's largest economies Germany, Britain, and France were much higher, at 81.2 percent, 85.7 percent and 85.8 percent respectively, all above what is allowed under EU rules.

However, the government deficit of both the eurozone and the EU decreased in 2011. The government deficit-to-GDP ratio declined from 6.2 percent in 2010 to 4.1 percent in 2011 in the euro area, and from 6.5 percent to 4.5 percent in the EU, Eurostat said.

Ireland's deficit of 13.1 percent of GDP was by far the highest. However, Eurostat said, 3.7 percentage points of the figure reflected state aid to two nationalized banks.

The Irish government said later Monday that stripping out the one-off capital injections into its banks, the country's underlying deficit for 2011 was 9.4 percent of its GDP, compared with the 10.6-percent target set by international lenders.

Greece, Spain and Britain also witnessed high deficit-to-GDP ratios in 2011, at 9.1 percent, 8.5 percent and 8.3 percent respectively, far above the 3-percent level allowed under EU rules.

Finland, Luxembourg and Germany were among those recording the lowest deficit levels, at 0.5 percent, 0.6 percent and 1.0 percent respectively, the data showed.