

Greek Parliament Approves Second Batch of Tough Measures



Athens, July 23 (RHC)-- The Greek parliament has approved the second batch of reforms the debt-laden country needs to implement in order to receive a new bailout from its international creditors, despite intense protests in Athens against the austerity measures.

The Greek lawmakers voted in favor of the much-debated second bill of tough reforms in the early hours of Thursday in a bid to receive a desperately-needed third bailout package worth up to 86 billion Euros (\$93 billion) over three years.

Out of the 300 seats of the parliament, 230 lawmakers voted in favor of the bill, 63 against it, five abstained and two were absent from the session.

In a passionate address to the MPs before the vote, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had urged lawmakers to vote in favor of the bill to unlock the huge bailout for the country and its cash-starved banks, saying Greece must confront "new realities."

"The left's presence in government is a bastion for the defense of the interests of the people. We will not be cowards. We will fight the battles we face with determination," he said, referring to his left-wing Syriza party.

The measures include a European Union directive that guarantees bank deposits of up to "100,000 (\$108,000) and civil justice reforms aimed at speeding up court cases and legal proceedings.

Last week, Athens agreed to the first bill of tough reforms, including tax, pension, and labor regulation reforms, in exchange for the third large bailout package.

Athens seeks to strike the deal by August 20, when it must pay the European Central Bank (ECB) -- one of its international creditors -- 3.2 billion (\$3.5 billion).

Meanwhile, some 6,000 people gathered around the country's parliament to show their dissent about the austerity measures and unfavorable reforms they have to accept in exchange for the bailout.

A number of angry protesters lobbed petrol bombs over the steel-rings surrounding the parliament. The demonstrations turned violent in some areas near the parliament building and some clashes were also reported between riot police and some protesters.

Since 2010, Athens has received two bailout packages worth a total of "240 billion (\$272 billion), from its troika of international lenders -- the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the ECB -- following its 2009 economic crisis. In exchange for the loans, Greece agreed to implement eye-watering austerity measures.

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