

Greek lawmakers back bailout reform plan

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Athens: Greece's parliament backed the government's reform plan containing austerity measures to win a third bailout early today, but with the government suffering significant losses from dissenting lawmakers.

The motion, which sought to authorise the government to use the proposal as a basis for negotiation with international creditors during the weekend, passed with 251 votes in favour, 32 against and 8 voting 'present' -- a form of abstention -- in the 300-member parliament.

Those who voted 'present' or were absent, as well as two of those who voted against, were members of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' left-wing Syriza party -- raising questions about the stability of his government.

The dissenters included two ministers Panagiotis Lafazanis who holds the energy portfolio and Dimitris Stratoulis who holds the social security portfolio and prominent party member and Parliament Speaker Zoe Konstantopoulou.

"I support the government but I don't support an austerity program of neoliberal deregulation and privatisations which ... would prolong the vicious circle of recession, poverty and misery," Lafazanis said in a statement released to the press explaining his "radical and categorical" objection to the proposal.

Former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, who resigned this week, was absent for family reasons, saying on Twitter he was spending the weekend with his daughter who was visiting from Australia. Although he sent a letter saying he would have voted in favour had he been present, it could not be counted among the 'yes' votes under parliamentary rules.

All opposition parties except the Nazi-inspired Golden Dawn and the Communist Party voted in favour. The proposed measures, including tax hikes and cuts in pension spending, are certain to inflict more pain on a Greek public who just days ago voted overwhelmingly against a similar plan.

But the new proposal, if approved by Greece's international creditors, will provide longer-term financial support for a nation that has endured six years of recession.

Without a deal, Greece faces the immediate prospect of crashing out of Europe's joint currency, the euro. It would be the first nation to do so.

If the proposal is approved, Greece would get a three-year loan package worth nearly USD 60 billion (53.5 billion euros) as well as some form of debt relief. That is far more than the 7.2 billion euros left over from Greece's previous bailout that had been at stake in the country's five-month negotiations until last month.

- AP