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After marathon in Brussels, Tsipras faces Athens sprint


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After a grueling summit in Brussels, where an agreement with lenders was achieved at the last minute, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras returned to Athens on Monday to start the domestic battle as he needs to pass six pieces of legislation by next week to satisfy creditors.

Tsipras returned to the Maximos Mansion on Monday afternoon after the summit concluded in the morning with a hard-fought agreement on the outline of a new three-year program for Greece. The prime minister, though, now has the equally challenging task of convincing his party to support it.

Energy Minister Panayiotis Lafazanis, who heads SYRIZA's Left Platform, told journalists on Monday that he would not vote for the legislation but that he would not resign from the government either. Coalition partner Panos Kammenos, who is also defense minister, adopted a similar line. In a somewhat cryptic statement, Kammenos indicated that Independent Greeks would not vote for the agreement but would continue to support the government.

Tsipras is thought to have prioritized getting the four reform bills through Parliament by Wednesday, as lenders have demanded, before dealing with the dissenters in his party and addressing the likely need for a reshuffle and a possible reconfiguration of the coalition.

Tsipras is thought to favor continuing even as a minority government with the support of New Democracy, To Potami and PASOK rather than expanding the current administration.

After 14 hours of talks with his eurozone peers, punctuated with closed-door meetings with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and European Council President Donald Tusk, Tsipras sought to defend the tough agreement he had backed, noting that he had secured a promise of debt relief and funding to boost growth.

"We gave a tough battle for six months and fought until the end in order to achieve the best that we could, a deal that would let Greece stand on its feet," he said, adding that "we faced hard decisions, tough dilemmas." "We assumed the responsibility of stopping the extremist ambitions of the most conservative circles in Europe," Tsipras added, noting that his government had averted "the transfer of assets abroad" and "a plan for the collapse of the banking system."


He admitted that the agreement included recessionary measures and will prove "difficult to implement." However, he expressed his conviction that most Greeks will support it. "We'll ensure the burden is distributed with social justice," he said, adding that "this time those who got away in the past will shoulder the burden." His government will continue striving for a return to growth "and to win back our national sovereignty."

Merkel also defended the agreement with Greece in comments to reporters, declaring that "the advantages outweigh the disadvantages." "Greece has a chance to return to the path of growth," she said, noting that a privatization fund into which authorities must transfer 50 billion euros' worth of assets would be based in Greece. She added that creditors expected Athens to roll back legislation passed since February, with the exception of humanitarian measures.

Tusk, who announced that a deal had been reached "unanimously" on Monday morning, said the next step was for finance ministers to urgently help Greece "meet her financial needs in the short term." According to the Financial Times, Merkel and Tsipras came close to storming out of talks on several occasions and it was Tusk who kept them talking. "Sorry, but there is no way you are leaving this room," he is said to have told them.

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