

Greece Financial Crisis Opens Door for Gospel

The Greek government fell into chaos Tuesday when Greece's prime minister called for a popular referendum on a new debt deal.

"There was a new agreement that updates the previous agreement that was approved," AMG International COO and executive vice president Tasos Ioannidis. "So, the new agreement has to be approved by the Greek Parliament again."

Eurozone leaders last week hammered out Greece's second financial rescue in a year, in return for yet more austerity. Given the unpopularity of the earlier measures, the second deal was likely to provoke more ire.

"People are frustrated with the austerity measures, so the Prime Minister is very worried that these new changes will be approved by Parliament," says Ioannidis. "Therefore, his idea was to hold a referendum, probably around January, to give the opportunity for the Greek people to approve the agreement."

However, the revolt came from Greece's own lawmakers who planned a no-confidence vote for Nov. 4. "It's an open question right now because the latest developments from Greece show no support for such a referendum," Tasos Ioannidis notes. The instability raised the possibility of a government collapse, and that had the rest of Europe alarmed.

Greece's decision could spark a financial market panic that could hurt other shaky European economies.

"The European powers, particularly Germany and France, are very upset because they feel that this undermines the efforts that are being made to save the euro," Ioannidis says.

If there is no government, the austerity plan they agreed on would be delayed in implementation. The debt deal was meant to help Greece stay out of default and bankruptcy. The events of the last few days could scuttle that plan and create havoc in the 17 countries sharing the euro.

The turmoil could lead to a toppling of the Greek government and a hastily organized do-over. Says Ioannidis: "It introduces a lot of uncertainty in the markets. The reaction has been very unfavorable. The reaction has been unfavorable for many in Greece. Therefore, there is a high probability that the referendum will not take place, and rather, elections will take place."

Uncertainty and the fluidity of the situation are also prompting a wave of exodus. Fotis Romeos, coordinator of Eastern European Ministries for AMG, says people are trying to leave Greece to pursue a better future.

He writes: "Thousands of Greeks have already filed petitions for immigrating to Australia and other countries which are open to immigration. The common people of middle class started feeling the pressure of the economy as the cuts in salaries and heavy taxation increased their agony and that of their families."

Yet, their team remains dedicated not only to work like St. Luke's Hospital in Thessalonica, but also to the CosmoVision Center in Athens, the bookstores and work with countless local evangelical bodies. Ioannidis says, "It's difficult for all of our co-workers in Greece. This uncertainty affects everyone, and everybody would like to have a resolution to this, to at least know where we are heading."

In the midst of this situation, the AMG team continues to proclaim the gospel and the hope found in Christ. "There is definitely a lot more interest in spiritual matters," Ioannidis says. " People are desperate. And when people get

desperate, they tend to do a lot of soul searching. It's a great opportunity to share the gospel."

There are new opportunities like the mobile medical unit which can be used to minister in northern Greece to the Pomac ethnic group. This is an unreached people group that belongs to the Muslim faith.

There's also the public face of AMG in Greece, St Luke's Hospital. Please continue to pray fervently for the staff, the needs and the financial support of the hospital. The facility is under Greece's public health system and depends on government payments for its financial well-being.

Ioannidis says the government owes the hospital a tremendous amount of money and needs help: "We are hearing the public sector continue to decline, and other private hospitals are seeing declines. We are seeing a lot of demand for our services. In the midst of this crisis, we have opportunities to minister to lots of people."

More than ever, Greece is a spiritual battleground. "We need prayer for our leaders of the ministry, particularly St. Luke's, because they have to make decisions every day in the midst of the uncertainty," Ioannidiss says. "We need prayer for Greece, that God will work in the hearts of the people and the hearts of the leaders, and that there is a resolution."