

Thousands of Greek Pensioners Protest Against Budget Cuts



Athens, April 5 (RHC)-- Thousands of elderly Greeks protested peacefully on Tuesday against more pension cuts, as cash-strapped Greece remained locked in talks with lenders on further austerity and contested labor reforms.

"Tsipras has betrayed us," said Stelios Vitzilaios as he marched with about another 4,000 pensioners through Athens with the aid of a walking stick. He started work at the age of 14, and now takes a 550-euro pension a month, 100 euros less than pre-crisis levels.

This would be the 12th reduction in pensions in seven years, a controversial issue for Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, whose Syriza party vowed to fight austerity when elected in 2015.

Pensioners in the country are often the sole means of support in a household, where a quarter of the workforce is jobless. Several said their pensions were financially supporting unemployed adult members of their family and that they scrimped on food.

"We have cut everything. We only eat beans," said Triainos Softsis, 82. His 800-euro pension was cut to 650 euro during the crisis, and now, he says, he financially supports two children and grandchildren.

Pension cuts have been a regular feature of austerity drives to ensure that financial aid continues to the

indebted country. Greece has needed three multi-billion bailouts since 2010 to stave off bankruptcy. Greece is now negotiating new cuts to keep its latest 86 billion-euro (US\$91.54 billion) bailout.

Greece has agreed to cut pension spending after its current bailout expires in 2018. It has sought to implement the cuts gradually, over two or three years. But Germany and the International Monetary Fund want them implemented in 2019.

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