# Troika enforcers return to Athens to step up looting of Greece

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Delegations from the European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) arrived in Athens Thursday. The representatives of the so-called “troika” were continuing “technical talks” with Greece's Syriza-led government that began in Brussels Wednesday on the austerity measures that are to be implemented over the coming weeks.

For the first time, representatives from the European Stability Mechanism, which facilitates the EU’s loan agreements, will also participate.

The talks were insisted on by finance ministers at Monday’s Eurogroup meeting in Brussels and must be completed to their satisfaction before Syriza can receive any further loans to pay off billions of euros in debts that are due this month. It must pay almost €20 billion in the course of 2015. Without access to an outstanding €7.2 billion tranche of funds, conditional on existing austerity agreements being implemented in full, Greece will be forced to default on its €320 billion debt in a matter of weeks.

The Syriza government, which on February 20 signed off on a four-month extension of the existing austerity programme, fraudulently claims that the deal meant the end of austerity.

In fact, it agreed not to “unilaterally” implement even the limited measures it was elected on. Syriza insisted that troika officials would no longer return to Athens to monitor the implementation of austerity. With this week’s events, these threadbare claims have been shot to pieces. The troika is not only back in Athens, but over the next weeks it will be coordinating with Syriza the imposition of even deeper austerity measures.

In a cynical attempt to save face, Syriza has insisted that the troika now be referred to as the “institutions”. Along these lines, the technical teams have been designated the Brussels Group (BG). However, the EC, ECB and IMF representatives at the talks—Declan Costello, Klaus Masuch and Rishi Goyal—are the same troika personnel who have been monitoring austerity in Athens for years.

The German government has led the demands that Greece adhere to the cuts agreed by the previous New Democracy/PASOK government. Following the Eurogroup meeting, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble warned, “Unless that takes place, nothing will happen.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that Athens had to show “readiness to implement reforms and duties in one’s country.”

European Commission spokeswoman Mina Andreeva said, "The Greeks won't be expected to implement 100 percent of the measures envisaged by the bailout, no country under a bailout had done so, but they will have to do a critical majority—let's say, the 70 percent that was mentioned.”

This was a reference to the fact that the Syriza government, on taking office, committed itself to implementing 70 percent of the existing austerity programme and negotiating the terms of further measures. The talks, Andreeva said, would specify the austerity measures “envisaged by the Greek authorities in order to be able to reach an agreement at the latest by the end of April.”

The Greek daily *Kathimerini* gave some details on the all-embracing remit of the negotiations, as the representatives of the global financial oligarchy keep Greece under their stranglehold.

The Brussels Group/troika will visit the State General Accounting Office as well as several ministries, with the visits taking place “in three weekly waves, focusing on different aspects of the economy each time," the newspaper wrote. "In the first week, visiting experts will examine fiscal issues. This will be followed by structural reforms in the second week and banking matters in the third."

*GR Reporter* noted that the team looking at fiscal policy will "determine whether the primary surplus that was attained last year is available, how huge the hole in the budget is, and whether additional measures will be required". The team in Athens next week "will deal with the course of the structural reforms as well as with labour legislation and privatization. The last team will hold talks on the banking sector and non-performing loans."

Among other items to be discussed, Reuters reported, are "spending ceilings for various levels of government and corrective mechanisms that would kick in on a quarterly basis if ceilings were breached."

The Greek banks have no access to international capital markets and remain afloat only due to temporary high-interest loans from the ECB's Emergency Liquidity Assistance programne, which approved only €600 million on Thursday.

Athens has been forced to raid every source of finance available to it in order to pay due debts and provide for the basic functioning of the state. The *Guardian* reported Thursday, "The debt-stricken country is resorting to increasingly desperate measures to ward off potential default. In the space of the past week it has raised six-month T-bills, tapped into the bank deposits of pensions and public sector salaries, postponed government payments for supplies to the public and private sector, and approached the Greek subsidiaries of multi-national companies for short-term loans."

Syriza's leaders are acutely aware of the enormous social and political backlash they face as the cuts in living standards they will be imposing are finalised and begin to be rolled out. This accounts for the rhetoric now being employed by its leading officials. On Thursday, Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis said, "The ECB in my opinion is pursuing a policy that can be considered asphyxiating toward our government."

Earlier, he lodged an official complaint with the German Foreign Ministry saying he had been insulted when Schäuble described him as being "foolishly naive" in his dealings with the media.

Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias concurred, "Germany wants to suffocate us over the state debt... They accuse us of squandering money... [what] they are doing to us is political racism."

This followed a speech in parliament Tuesday by Prime Minister and Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras in which he announced that his government would be seeking World War II reparations from the German government. The Greek government had a "duty to history, to the people who fought and to the victims who gave their lives to defeat Nazism," he said.

Tsipras said his government was seeking billions in reparations. On Wednesday, Justice Minister Nikos Paraskevopoulos declared he was ready to implement a court ruling that found €28 million euros was owed for the murder of 218 people in the Greek town of Distomo in 1944 by the occupying Nazi regime.

These moves are part of Syriza's ongoing efforts to forge an anti-German coalition among sections of the European bourgeoisie aimed at securing concessions on the austerity agenda. The Syriza government is carrying out this charade despite every euro zone finance minister signing up to insist that Greece continue to impose devastating spending cuts and pay off its debts.

Syriza is also seeking to whip up nationalist, anti-German sentiment domestically to divert attention from its own anti-working class policies.

The German government dismissed Greece's claims to reparations out of hand. Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seifert said, "The question of reparations and compensation is legally and politically closed."

Finance Ministry spokesman Martin Jaeger said provocatively, "We won't be conducting any talks or negotiations with the Greek side... The aim is to look ahead jointly. Being emotive and making retrospective accusations will not help in overcoming the current problems."

The troika's return to Athens coincided with the release of new data revealing a further increase in the already chronic level of unemployment casued by their policies. The official jobless rate increased to 26.1 percent in the fourth quarter of 2014, from 25.5 percent in the third quarter. Most of the unemployed (about 73 percent) have been without work for at least 12 months.

Large parts of the economy remain mired in recession. New statistics found that in 2014 Greek industrial output fell by 2.7 percent, the seventh consecutive annual decline.

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