
EXCLUSIVE: GREEK PM SAYS CRISIS NEARLY OVER, NO MORE AUSTERITY NEEDED

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The Greek economy is just one step away from a recovery but needs debt relief, not further austerity, to overcome its crisis for good, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras told Euronews in an interview.

Talks between Greece and its international creditors are underway in Athens. But a final deal to unlock badly needed bailout funds remains elusive, as the parties argue over what more Athens needs to do to balance its budget.

On Thursday (April 21), Eurostat data showed Greece had a 2015 primary budget surplus □ which excludes debt servicing – that beat the target set in its bailout programme.

Athens hopes this will support its stance it can meet its fiscal targets without more of the austerity measures that are deeply unpopular in the country.

Stamatis Giannisis, euronews: Prime minister, the data Eurostat published on the performance of the Greek economy are better than anticipated, but you still have a long and arduous way ahead. How do you evaluate these results?

Alexis Tsipras: Greeces fiscal policy performance has exceeded any expectation in 2015, and dont forget how difficult this year was. We have had two general elections, one referendum, closed banks and also an unprecedented refugee crisis that fell almost entirely upon Greeces shoulders.

Despite all that what does Eurostat tell us? That we had a primary surplus of 0.7 percent instead of the projected 0.25 percent primary deficit. That is to say that we exceeded the programmes target by nearly 1 percent. Lets not forget that at the same time the IMF forecasts were for a 1 percent (deficit) or 0.6 percent (deficit). We exceeded the IMF forecasts by 2.3 billion euros. And we did all this in a difficult year. Nothing happened by chance. Everything happened because we worked with vision, with patience and with persistence.

We kept expenditure low, we gave a breath of fresh air to the economy by exploiting the EUs National Strategic Reference Framework that gave over five billion euros to the Greek economy and Greece was, for the first time, the number one country in absorbing those funds. We also had an excellent track record on tourism, we exceeded our targets on state revenues by two billion and we reduced unemployment by 1.5 percent.

This non-aggressive fiscal adjustment □ focused on the concern for the protection of the weak and

of those with medium and low incomes, as well as the protection of our National Health and education systems □ is bearing fruit, and the Greek economy appears now to be at the threshold of recovery. The prophecies of the modern day Cassandras who had been saying that we destroyed the economy while negotiating have been gloriously dismissed. Now is the time to make the right decisions.

euronews: Do you feel that this development will help to kick-start the discussion on debt settlement?

Alexis Tsipras: I feel that at this very moment □ as we have the picture that Greeces economy is on the threshold of exiting the crisis □ we all need to make the right decisions. This means that Greece is on the final leg of the race and needs a push forward, not a push backward. It is therefore necessary that those who have made gross mistakes with wrong choices and wrong forecasts, not be allowed to repeat the same mistakes again.

Greece therefore has a surplus of 0.7 percent, that is 1 percent above target and does not need any extra (austerity) measures. What Greece needs is a necessary easing of the debt if the economy is to take off, the investors trust will be regained and we will return to growth, finally.

At this critical stage we must by no means allow some people to drive this country back to the darkness of recession. We must march forward and overcome the crisis for good.

euronews: Do you believe that your parliamentary majority of three is enough to secure that all the austerity bills you need to pass are voted into law?

Alexis Tsipras: For the first time in Greece, a government has received a mandate to implement a very difficult agreement, right after this agreement was struck and not before. For the first time the Greek people knew what was on the table and for that matter there is no issue whatsoever with regard to the implementation of the deal. For that matter we insist on the contents of the deal and we ask neither for anything less nor for anything more than this. The agreement will be honoured. The country will exit the crisis and our parliamentary majority is sufficient, as long as we wont let some people place additional burdens to those already anticipated in the agreement. And surely they have no excuse to insist on something like this because the results, the figures and reality itself contradicts them.

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