

GREECE: TENSIONS LINKED TO THE NEW LABOR LAW WORRY TOURISM PROFESSIONALS



The streets of Athens are again in turmoil, with new demonstrations taking place last week in the Greek capital. The demonstrations were held on the sidelines of the second review of the new labor law. Tourism professionals however are worried that the situation may complicate the return of visitors.

The Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotaki is facing a protest of the unions and the opposition parties, who are standing up to the proposals put forward by the government. The far-left Syriza party calls it a "monstrosity", taking Greece back to the "19th century".

The labor law advocated by the executive aims to reform a system that the government considers obsolete and unsuitable. **The Prime Minister said that the reform was "profoundly favorable to growth", while aligning with European standards.** It would also bring "transparency" to the union process. His detractors, including the secretary-general of the Communist Party Dimitris Koutsoumbas, sees it differently, accusing him of legalizing a kind of "jungle" in the workplace where employees will be "totally defenceless".

In concrete terms, the new labor law aims to adapt to recent developments that are reshaping the world of work and to make the country more competitive. Among the key articles of this proposal is the authorization of the 10-hour day, allowing workers to adapt their week as they wish. It also extends parental leave from 10 to 14 days with pay, formalizes stricter rules for teleworking and increases the prevention of sexual harassment.

It also changes the strike system by imposing a minimum service requirement in the public sector. On the other hand, the new regulations involve the unions more closely in the event of a breach of the rule, as they become criminally liable and can be fined for interrupting services.

The demonstrations in the framework of the protest against this bill have been multiplying. In Thessaloniki, there were 10 000 people demonstrating and in Athens 16 000. Another rally is planned in front of the Parliament.

This discontent has also materialized in the temporary stoppage of public transport in Athens and ferries serving the Greek islands for 24 hours. This strike movement is organized by the Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE) and the Athens Labor Center. They are also behind the demonstration that took place in Piraeus, the main port of the city.

The protests are causing great concern among Greek tourism professionals. A renter of apartments and villas on the island of Hydra confided to us that "he will not be able to hold one more season if the ferries do not work at full capacity". Weakened by the epidemic of Covid-19, businesses, hoteliers and seasonal workers are counting on the summer to take advantage of the upsurge of tourists. This sector remains vital to the local economy generated a turnover of over 18 billion euros in 2019.

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