

Greece braces for first general strike of 2013 against austerity

ATHENS, Feb. 20 (Xinhua) -- Greek workers are launching on Wednesday the first general strike of 2013 to renew their protest over the government-prescribed austerity measures. The strike came ahead of a return of auditors of international creditors to Athens next week to discuss the next painful steps in efforts to tackle the Greek debt crisis. The 24-hour nationwide mobilization is organized by the two main umbrella trade unions of public and private sector employees to protest the latest round of pay and pension cuts, tax increases and the planned dismissals of thousands civil servants in the coming months. European Union and International Monetary Fund creditors, who have been keeping debt-wrecked Greece afloat with multi-billion bailout aid packages since 2010, are pushing for more progress before the disbursement of the next loan tranche to Athens in coming weeks. Thousands of protesters walked off their jobs on Wednesday, marching to the streets of central Athens. The workers claimed that the policies implemented over the past three years have come to a dead-end, fuelling deep recession and impoverishing Greek society. "We will struggle to the end," read banners raised by strikers outside the parliament building, as schools and state offices were shut down, hospitals ran on emergency personnel and public transport services were partially disrupted.