

## **Hollande to meet Merkel to mull decisions on Greek bailout extension**

PARIS, Aug. 23 (Xinhua) -- French President Francois Hollande will fly to Berlin later on Thursday to meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel after Athens' plea for more time to implement crucial but painful reforms to safeguard its eurozone membership.

According to the French presidency office, Hollande will share a working dinner with Merkel at (1730 GMT) before holding a press conference on the meeting's key points.

Hollande will "defend what he has always defended: implementing the decisions of the European Council of June 28 and the need to show solidarity and defend the integrity of the euro zone," said Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the French government's spokeswoman.

Greece, now in its fifth year of recession, has committed to cut 11.5 billion euros worth spending over the next two years in exchange of getting next tranche of around 31.5 billion euros aid.

Samaras is on a charm offensive, asking international creditor to allow Athens to spread out painful economic reforms over four years instead of two, to soften their impact on the Greeks.

The French and German leaders are expected to fine-tune a joint message to Athens' request, but decisions would not be on the table, according to local media reports.

Samaras will meet Merkel on Friday before heading to Paris on Saturday to seek Hollande's support.