

FINANCIAL TIMES

[UPDATED] On Greece, a commission cacophony

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Dutch EU Commissioner Neelie Kroes: "No 'man overboard' if we lose someone from eurozone."

[UPDATE 2] Dutch finance minister Jan Kees de Jager was asked about Kroes' comments during the government's regular parliamentary question time Tuesday. De Jager said that while the contagion risk in the eurozone has decreased over the last year because of measures taken in Brussels, a Greek exit would still be very costly.

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[UPDATE] In response to Kroes' comments, Olivier Bailly, an EU Commission spokesman, today insisted its policy towards keeping Greece in the euro has not changed.

José Manuel Barroso, the European Commission president, may have promoted his economic chief Olli Rehn to vice president last year with new responsibilities for managing the eurozone crisis, but in recent days a growing number of other commissioners seem to be elbowing in, opining on whether Greece will leave the single currency.

On Monday came an interview with Greece's own commissioner, Maria Damanaki, where she told the newspaper To Vima tis Kyriakis that contingency plans for Greece leaving the euro were being "openly studied". "Now they're not simply scenarios," said Damanaki, whose portfolio is fisheries. "They are alternative plans that are being openly studied." Rehn's spokesman insisted that no such plans were afoot within the commission, although he acknowledged some in the private sector were making such calculations.

This morning, however, comes another broadside, this time from Neelie Kroes, the European commissioner from the Netherlands – one of the eurozone's remaining triple A-rated countries where support for more aid to Greece is dwindling.

In an interview by our friend and rival Mark Peeperkorn, a Brussels veteran for the Dutch daily deVolkskrant, Kroes breaks with the dire warnings of other European leaders by saying a Greek exit from the euro wouldn't cause excessive turbulence.

“There is absolutely no ‘man overboard’ if we lose someone from the eurozone,” Kroes is quoted as saying. “They always said, ‘If a country lets you down or asks to get out, then the whole edifice falls in.’ But that is simply not true.”

Tags: Greece, sovereign debt crisis

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