
EU MINISTERS TURN WARY EYE ON MIGRATION FROM NORTH AFRICA

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On Friday (10 June) European Union ministers will look into ways of stemming the flow of refugees who set sail for Europe from North Africa, after a deal with Turkey has cut arrivals via Greece to a trickle.

The EU fears the central Mediterranean route to Italy may become the main one now, as calmer seas encourage more people to try the perilous journey.

ITALY PREPARES FOR SURGE IN REFUGEES

The number of refugee arrivals in Italy this year is already 80% higher than in the same period in 2015. At the UNs Geneva conference on Syrian refugees last Wednesday (30 March), Italys Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paolo Gentiloni, announced that 3,700 people had been rescued over the previous five days alone.

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The EU-Turkey deal is functioning and so, if nothing changes, the central Mediterranean will this year be the route through which the bulk of migrants will be coming, said an EU diplomat. He added that 45,000 refugees had reached Italy that way this year, roughly at the same level as last year.

The EU is also worried about the long-term impact of mass migration from Africa. It is considering linking development aid and trade ties with poor states to help them keep a lid on migration.

EU interior ministers meeting in Luxembourg on Friday will also discuss Libya, where a UN-backed government is trying to establish itself, while people smugglers operate freely.

EU READIES FOR MASSIVE MIGRATION FLOWS FROM LIBYA

EU leaders will discuss the critical situation in Libya and potential waves of immigrants trying to reach Europe on 18 April, EurActiv Greece has been informed.

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The meeting takes place as the UK readies itself for a 23 June referendum on membership of the 28-nation bloc in which migration is a key issue.

The ministers were also due to approve tougher rules for acquiring and holding guns in the EU, a plan first introduced after Islamist attacks in Paris killed 130 people last November.

But some diplomats said the original proposal was so diluted as to be almost irrelevant after countries including Finland, the Czech Republic and Estonia pushed back, saying their hunters, sports people, collectors, museums or national militias must be allowed to hold weapons.

Georgia linked to Ukraine?

The ministers were not due to agree on visa liberalisation for Georgia, which just a few ago weeks seemed on track to secure the privilege this summer.

JUNCKER RECOMMENDS VISA LIBERALISATION FOR UKRAINE, GEORGIA, KOSOVO

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said Friday the EU should offer visa-free short-stay travel to the bloc for Ukraine, Georgia and Kosovo [] three locked in bitter disputes with Russia.

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Germany [] joined by France and Italy [] led the 11th-hour opposition, saying a growing number of crimes committed in Germany were attributable to Georgians.

Germany took in most of the 1.3 million refugees that reached Europe last year, an influx that triggered a spike in anti-migration sentiment across the continent, fuelling support for nationalists, populists and Eurosceptics.

MEMBER STATES USE BREXIT REFERENDUM TO DELAY VISA WAIVERS

European Union states held off agreeing to ease travel rules for Georgia yesterday (1 June). Turkey, Ukraine and Kosovo should also expect more delays in visa liberalisation, as the bloc turns more cautious amid immigration fears, EU delegation sources said.

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But diplomats in Brussels said Berlin might be stalling Georgia not to put in a delicate spot the pro-Western authorities in Ukraine, another country hopeful to win easier access to Europe's free-travel Schengen zone of 26 states.

COMMISSION PROPOSES VISA-FREE TRAVEL FOR UKRAINIANS

The European Commission proposed lifting the visa requirements for citizens of Ukraine on Wednesday (20 April). The move, which was expected, comes despite the Dutch referendum vote against the EU-Ukraine association agreement, partly motivated by hostility to migration.

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In turn, they said, Germany wants Kyiv to make progress in implementing the February 2015 Minsk peace agreements for eastern Ukraine where sporadic fighting between Russia-backed rebels and government troops is still occurring despite the peace plan.

Ukraine and Russia trade blame for failing to deliver on the peace plan, and the EU has linked

lifting sanctions on Russia over the conflict in Ukraine to the plan being fully implemented.

Berlin may also be weighing the issue of Turkey, which does not meet visa-liberalisation criteria but has named relaxed travel rules with Europe as its price for curbing the flow of migrants.

Kaynak/Source: