
ITALY TO TAKE IN MIGRANTS AFTER ALL

- 26.07.2018

EU Observer (24 July 2018)

Italy has announced a U-turn on migrants, amid wider confusion on fiscal and foreign policy.

"Italy will guarantee the landing in their ports of all the people saved by the military ships" of Operation Sophia (an EU naval mission off the coast of Libya), Italian foreign minister Enzo Moavero Milanesi said in Berlin on Monday (22 July).

This offer was valid for just five or so weeks to give the EU time to draft new rules, which currently say people rescued by Sophia automatically go to Italy.

But the decision showed "the will of our government to work on common positions with EU and Nato partners," Milanesi said.

"We expect all EU states to respect existing agreements. Rescues at sea are part of it," his German counterpart, Heiko Maas, noted.

Milanesi's announcement came after Italy's powerful interior minister, Matteo Salvini, said Sophia and other rescue ships were no longer welcome.

He stayed quiet on migrants on Monday, but he attacked EU fiscal rules amid plans for tax cuts by Italy's populist government.

"If we have to go above those [EU deficit] limits for the good of the Italians, that won't be a problem for us," Salvini told reporters in Milan.

"Brussels needs to review its rules. Tax cuts? They will be in the next budget adjustment," he said the same day in Corriere della Sera, an Italian daily.

His comments, in turn, contradicted Giovanni Tria, Italy's finance minister, who had said that "staying within those [EU] budget limits [was] needed to preserve market confidence and avoid instability."

Overspending would increase Italy's cost of borrowing, he also warned at a meeting of the Group of 20 wealthy nations in Argentina on Sunday.

Salvini's far-right League party took office together with 5 Star Movement, a populist party, in May.

They put junior figures, such as Milanese, a former law professor, and Tria, an economist, in big jobs, creating space for Salvini to aggrandise his role.

But the set-up has created fuzzy communications and unpredictability, amid speculation that Salvini might try to seize full power in new elections.

The blur continued on foreign policy on Monday.

"We believe that the rules of international law must be respected," on Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, Milanese said in Berlin.

"The position of the Italian government has been expressed in the acts put in place at the last European Council," he added, referring to a recent EU decision to uphold Russia sanctions.

He spoke after Salvini said Italy was "not afraid" to veto those sanctions while in Moscow last week.

Salvini, whose party has surged in polls to first place in the past two months, also baited the EU by pledging to empty Roma camps in the Italian capital.

"In Rome, the situation on the Roma is a total mess, with thousands of people there: My goal is to reach zero Roma camps," he said on Monday, in the teeth of EU rules against discrimination on grounds of ethnicity.

Kaynak/Source: