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## **MONTENEGRO MULLS ITALIAN PLEA TO HOST STRANDED MIGRANTS**

- 31.08.2018

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Balkan Insight (30 August 2018)

Montenegro confirmed on Wednesday that it has been approached by Italy and asked to take in a number of migrants and refugees, to help end a 10-day standoff with a ship docked off the Italian coast at Catania.

The government in Podgorica said it was still mulling whether to take the mostly African-origin migrants and refugees, but has not yet taken a stance.

Italy contacted the Foreign Ministry and told them about the possible acceptance of migrants from the ship 'Dicotti'. The Montenegrin authorities still haven't decided what to do regarding that matter, the government's spokesperson, Srdjan Kusovac, told a local website CDM.

Italy has asked Montenegro and other countries to receive some of the migrants who disembarked at a port in Sicily after the Italian authorities kept them on the ship for days.

The vessel arrived on August 19 with 177 migrants on board, but the Italian Interior Ministry denied them the right to disembark, calling on EU member states to help to distribute them first.

Reportedly, 27 unaccompanied minors were let off the ship on 22 August, assisted by the Red Cross, UNHCR and Save the Children.

Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, who leads the anti-migrant League party, refused to let the migrants off the Diciotti until other EU nations had agreed to take in some of the asylum-seekers, most of them young men from Eritrea.

The Italian authorities say about 650,000 people have reached Italy from North Africa since 2014, and the country's new populist government has vowed to stop the surge.

Last week, Italy threatened to withhold next year's EU budget contributions if other member countries and partners did not agree to take in more rescued migrants and refugees.

So far, only Ireland and Albania have offered to help with the migrants, agreeing to take some of those stuck off the Italian coast.

The Albanian government's decision sparked sharp reactions on Monday and Tuesday, with Prime Minister Edi Rama's cabinet being accused of breaching EU laws, as the migrants had already

applied for the asylum in Italy.

However, speaking to the BBC on Monday, Albanian Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati said that Albanias own refugee crisis in the 1990s, when tens of thousands of people left for Italy, was one of the reasons why it felt bound to help out.

Many people fled communism in the eastern part of Europe and went west, Bushati said. I think this is a message for the European Union, that we need a more coherent view and a more coherent response to such important issues, even from the perspective of an EU candidate country, such as Albania.

Meanwhile, Montenegro has decided to deploy troops on its border with Albania to prevent any illegal crossings and a new migrant crisis.

Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia have all seen an increase in numbers of refugees and migrants heading north to EU member state Croatia since the beginning of 2018 □ a total of 6,700 from January until the end of May, more than twice the number registered in these three countries for the whole of 2017.

In the first five months of this year, the government has said, Montenegro registered about 1,500 illegal crossings, far more than in the previous year.

Local media reports suggest that the vast majority come from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Iraq.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/montenegro-mulls-taking-in-migrants-docked-in-italy-08-29-2018>

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