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## **SALVINI 'AT HOME' IN MOSCOW, DENOUNCES EU SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA**

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Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini denounced the madness of western sanctions against Russia, during a trip to Moscow Wednesday (17 October), and launched a fierce attack on the European Union.

I feel at home here [ \* ] I come here because I am convinced that sanctions are economic, social and cultural madness, said Salvini, who leads the far-right League party and also serves as deputy prime minister.

His comments got a warm reception from his audience, a gathering of the Russo-Italian business community, and several Russian and Italian businessmen took the microphone to press the minister to get the sanctions lifted.

Ideally, Salvini told them, they would be busy running their businesses and he would be discussing anti-terrorism, cybersecurity and other issues with his Russian counterpart.

Instead, the European Union was financing and courting Turkey, [ \* ] country that has had a European country under military occupation for 44 years, while imposing sanctions against Russia for its 2014 annexation of Crimea, he said.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkish troops occupied its northern third in response to an Athens-sponsored military coup seeking to unite the Mediterranean island with Greece.

Salvini also defended Italy against EU criticism of its high-spending budget.

Brussels is concerned that Italy's budget will increase the country's deficit. At 130% of annual economic output, Italy's debt is well above the EU's 60% ceiling.

As part of a visit to Moscow in July, Salvini said he wanted to end sanctions against Russia.

During Wednesday's visit the Italian was received by Russia's deputy foreign minister Alexander Grushko.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte is due in Moscow next Wednesday for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev.