
HUNGARIAN PRIME MINISTER SEEKS IMMIGRATION COOPERATION WITH ITALY'S SALVINI

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Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, who leads the far-right League party in his home country, met Hungary's leader Viktor Orban on Thursday for talks dominated by immigration and political alliances ahead of EU elections later this month.

The two politicians visited a steel fence on Hungary's southern border with Serbia, built under one of Orban's signature anti-immigrant policies.

Euronews' correspondent in Rome Giorgia Orlandi said the visit was "part of Salvini's campaign to build his pan-European nationalist alliance" at the European parliament.

"The idea is to reunite the three main right-wing parties into a single group," Orlandi explained.

Speaking at a joint news conference, Orban said Europe needs to be governed by leaders opposed to immigration, and faulted the European Popular Party (EPP) for being "unreceptive" to right-wing parties pushing a hard line on immigration.

He thus distanced himself further from the mainstream European conservative group which suspended his party in March.

Orban further distances himself from EPP

Orban's ruling Fidesz Party was suspended from the European People's Party (EPP) over his record on respect for the rule of law, freedom of the press and minorities' rights.

The EPP, made up mainly of mainstream centre-right parties across Europe, is the biggest group in the European parliament and expected to keep that status after an election later this month, which would give it a strong position to choose the successor to Jean-Claude Juncker as EU Commission President.

It has long had an uneasy relationship with Orban, but has tried to avert a full split with one of the most electorally successful leaders in ex-Communist central Europe.

Orban has denied violating any EU principles and said he wants to remain part of the EPP. But, in an interview with the Italian newspaper La Stampa published on Wednesday, he said the group had to drop its aversion to the far right.

"Whether we remain a member of the EPP depends on where the EPP is turning to," Orban said, declining to specify whether his party might join the group of nationalists backed by Salvini.

"We will decide on our own fate," Orban said. "If the EPP will bind themselves with the European left ... then it will be difficult to find our place in that cooperation."

Germany's AfD Party and right-wing groups from Finland and Denmark have said they back Salvini's proposal for a new nationalist bloc.

Salvini said he valued Orban's "efforts to enforce an aspect within the EPP which respects the history, the present and future of European peoples."

"I do not wish to intervene into that debate. I hope he will emerge victoriously," Salvini said.

Orlandi said Salvini's strategy was unclear. On the one hand, she said he may want to appeal to some members of the EPP in the new EU parliament with Orban's help. On the other, he may also ask Orban to join the alliance directly.

Kaynak/Source: