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## DOZENS OF MIGRANTS STILL STUCK ON COASTGUARD VESSEL IN ITALY PORT

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An Italian coastguard vessel stranded in the Mediterranean with more than 130 migrants aboard has been allowed to dock in the Sicilian port of Augusta but Rome on Sunday (28 July) refused to let them disembark until a deal is struck with the EU.

The Gregoretti berthed in the port of Augusta overnight, as is the normal procedure for a military vessel. Now the EU has to act because the migration question concerns the whole continent, Transport Minister Danilo Toninelli said in a statement.

Some 140 migrants, who had set off from Libya in two rickety boats, were picked up by Italian patrols on Thursday night and transferred to the coastguard ship Bruno Gregoretti.

The operation took place on the same day that at least 115 other migrants were feared drowned in a shipwreck off Libya – the Mediterraneans deadliest tragedy this year, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Several migrants aboard the Gregoretti have already been evacuated for medical attention, including a seven-month pregnant woman, her two children and her partner.

The ships crew is blocked on board along with the migrants.

However, Italys far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has reiterated that the remaining migrants would not be able to leave the vessel until other European countries agree to take them in.

Salvini, also deputy prime minister, has taken a hard line against migrants rescued at sea being brought to Italy, which he says bears an unfair burden in the crisis.

French President Emmanuel Macron announced last Monday that 14 EU members had approved a plan to redistribute refugees rescued in the Mediterranean, and eight said they would actively take part.

The proposal drew Salvinis ire because it still involved allowing migrants to disembark on his countrys territory.

He said the agreement underscored a demand that Italy continue to be the refugee camp of Europe.

Pope Francis on Sunday called on the international community to act swiftly to help avoid further deaths.

I have learned with sorrow the news of the dramatic shipwreck that happened in recent days in the Mediterranean where dozens of migrants including women and children have lost their lives, he said Sunday during his weekly Angelus address on St Peters Square.

I am renewing my call that the international community act swiftly and decisively to avoid that such tragedies repeat themselves and guarantee the safety and dignity of all.

Former Italian navy chief Giuseppe De Giorgi, who launched the Mare Nostrum maritime rescue plan in 2013, hailed the Gregolettis crew who despite all were committed to accomplishing with honour their duty as sailors to protect lives at sea.

In August 2018, almost more than 150 people were stranded on the Italian coastguard ship Diciotti for over a week before an agreement between the Italian church, Albania and Ireland allowed them to disembark.

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Kaynak/Source: