

Standoff on Migrants Splinters the EU

Judith Harris (June 13, 2018)



When 629 migrants were en route by sea to Italy on June 10, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini declared that no Italian port could accept them. "Saving lives is a duty, but turning Italy into Europe's refugee camp, no," he stated. Spain is to take them in, but the EU is splintered on this.

ROME -- When 629 migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, were en route to Italy in a ship June 10, [Matteo Salvini](#) [2], who as Interior Minister is chief of all police here, declared that no Italian port could accept them. "Saving lives is a duty, but turning Italy into Europe's refugee camp, no," he stated. "The EU countries have left us alone too long," he added, speaking on nationwide TV. "And among the migrants there are terrorists." Salvini won, and at this writing, weighed under by its load



of migrants, the ship run by the [SOS Mediterranee NGO](#) [3] was heading off toward Valencia in Spain, albeit plagued by the considerable distance (750 nautical miles), rough seas and strong winds.

Among the migrants were 123 unaccompanied minors, among them a dozen young children. Of the seven pregnant women on board, the Italian coast guard removed four, plus a child suffering convulsions, to the isle of [Lampedusa](#) [4], from where they were flown to hospitals in Palermo and Agrigento. Sicilian press reports suggest that at least some of these pregnant women, who had spent months crossing the desert to reach the Libyan coast and the boat traffickers there, were rape victims.

Salvini's popularity is on the rise, and he appears notably heartened by his triumph in local elections held June 10 that involved 6 million voters in 760 towns scattered throughout Italy. These were the most important elections held since the national vote March 4, and the 61% turnout was 6 points below that of the previous local elections, held in 2013. His governing partner [Luigi Di Maio's](#) [5] Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) lost votes and hence is weaker vis à vis Salvini in their shared government.

In Rome's two districts, fewer than one-third of those who could vote bothered to do so. Rome Mayor [Virginia Raggi](#) [6] of the M5S appeared in obvious difficulty. So did Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, which dropped some 200,000 votes while the Partito Democratico -- slashed in half March 4 -- made small advances. For a full analysis, see here [>>>](#) [7]

Countering the ever more popular Minister Salvini's harsh words and actions on immigration were the mayors of a number of Southern Italian towns, who defiantly said they would accept the migrants. Minister Salvini rejected their offers -- just as word arrived that another ship, the Dutch-German Sea Watch 3, is trying to deliver onto Italian shores over 1,000 more migrant refugees. At this news Salvini tweeted, "Italy has stopped bowing its head and obeying, and THIS TIME SAYS NO. #chiudiamoporti."

To his tweet almost 4,000 tweeters responded emotionally. "Finally we have a state that protects its borders and orders a halt to the deportation of slaves," said one. The reply: "And let's the slaves die. Finally, right?" The dialogue continued: "Well, there are other ports." "Pontius Pilate was decidedly a favorite of yours." "Until now there have been lots of Pontius Pilates." "Think only of your own people and tell the others to f&*! off. Very nice." "Same to you." "Germany, France, Malta turn the [migrants] away? And they call us racist!"

Although the EU has just agreed to triple spending to over \$5 billion a year to deal with illegal migration, these turbulent seas washed all across Europe. The EU last week sought to establish refugee quotas and a common system for member states to share responsibility for asylum seekers, but failed utterly. Although [Angela Merkel](#) [8] warned of the consequences of failure to find an agreement, that debate deadlocked, "with ministers pessimistic that any agreement can be reached by their self-imposed deadline at the next Brussels summit at the end of this month," writes the Guardian.

The fallout of ill feeling was particularly strong between Italy and France. "Bravo Salvini," was the reaction from [Nicola Dupont-Aignan](#) [9], rival and ex-ally of the French rightist Marine Le Pen. "Proud that a front is opened in Europe on the migrants, a shame that Spain has decided to take them when they can enter France whenever they want" (this, obviously, was sarcasm). France called the position dictated by Salvini "nauseating" while Spain suggested that Italy, in denying a port to the migrants, was in violation of the law. To this Salvini retorted, "To the French President I say, if you have the big heart you say you have, tomorrow I will send you the details of 9,000 migrants you had agreed to take in." As a result, Salvini, Di Maio, and their premier Professor Giuseppe Conte are now considering cancelling that EU migration summit.

The drawings and paintings by child migrants are from an exhibition opening this week at Rome's National Gallery of Modern Art, organized by actress Simona Marchini and sponsorship by UNICEF.



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Links

- [1] <http://iitaly.org/files/i-italy4.jpg>
- [2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matteo_Salvini
- [3] <https://sosmediterranee.org>
- [4] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lampedusa>
- [5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi_Di_Maio
- [6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Raggi
- [7] https://cise.luiss.it/cise/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/DCISE8_87-104.pdf
- [8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angela_Merkel
- [9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolas_Dupont-Aignan