

Italy Calls on EU Ports to Welcome Migrants



Rome, July 3 (RHC)-- Italy's interior minister has called on other European countries to open their ports to rescue ships ahead of talks with France and Germany on tackling the migrant emergency.

Marco Minniti, who met his counterparts in Paris on Sunday to prepare for EU talks in Tallinn this week, said in an interview with *Il Messaggero* daily that "we are under enormous pressure."

With arrivals in Italy up nearly 19 percent compared to the same period last year, Rome has threatened to close its ports to privately-funded aid boats or insist funding be cut to EU countries which fail to help with the crisis.

"There are NGO ships, Sophia and Frontex boats, Italian coast guard vessels" saving migrants in the Mediterranean, he said, referring to the aid boats as well as vessels deployed under EU border security missions. "They are sailing under the flags of various European countries. If the only ports where refugees are taken to are Italian, something is not working. This is the heart of the question," he said.

"I am a Europhile and I would be proud if even one vessel, instead of arriving in Italy, went to another European port. It would not resolve Italy's problem, but it would be an extraordinary signal" of support, Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti said.

Over 83,000 people rescued while attempting the perilous crossing from Libya have been brought to Italy so far this year, according to the UN, while more than 2,160 have died trying, the International Organization for Migration says. Italy's Red Cross has warned the situation in the country's overcrowded reception centers is becoming critical.

Unsources Italian media reports said Rome was likely to call for a European code of conduct to be drawn up for the privately-run aid boats, with the Corriere della Sera saying vessels that did not comply could be "seized."

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