

Italian minister postpones Paris meeting over refugee row



Paris, June 14 (RHC)-- Italy's new economy minister Giovanni Tria postponed a meeting with his French counterpart in Paris on Wednesday as a diplomatic row spiraled over Rome's refusal to take in an overcrowded migrant ship.

Tria had been due to meet his French counterpart Bruno Le Maire in Paris Wednesday afternoon before announcing the talks were cancelled. Soon after however, the French economy ministry said that both ministers had spoken over the phone and had "agreed that Mr Tria will come to Paris in the coming days."

The initial cancellation came via a tweet from the Italian economy ministry's Twitter account which also confirmed that Tria's meeting with German Economy Minister Olaf Scholz scheduled for Thursday would go ahead in Berlin. Le Maire had initially responded with "regret" at Tria's decision, adding that he had "many important subjects to discuss with Mr Tria" ahead of EU summit at the end of June.

Tria's decision came after Rome demanded an official apology from France over its comments on Italy's treatment of the Aquarius vessel that was left in limbo in the Mediterranean after saving 629 people off Libya. French President Emmanuel Macron had blasted Italy for its "cynicism and irresponsibility" in refusing to allow the migrant ship to dock at its ports.

Interior Minister Matteo Salvini said Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte -- who is due to meet Macron in Paris

on Friday -- "would be right not to go to France" should such an apology not arrive.

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