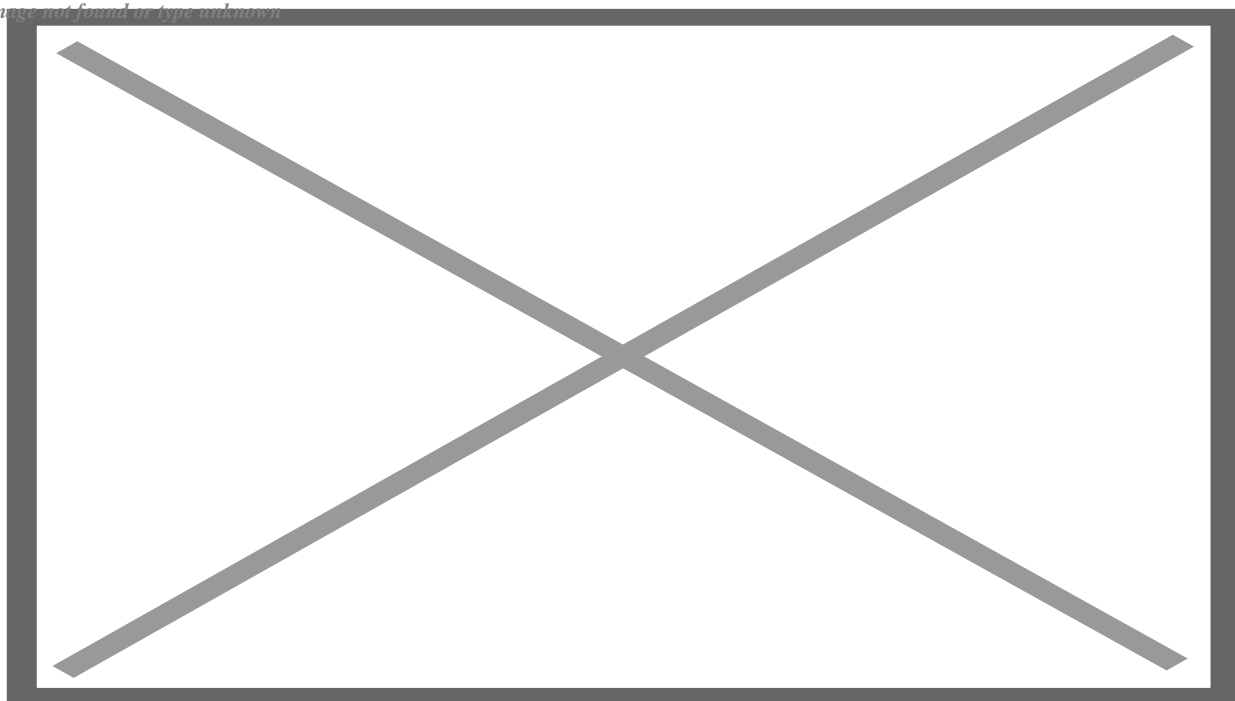


EU member states reach deal on migration policy

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Brussels, October 5 (RHC)-- European Union states have agreed on a series of new procedures to handle irregular immigration during times of high arrivals, removing a key obstacle to a larger agreement on the bloc's asylum and migration rules by the end of the year.

Representatives from the EU's 27 members reached a deal on Wednesday covering "crisis regulation", allowing further negotiations to move forward and a push to make the changes legally binding before next year's EU elections.

"Now we can move on with the negotiations," Swedish Migration Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard said. "It is important to get the pact in place, to ensure order at the EU's external borders and reduce flows." The bloc hopes to make those changes into law before the next round of EU elections ushers in an expected shift to the right as support grows across the continent for political parties that have railed against immigration.

The agreement was struck after a dispute between Germany and Italy focused on charities that rescue refugees from drowning at sea. "We need the pact done and dusted before Europeans go out to vote,"

said European Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas, who called Wednesday's deal the "missing link" in a package on migration and asylum.

Thousands of refugees, many of them fleeing war, conflict and economic hardship, have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, a testament to the high price of Europe's already restrictive approach to immigration that has come under fire from human rights groups.

But right-wing parties in countries such as Italy, Hungary, Poland and Germany have made immigration central to their policies, railing against the asylum system and calling for greater restrictions. Hungary and Poland are poised to take turns holding the EU presidency after the next elections, and both opposed Wednesday's deal. The vote went through with a majority in support.

The package includes new support for countries such as Italy where many refugees arrive from the Mediterranean as well as processing centres on the EU's outer borders and new authority to keep asylum seekers in detention as their claims are processed.

In Europe and around the world, wealthy nations have been accused of sidelining human rights in their effort to restrict asylum and crack down on migration. The EU has made a series of agreements outsourcing the more unseemly aspects of migration restrictions to countries in Africa and the Middle East, including a deal with Tunisia, which was recently accused of dumping refugees and migrants in the desert.

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