

EU holds emergency talks over migration

Migrants on the Lifeline ship, which was turned away by Italy and Malta. APHermine Poschmann

European Union (EU) leaders headed to Brussels for emergency talks on Sunday over migration as Italy's new populist Cabinet turned away another rescue ship, vowing no longer to shoulder Europe's migrant burden. The talks involving 16 of the bloc's 28 leaders aim to mend rifts over burden sharing. The meeting was called last week to clear the air before a scheduled full summit on Thursday and Friday.

With four eastern anti-migrant EU countries snubbing the meeting, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other leaders have downplayed hopes of an EU-wide agreement, saying smaller ad-hoc deals may be the only way forward.

Rescue vessel

The urgency of finding a solution was highlighted by the plight of the *Lifeline*, the second rescue vessel left adrift in the Mediterranean after Italy and neighbouring Malta refused it permission to dock.

The German charity operating the ship, which is carrying 239 Africans, on Sunday took a swipe at Italy's far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini over his reference in a Facebook post to its consignment of "human flesh". "Dear Matteo Salvini, we have no meat on board, but humans," it said in a statement.

In a sign of the growing tensions within the EU, French President Emmanuel Macron suggested Saturday that countries who refused to pull their weight on accepting asylum seekers should have their EU benefits cut.

He also riled Italy by saying that the migration emergency, which peaked in 2015, had passed and was now mainly a political issue. "The immigration emergency continues in Italy, partly because France keeps pushing back people at the border," Italian Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio shot back on his Facebook page.

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