

Italy: France, Malta offer to take quarter of 450 migrants

15/07/2018 09:04 by admin

Premier Giuseppe Conte said that Malta and France had come forward in response to his request to all 27 other members of the European Union to share the burden of welcoming the migrants.

France, Malta agreed to take 100 out of 450 migrants into their country. (File)

Rome: Italy said Saturday that Malta and France had agreed to take 100 of the 450 migrants who were rescued from a fishing boat in the Mediterranean, claiming victory in the latest standoff but demanding even greater European solidarity.

Premier Giuseppe Conte said that Malta and France had come forward in response to his request to all 27 other members of the European Union to share the burden of welcoming the migrants.

“It’s an important result,” Conte wrote on Facebook, along with a copy of the letter he wrote to top European Commission officials demanding that other European countries make good on their verbal pledges to help Italy deal with the influx.

The migrants had been aboard a large fishing boat when the Italian and Maltese coast guard control centers began squabbling Friday over who was responsible for taking them in.

Malta said it had fulfilled its obligations by monitoring the vessel to see if it needed help. Malta says the ship’s crew made clear they didn’t need help and were heading toward the Italian island of Lampedusa.

Italy insisted Malta should have opened its ports to the ship.

Early Saturday, the migrants were taken off the boat and transferred onto a rescue vessel from the EU border patrol agency Frontex and a ship from the Italian border police.

The Maltese government said Prime Minister Joseph Muscat had agreed to participate in the migrant relocation initiative, similar to one involving the Lifeline ship of a German aid group several weeks ago. But he stressed that Malta at all times followed international law.

In just one month in office, Italy under the hard-line, anti-migrant Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has upended years of Italian policy toward migrants by refusing them entry.

Italy, in general, feels that the European Union has left it alone to handle the tens of thousands of migrants coming across the sea every year. Salvini is pressing the EU to step up and take in the migrants who land in Italy and is trying to help Libya prevent them from leaving.

Aid officials say migrants who are being returned to Libya are at risk of facing abuse, rape, beatings and slavery.

- AP