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Rome, November 12 (RHC)-- Diplomatic tension between Italy and France keeps mounting as the French NGO-run search-and-rescue ship Ocean Viking reached the French port of Toulon with its load of 234 asylum seekers on Friday. The ship had been refused a port of safety by Italy's far-right government for around three weeks, a decision that the French government slammed as irresponsible and inhumane.

In response to the situation, Paris suspended plans to take in 3,500 refugees currently in Italy -- calling on all the countries in the EU's migrant relocation mechanism to adopt similar measures. One-third of the 234 asylum seekers on board the ship will be relocated

in France, four passengers with serious health difficulties were transferred to a French hospital. This is not the first diplomatic rift between Italy and France in recent years. In 2019 Paris recalled its ambassador to Rome for consultations after then Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio urged members of the Yellow Vest movement to continue with their protest against the French government.

While EU countries keep failing to collectively assume responsibility on the migrant issue around 20,000 asylum seekers have died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea since 2014 while tens of thousands are stuck in Libyan detention centres where torture, sexual violence and abuse are rife.

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