

Europe perplexed and reluctant in the face of refugees

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By Roberto Morejón

Within days of coming to power, Italy's far-right government has become embroiled in a bitter dispute with France, and eventually with other countries, by refusing to allow a ship carrying vulnerable migrants to dock.

This is an old problem, viewed with considerable animosity in the Old Continent, which considers its borders threatened by the arrival of people escaping from impoverished Southern nations, where they cannot find a livelihood.

Rome refused to receive the ship "Ocean Viking", with more than 200 passengers on board, including 57 children, after three weeks of waiting, and France agreed to receive only a third of them. The remainder

will have to be spread over nine countries, for while Italy angrily argues that it cannot be the sole receiver, its neighbors are also reluctant, albeit with nuances.

The transalpine country, now ruled by the ultra-right with Prime Minister Georgia Meloni at the helm, claims to be at the brink of absorbing 90,000 migrants this year. Others think that everything is nothing more than an expression of the hard line taken by the Premier on migration issues, as a continuation of the imprint of Matteo Salvini, currently on trial for the blockade of humanitarian ships between 2018 and 2019 when he was head of the Interior.

Rome welcomed only 164 asylum seekers were transferred to other EU nations in 2022. Members of the bloc cite previous agreements to share the arrivals and reproach Italy for approving selective and discriminatory policies.

Certainly, the problem seems insoluble in the background as the Mediterranean has become one of the most dangerous routes in the world, with some 1,900 poached passengers dying or disappearing in its waters this year.

As more boats set sail from the northern coasts of Africa, tensions are growing, not only in Italy and France, because their neighbors also have other worries.

They are worried about the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine and high electricity and gas bills.

And they are also uneasy about how the rising far right is exploiting the migration issue and exacerbating rivalries in Europe.

They are worried that vulnerable migrants are watching from overloaded boats with deferred berths, because their deprivation is also politics.

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