

Italian, Tunisian presidents meet to discuss immigration

Wed, 2021-06-16 18:55

ROME: As the illegal migrant situation in the Mediterranean Sea continues to escalate – nearly 2,000 people have landed on the island of Lampedusa since Sunday – the presidents from Italy and Tunisia met in Rome to work on a solution.

Security policies “are necessary to fight against human trafficking”, but at the same time “conditions for development must be created in Africa so that people there do not feel compelled to risk their lives and emigrate to look for work or escape hunger,” Italian President Sergio Mattarella said during the meeting with Tunisian President Kais Saied.

Immigration was the key issue during Saied’s official visit to Italy, said Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, who signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Tunisia’s Foreign Minister Othman Jerandi.

“Tunisia is a strategic partner in the Mediterranean region on immigration issues and Libya,” Di Maio said in a press conference.

Most of the migrants trying to reach Europe from North Africa depart from Tunisia and Libya. Over the past few years, Italy has provided both countries with equipment, resources, and ships in an attempt to thwart migrant crossings. But they continue to arrive on the shores of Lampedusa, located 105 miles southwest of Sicily, and on other tiny islands scattered across the Mediterranean.

“We must ask ourselves why a mother accepts for herself and her son the risk of becoming food for fish and then maybe to be exploited,” Saied said after the meeting with Mattarella.

“The problem is that there is no fair distribution of wealth between the north and the south of the world.”

In an interview with RAI, the Italian state broadcaster’s news, Saied remembered how it was the Italians who used to immigrate to his country. The roles may be reversed now but the motive remains the same.

“Those who migrate are in search of fortune, just as they were in the past,” he said.

Mattarella reaffirmed to his Tunisian counterpart “the great friendship that binds Italy to Tunisia.” He recalled “the great friendship and primary partnership” between the two countries who share “the values of democracy, a geographical proximity, and some common history.”

He also stressed that peacemaking and stabilization in Libya represent a priority of Italian foreign policy.

“In order to achieve this, mercenaries and foreign troops must leave the country. Libya must be left to the Libyans,” Mattarella was quoted to Arab News by a source in the Italian administration.

While in Rome, Saied also met with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi and Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese. According to sources in the prime minister’s office, more assistance has been offered to Tunisia, but more “attention and effort in contrasting illegal migration will have to be enforced.”



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[Sergio Mattarella](#)

[kais Saied](#)

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[Mario Draghi](#)

Boats carrying hundreds of migrants arrive in Italy’s Lampedusa
Tunisian cemetery offers living memorial to ‘unknown migrants’

Rights groups urge EU to protect life on sea route from Libya

Wed, 2021-06-16 17:46

LONDON: Leading rights groups have called on the EU to protect lives on the main Mediterranean route between Libya and Europe.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) on Wednesday published an action plan to promote safe pathways on the precarious route from North Africa.

The 20-point plan gives guidance on how the EU could ensure safe and predictable disembarking opportunities and relocation responses for people rescued.

“It is shameful and tragic that EU countries can’t agree on something as fundamental as saving lives at sea,” said Judith Sunderland, HRW’s associate Europe and Central Asia director. “People are drowning while European leaders squabble.”

An estimated 20,000 people have died or disappeared in the central Mediterranean in the last decade. According to the UN, some 664 people have died or gone missing so far this year.

HRW accused the EU of “withdrawing responsibility,” noting that the bloc has since March 2019 been withdrawing its ships from areas where unseaworthy boats carrying migrants and refugees are most likely to be.

Libya’s Coast Guard has intercepted and returned to the country more than 11,700 people this year, with up to 1,000 migrants returned on June 12 alone.

People recovered and returned to Libya face being detained in “nightmarish detention centers and experiencing abysmal conditions, violence, and forced labor,” HRW said.

It added that the EU should abandon its policy of assisting the return of migrants and refugees to Libya, and urgently adopt one that ensures migrants are relocated to a safe place.

HRW called for new relocation arrangements so EU member states can share the responsibility of migration from Libya more equally.

EU heads of state are expected to discuss migration policy at the next European Council meeting on June 24-25 in Brussels.



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HRW criticizes Italy, EU's Libya migrant policy
Italian island in plea for help after 600 migrants arrive in 24 hours

[Biden names Israel ambassador days after new government](#)

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Tue, 2021-06-15 19:47

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden on Tuesday nominated veteran Democrat Thomas Nides as the US ambassador to Israel, two days after the formation of a new government.

Nides, who as a senior State Department official under president Barack Obama fought attempts to cut off US funding for the Palestinians, requires confirmation from the Senate.



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Israeli nationalists march in East Jerusalem under heavy police presence
Joe Biden confuses Syria with Libya repeatedly at G7

[Tunisian court releases media mogul Nabil Karoui](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2021-06-15 17:26

TUNIS: A Tunisian court on Tuesday released media mogul and former presidential candidate Nabil Karoui after he spent more than six months in custody on money laundering and tax evasion charges, his lawyer and party said.

Karoui, the owner of Nessma television channel and head of the Heart of Tunisia political party, the second largest in parliament, was detained in December for a second time for alleged money laundering and tax fraud. Video footage broadcast by local radio Mosaïque FM showed Karoui leaving Mornaguia prison, where he found his family and party members waiting outside.

In 2019, Karoui beat most candidates to reach a run-off for the presidency despite spending most of the campaign behind bars. He ultimately lost in a landslide to President Kais Saied.

His Heart of Tunisia party, which came second only to the moderate Islamist Ennahda in a parliamentary election the same year, has joined with it in giving narrow majority support to Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi's government, which has been locked in a power struggle with the president.



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Court frees Tunisian presidential candidate Nabil KarouiSaied and Karoui to face off in second round of Tunisia's presidential election

Algeria's FLN wins most seats in parliament, election authority says

Tue, 2021-06-15 20:40

ALGIERS: Algeria's FLN, long the country's biggest political party, won the most seats in Saturday's parliamentary election, the head of the electoral authority said on Tuesday.

Fewer than a third of registered voters took part in the election, which the long dominant establishment had seen as part of its strategy to move beyond two years of mass protests and political turmoil.

The protests that erupted in 2019 demanded the ousting of the ruling elite, an end to corruption and the army's withdrawal from politics. While authorities praised the demonstrations as a moment of national renewal, they also cracked down with arrests.

"The dynamic of peaceful change that was launched (with the protests) is being strengthened," electoral authority head Mohamed Chorfi said, referring to the election.

The FLN's 105 seats were far short of the 204 needed to secure a majority in the 407-seat parliament, with the Islamist MSP winning 64 seats, another former ruling coalition party, the RND, winning 57, and independent candidates taking 78 seats.

However, most of the elected members of parliament are expected to support President Abdelmadjid Tebboune's programme, including economic reforms.

Islamist parties had hoped to benefit from the unrest of the past two years of protests that pushed the veteran president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, from office and led to the jailing of numerous senior officials.

But the biggest difference from previous elections was the much larger number of independents winning seats in parliament, with Islamists retaining about the same share as previously.

The leaderless "Hirak" mass protest movement boycotted the vote, as it had the 2019 election that installed Tebboune in place of Bouteflika.

Hirak has said any vote that takes place while the current establishment remains in place, and while the army interferes in politics, cannot be fair.

While elections before Hirak's rise had higher official turnout figures, they were still often marked by a large number of abstentions.

The make-up of the new parliament is expected to shape the next government, which will face a looming economic crisis with Algeria having spent more than four fifths of its foreign currency reserves since 2013.



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