

The Malta declaration on migrants

There are two main problems with the EU's decisions on migrants at Malta.

The first is the EU has effectively shifted the responsibility to stem the rapid flow of migrants across the Mediterranean to the Government of National Accord in Libya. This government is struggling to exert its control over Libya, which remains a deeply divided country with a rival government in Tobruk and areas of the country under tribal and rebel control. No doubt it will welcome the money promised to strengthen its coastguard and for related purposes, but can it spend it nationally to achieve the EU's aims? Will it be tempted to spend it for other purposes related to its own difficult position?

The second is the request for a policy to return people who have already arrived in the EU following illegal migration. How are they going to do this? Why do they bring people in to the EU in the first place if they want to take them back to countries like Libya? Will it be legal to require people to leave? What will they do if they refuse?

It is difficult to believe this statement will work to stop the flow. It is also difficult to see how it squares with the EU vision of itself as a home to welcome migrants as outlined by Mrs Merkel last year. How does this differ from Mr Trump's wish to cut numbers crossing the Mexican frontier?