

MEPs call on Council summit to come up with common European solution to migration crisis

Written by Martin Banks and Julie Levy-Abegnoli on 25 June 2018 in News
News

A mini-summit in Brussels on Sunday where leaders of 16 EU countries tried to reach agreement on migration issues ended without a formal joint statement.



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Instead, the European Commission has tabled proposals for the Council summit later this week, where migration will top the agenda.

At the summit meeting over the weekend, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte put forward a proposal for a 'European multilevel strategy for migration', which calls for "shared responsibility among member states in dealing with primary movements."

The Italian idea, however, clashed with German Chancellor Angela Merkel's call for "bilateral and trilateral agreements" and "common ground."

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Elsewhere, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said that Austria would reintroduce border controls at the Brenner Pass if Germany turns refugees back at its southern border with Austria.

Kurz, who attended the mini summit, said, "We would be ready and do everything necessary to protect our borders. That would mean securing the border on the Brenner and other locations." He added that he hopes to avoid such an outcome.

The debate about migration is happening against the backdrop of the recent controversy over the Aquarius ship full of refugees which both Italy and Malta refused to dock. The ship was eventually accepted by Spain.

Ahead of this week's summit, Parliament's S&D group leader Udo Bullmann called for "a European solution, not nationalistic politics of isolation" and accused Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini of "using the lives of innocent people for his political agenda."

ALDE group leader Guy Verhofstadt said, "This week's summit must result in a coherent migration policy. Action must prevail over the emotion that surrounds the current debate and is polarising opinion."

Elsewhere, Greens/EFA joint leaders Ska Keller and Philippe Lamberts said it would be "disastrous" if this summit ends with a deal "tailored to the demands" of German interior minister Horst Seehofer and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

A statement issued ahead of the summit said, "This would bring the horrible conditions in Hungary - with transit zones, refugee children imprisoned and borders sealed - to the whole of Europe.

"This summit should be used to put the solidarity back into European refugee policy. If we are going to end the suffering on the Mediterranean, we need binding resettlement quotas, humanitarian visas and a fair distribution of refugees across Europe. Shifting our responsibility to protect refugees to countries such as Libya - where people are being tortured and enslaved - is inhumane."

The statement went on, "We need a common European solution. Merkel's plans for bilateral deportation agreements with other European countries would only exacerbate the failings of the Dublin system, and could spell the end of freedom of movement in Europe."

The pair, together with leaders of other political groups, wrote this week to European Council President Donald Tusk demanding that the heads of state and government deal with the reform of the Dublin system.

There is particular concern after the Hungarian government recently passed a series of laws that critics say seek to crack down on immigration and criminalise anyone who attempts to assist asylum seekers.

The laws, it is claimed, also make homelessness a criminal offence and would prevent attempts to settle migrants in the country, which flies in the face of the EU's quota reallocation proposals currently being discussed.

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