

Sommario Rassegna Stampa

Pagina	Testata	Data	Titolo	Pag.
Rubrica Stampa estera				
3	Financial Times	21/07/2017	ROME'S FRUSTRATION WITH MACRON ON MIGRANT CRISIS BODES BADLY FOR BLOC REFORM HOPES (J.Politi)	2
19	the Economist	28/07/2017	UNWELCOME CHOICES	3
6	el Pais	21/07/2017	BRUSELAS EXIGE A LONDRES QUE ACLARE SU PROPUESTA DE BREXIT	5
1	le Monde	21/07/2017	APRES LACRISE, MACRON VEUT AMADOUER L'ARMEE	7
1	le Monde	21/07/2017	LA COMMISSION MENACE LA POLOGNE DE LA METTRE AU BAN DE L'UNION EUROPEENNE	9
Rubrica Prime Pagine				
1	Corriere della Sera	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	11
1	la Repubblica	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	12
1	la Stampa	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	13
1	il Messaggero	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	14
1	il Sole 24 Ore	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	15
1	Il Fatto Quotidiano	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	16
1	il Giornale	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	17
1	Libero Quotidiano	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	18
1	il Foglio	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	19
1	il Tempo	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	20
1	Avvenire	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	21
1	Italia Oggi	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	22
1	MF - MILANO FINANZA	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	23
1	Corriere della Sera - ed. Milano	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	24
1	Il Dubbio	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	25
1	il Gazzettino	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	26
1	Il Giornale d'Italia	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	27
1	il Giorno	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	28
1	il Manifesto	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	29
1	il Mattino	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	30
1	Il Resto del Carlino	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	31
1	Il Secolo XIX	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	32
1	la Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	33
1	la Repubblica - ed. Milano	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	34
1	La Verita'	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	35
33	Libero Quotidiano - Ed. Milano	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	36
1	l'Opinione delle Liberta'	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	37
1	l'Osservatore Romano	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	38
1	Pagina99	21/07/2017	PRIMA PAGINA DI VENERDI' 21 LUGLIO 2017	39

Italy-France relations

Rome's frustration with Macron on migrant crisis bodes badly for bloc reform hopes

JAMES POLITI — ROME

When Emmanuel Macron first hosted Paolo Gentiloni, Italy's centre-left prime minister, at the Elysée Palace in late May, France's youthful pro-EU president suggested a shift towards more aid and understanding for Rome as it handles thousands of migrants arriving in its ports every week.

"We have not listened enough to Italy's cry for help on the migration crisis," Mr Macron said.

But two months later, Italian officials say Mr Macron's stance on migration is little changed from the rigid, closed-door approach of François Hollande, his predecessor, triggering frustration in Rome. "After saying they understand our problem, it doesn't seem like France wants to help us concretely," said Mario Giro, Italy's deputy foreign minister.

Disappointment with Mr Macron was beginning to set in, Mr Giro added. "We need more solidarity in the management of migration, not just compared to our expectations but his own words."

Mr Macron's ascent to the presidency over far-right rival Marine Le Pen was greeted with relief and hope in many parts of the EU, especially in Italy, and was seen as a chance to revitalise the bloc through deeper integration and a reformist agenda.

But the fact that frustration with Mr Macron is already emerging in Rome bodes poorly for those expectations, especially given Italy's size, relative economic weakness and vulnerability to rising populism. A general election is due in Italy in early 2018.

There are several reasons for the dimming hopes on migration: French police

still refuse entry to hundreds of migrants camped out in Ventimiglia, on the Italian side of the border; France is far from meeting the quota of refugees agreed in an EU relocation scheme in 2015; and Paris will not allow French vessels carrying migrants rescued in the Mediterranean to dock in its ports — they dock in Italian ports instead.

Mr Macron has also spoken of the need to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. Given that the majority of Italy's new arrivals come from countries suffering from hunger and poverty but not necessarily war, this approach does not help Rome.

Meanwhile, progress on longer-term policies has slowed or stalled. These include the renegotiation of EU asylum rules that work to the detriment of Rome and the funnelling of more investment to the countries in sub-Saharan Africa that are the main sources of immigration to Italy. Many have strong cultural, military and economic ties to France. "Africa is a key test for Macron. We will see if he is a nationalist with a European vocation or if he is really interested in building a European policy, full stop," said Lia Quartapelle, a ruling Democratic party lawmaker.

Two former Italian prime ministers have weighed in. Romano Prodi, the former president of the European Commission, said he had felt "wounded" by Mr Macron's approach to migration. Enrico Letta, now a dean at the Sciences Po university in Paris, accused France, along with Austria and Spain, of doing "irrevocable damage" to Europe by refusing to take in more migrants.

Some Italian officials concede that the early enthusiasm for Mr Macron was probably exaggerated and that some

expectations, particularly on migration, have been unrealistic. "Anyone who elevated Macron into such a myth was being foolish," said one Italian official.

But Mr Macron's cautious migration stance could be a warning sign for Italian officials on other fronts, too.

On eurozone economic policy in particular, Rome sees Mr Macron as a pivotal ally. Detailed talks are not expected to begin until after the German election in September. But even if France and Italy are broadly aligned in wanting to push Germany towards greater fiscal and budgetary union, and burden sharing, the concern is that the French president could still strike a deal with Berlin that leaves Rome sidelined.

Italy's Eurosceptic opposition has sought to seize on Mr Macron's migration policies as a sign there was little to gain for Italy in his victory. Luigi Di Maio, the Five Star Movement politician who is the populist party's likely candidate for premier at the next election, went to Ventimiglia on Bastille Day last week to attack French border policies.

"If this had been the work of Marine Le Pen, and I would not defend her ideas, all of Europe would have called it xenophobia, but Macron does it and nobody takes a strong position against France," Mr Di Maio said.

In Rome, the feeling is that they are not asking for much from Mr Macron and that a few bold steps could go a long way towards defusing populist tensions and tackling a huge humanitarian crisis.

"We are not asking France to open all the doors. Macron can prove his pro-Europeanism simply by following through on the commitments they have already made," said Ms Quartapelle. "There's an EU agenda on migration and we are asking Macron to stick to it."



Emmanuel Macron, right, meets Italy's Paolo Gentiloni in Trieste, Italy last week. The French leader's stance on migration seems little changed from that of his predecessor

Tiziana Fabi/AFP/Getty



Codice abbonamento: 045688

Europe



Italy's migrant surge

Unwelcome choices

ROME

Most Mediterranean migrants now are economic, and Italy does not know what to do with them

THE encampment has no name, no water, no electricity and no right to be where it is: an abandoned bus park in a desolate stretch of scrub, east of the Tiburtina railway station in Rome. Most of the Africans dotted across the asphalt in tents or sprawled on mattresses in the enervating heat of a Roman summer have no permission to be there either. Many come straight off the boat, says Andrea Costa, head of Baobab Experience, the NGO running the camp: "For them, this is just the latest stage in a journey that may already have taken two years."

So far this year, the number of migrants arriving in Italy by sea is up by 17% over the same period in 2016, to 93,335. Unlike the Syrians who poured across the Aegean in 2015, most of them are fleeing not from war or persecution, but for economic reasons. They do not qualify for humanitarian protection, and in most cases do not want to remain in Italy, but to move on to countries with better grey-market jobs.

Under the European Union's Dublin regulation of 2013, the country where asylum-seekers first land is usually the one that should deal with them. Others are allowed to send them back to that state. Many of those in the camp are among the so-called *dublinati* ("Dublinated ones"), who have tried to leave Italy and been returned—many of them intercepted at the French frontier where stricter controls were imposed last year. "We have some

who have been turned back three, four times," says Mr Costa.

Carlotta Sami of UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, estimates that more than 170,000 migrants are in Italian reception centres or are being housed by local authorities. The French blockade is one reason for the growing build-up. Others include the increase in arrivals and more rigorous identification, such as taking fingerprints, which blocks migrants from applying for asylum in other countries.

As the logjam grows, there have been protests in parts of Italy. And with a general election due by May, Paolo Gentiloni, the prime minister, cannot ignore the discontent. His government wants neighbouring countries to accept migrant rescue boats

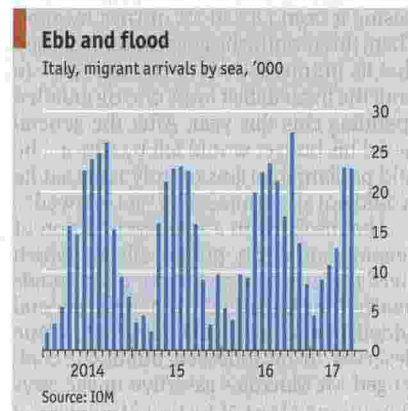
when exceptional numbers are picked up at sea, and for Italy's EU partners to take more of those it already hosts. He also wants international action to stem the flow through Libya.

At Italy's request, the member states of the EU's border agency, Frontex, met in Warsaw on July 11th to discuss changing the rules that govern Triton, the agency's search-and-rescue operation in the central Mediterranean. The following day Mr Gentiloni lobbied the leaders of France and Germany at a summit in Trieste. On July 13th the interior minister, Marco Minniti, flew to Libya to meet the mayors of towns on the coast and the southern border. Officials in Rome are working on a code of conduct for NGOs helping with search and rescue, some of which have been accused of entering Libyan waters in their eagerness to save migrant lives—claims they deny. And on July 18th, a junior foreign minister, Mario Giro, reiterated a threat (disowned by some colleagues) to issue emergency visas that would allow migrants to travel anywhere in the EU's passport-free Schengen zone.

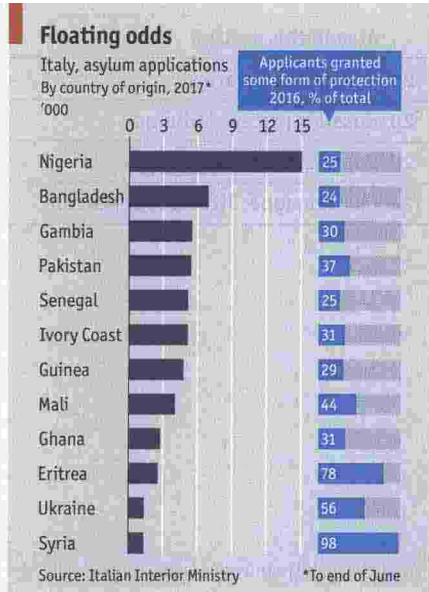
So far, neither bluster nor entreaty has succeeded. A review of the Triton treaty was agreed upon, but with no guarantee it will be altered to Italy's satisfaction.

One of Italy's biggest handicaps is a feeling in other capitals that, because of a mix of soft-heartedness and negligence, it has made itself a "soft touch" for economic migrants. An action plan issued by the European Commission this month is strikingly critical. It urges Italy to extend detention on arrival (currently limited to 72 hours), do more to persuade migrants to agree to be sent back to their home countries, speed up asylum procedures and be less generous in offering protection.

For example, this year has brought a curious surge in the number of Bangladeshis



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▶ arriving in Italy. They formed the biggest group after Nigerians. That may be related to the fact that in 2016, the last year for which figures are available, Italian tribunals extended some form of protection to 24% of applicants from Bangladesh, a poor country but scarcely Syria.

□ Italy has one of the world's lowest birth rates, and few countries are in greater need of immigrants. But an influx of undocumented migrants, many of whom end up idling in illegal makeshift camps, is no way to deal with that issue. For Italians, the Mediterranean migration crisis represents a humanitarian burden. Geography has saddled them with the problem, and their governments' disorganisation has exacerbated it. Their fellow EU members are not eager to help out. ■



Codice abbonamento: 045688

Bruselas exige a Londres que aclare su propuesta de Brexit

LUCÍA ABELLÁN, Bruselas
El Gobierno británico admite en Bruselas lo que evita decir en Londres: que la salida de la Unión Europea implicará pagar una factura por compromisos pendientes. Aun así, Londres rechaza, por el momento, presentar sus cartas en este capítulo cla-

ve del Brexit. El negociador europeo, Michel Barnier, urgió ayer a su homólogo británico, David Davis, a entregar propuestas. “Es indispensable una clarificación”, aseguró tras concluir la segunda ronda negociadora del divorcio británico. La falta de avances en este ámbito amenaza todo el proceso.

La ronda de discusión del divorcio británico —en realidad la primera que ocupa varios días, tras un contacto inicial a mediados de junio— deja claro que el calendario marcado por la UE es más que optimista. Barnier confía en lograr en octubre progresos suficientes en la separación para pasar a discutir la relación futura. Pero a tres meses de esa meta, Londres no ha presentado una sola idea en el asunto más espinoso de este proceso: el ajuste de cuentas entre el club comunitario y el Estado que lo abandona. Bruselas lo cuantifica (extraoficialmente) entre 60.000 y 100.000 millones de euros, pero no habrá cifras concretas hasta el final. Lo que se pretende ahora es consensuar los conceptos de esa suma.

Pese a que los dos negociadores se esforzaron en hablar durante la conferencia de prensa de “conversaciones constructivas” y de “progresos”, los avances fueron muy limitados. En la llamada factura, Barnier exigió a Londres que presente ya su modelo. “Es indispensable una clarificación de la posición de Reino Unido para lograr los progresos necesarios”, advirtió. “La salida ordenada que queremos exige saldar las cuentas antes”, insistió, lo que refuerza la idea de que, sin un divorcio pactado, no habrá conversaciones sobre un próximo acuerdo comercial entre Bruselas y Londres. Barnier extiende la necesidad de aclaraciones a los tres asuntos que forman parte de la fase de salida: la factura, los derechos de los ciuda-

danos afectados por el Brexit y la frontera con Irlanda del Norte. Pero al menos sobre los dos últimos aspectos hay propuestas británicas concretas y la negociación es más fluida.

Davis, partidario del Brexit y uno de los presuntos aspirantes a suceder a la primera ministra, Theresa May, admitió la idea de pagar, aunque muy matizada: “Somos un país que reconoce sus responsabilidades y sus derechos internacionales. Los ejerceremos en el futuro”. Al referirse a derechos —dinero que espera recibir— y obligaciones —cantidades que adeuda a la UE— evitó reconocer que habrá una transfe-

rencia neta a las arcas comunitarias, algo difícil de trasladar al ciudadano británico que votó por el Brexit con la idea de que la pertenencia a Europa le salía cara a Reino Unido.

Sin documentos

El ajuste de cuentas incluye esencialmente tres conceptos: compromisos presupuestarios firmados por Reino Unido para años venideros (y aún no desembolsados), derechos de pensión de los funcionarios europeos y préstamos o avales apalabrados en los que Londres se comprometió a participar. En la ronda de esta semana, Bruselas expuso con detalle su posición —ofreciendo el análisis jurídico de todos los conceptos que cree forman parte de este capítulo— y Londres se limitó a hacer preguntas exhaustivas sobre ese análisis, sin ofrecer pistas sobre qué aceptan, según las fuentes consultadas. El debate fue muy breve, explica un alto cargo de la UE.

Más allá de las cuentas, el otro punto de conflicto detectado en esta ronda ha sido el papel del Tribunal de Justicia de la UE en un Reino Unido pos-Brexit. Bruselas exige que este órgano siga garantizando los derechos de los 3,2 millones de ciudadanos comunitarios que habitan en Reino Unido y de los 1,2 millones de británicos en suelo europeo. Londres alega que no puede mantener su jurisdicción cuando se desvincule del proyecto comunitario. Las discusiones continuarán la última semana de agosto.

Casi 100 británicos, pero sin Davis

Reino Unido ha respondido a las críticas sobre falta de preparación ante el Brexit con una legión de funcionarios desplazados a Bruselas. Un total de 98 británicos han participado en los grupos de trabajo con la cuarentena de funcionarios que componen el equipo de Michel Barnier. El despliegue contrasta con la prolongada ausencia de David Davis, que regresó apresuradamente el lunes a Londres y volvió a Bruselas el miércoles por la noche para cerrar ayer la ronda negociadora.

INTERNACIONAL

Alemania amaga con represalias comerciales a Turquía

El gobierno alemán amenaza con imponer sanciones comerciales a Turquía por su política exterior y su apoyo a los grupos terroristas.



Bruselas exige a Londres que acelere su propuesta de Brexit

La Comisión Europea pide a Reino Unido que avance con rapidez en el proceso de salida de la Unión Europea.

Un año de detenciones

El informe de la ONU denuncia el uso de la fuerza por parte de las autoridades turcas.

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