

FOI Reference 0862-15 – Digest of Information to be Released

[...] indicates where material has been removed as it is out of the scope of the request;

[REDACTED] indicates where material has been redacted using exemptions in the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

From Document 1: OFFICIAL UNGA 69: GENERAL DEBATE: ITALY: PRIME MINISTER RENZI [DIPTTEL 1407739]

Diptel UKMIS NEW YORK

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Diplomatic Telegram, 26 September 2014

Summary

Renzi focuses on threats from immigration [...]

1. Prime Minister Renzi of Italy addressed the General Assembly on the morning of 25 September. His statement was framed around the need to address these challenging and frightening times by returning to the UN's founding aspirations; a vision of hope for the future and a desire to design a world based on rights, respect, freedom and peace. Today's challenges could only be truly addressed through political solutions.

MEDITERRANEAN / LIBYA

2. The Mediterranean was a key strategic issue and transformation of the Mediterranean should be at the heart of Europe. However, the flood of immigrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean to enter Europe had turned it into a cemetery. Italy had stepped up to the challenge with the launch of Operation Mare Nostrum last year. This operation had saved 80,000 lives. But Italy could not tackle this issue alone - it needed strategic intervention from the international community and could not be left to one country.

[...]

From Document 2: OFFICIAL MIGRATION: POPE'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS 2015 [DIPTTEL 1407835]

Diptel HOLY SEE

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Diplomatic Telegram, 30 September 2014

Summary

[...]. Holy See criticises the replacement by Frontex of Italy's Mare Nostrum programme.
[...]

[...]

6. In a later radio interview, Cardinal Vegliò compared Italy's "Mare Nostrum" operation with the "Frontex Plus" EU programme. He claimed the latter would provide less assistance: "Italy has shown real sensibility and generosity through "Mare Nostrum", as they were rescuing migrants everywhere, even close to Northern African countries. I don't think "Frontex Plus" will do that".

From Document 3: OFFICIAL_SENSITIVE ITALY: THE END OF MARE NOSTRUM [DIPTTEL 1408909]

Diptel ROME

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Diplomatic Telegram, 04 November 2014

Summary

Mare Nostrum, the Italian search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean, ended on 31 October. It rescued over 100,000 individuals over 12 months and cost 115m euros. The new Frontex operation Triton is smaller in size and scope but the Italians are presenting it as a replacement for Mare Nostrum.

Detail

1. On 31 October, Italian Interior Minister Alfano and Defence Minister Pinotti announced the end of the Mare Nostrum operation, which was put in place after the Lampedusa tragedy in which, on 3 October 2013, 366 people of various nationalities died trying to reach Italy from Libya. The mission will in fact be phased out in reduced capacity over two months alongside Triton, the new Frontex maritime border control mission. The Italian government, however, was keen to deliver quickly on their commitment at the last Justice and Home Affairs Council to end the financially unsustainable Mare Nostrum now that there is an EU mission in place.
2. At a cost of almost 115m euros, Mare Nostrum carried out 558 search and rescue operations, saving more than 100,250 people. 728 human traffickers were arrested and 8 mother ships (boats that served as a staging area from which traffickers dispatched migrants on smaller boats) were confiscated. But it did not save 499 people who lost their lives before the rescue operations reached them; or 1,500 presumed lost at sea. A further 50,000 migrants were not intercepted and arrived directly on Italian shores. The new Frontex mission will remain within 30 miles of the Italian coastline, costing around 3m euros a month – Mare Nostrum cost the Italian government 9m euros a month – and most EU Member States are participating in one way or another. Italy will continue maritime controls in accordance with international obligations.

3. This year has seen an unprecedented number of arrivals to Italy, mainly from Libya but of predominantly Eritrean, Syrian, Palestinian and Somali nationalities, with around 150,000 people, more than twice the previous peak of 62,000 arrivals in 2011 during the Arab Spring, leaving Africa and the Middle East in search of a better life in Europe. Mare Nostrum, which reached almost to the Libyan coast, is partly responsible for creating a pull factor. As more than 3,000 people died this year attempting the crossing, it is clear that the search and rescue operation did not save everyone. But both migrants and traffickers have admitted that its existence encouraged many to take the risk, believing they only had to survive a journey of a few miles, and even attempting the crossing in winter.
4. [REDACTED]
5. What happens next will be dictated by what happens at sea but it is clear that the flow of migrants will continue. Many have expressed concerns that the vacuum left by the end of Mare Nostrum may lead to further tragedies at sea. UNHCR spokesman William Spindler said on Friday "A proper search and rescue effort needs to be maintained, otherwise people will continue to die" adding that the UN body did not think that Triton was enough. The Secretary General of the European Council on Refugees, Michael Diedring, said it was "deplorable" for the EU to prioritise coastal border controls over search and rescue missions. As seen from here, the Italians will continue to press for an increased budget for Frontex and more widely for EU burden sharing and a common asylum framework. They will also encourage the creation of humanitarian channels of passage and allowing asylum seekers to apply for asylum or international protection from their home countries. As Triton will continue to bring rescued individuals to Italy they will also continue to struggle with their reception policies and fingerprinting [REDACTED]

Comment

6. We are engaging with Italy more closely than ever on migration issues and this is helping to create a spirit of cooperation which we should nurture further. The Home Office has already identified a number of areas for joint cooperation - upstream work in Ethiopia, Eritrea and elsewhere in North/East Africa, organised immigration crime, joint returns, information campaigns in third countries – and it is crucial that this work continues. The Khartoum Ministerial meeting in Rome on 28 November (of which Italy is a prime sponsor and we are members of the core group) also represents a good opportunity for high level engagement which we should make the most of, particularly as the challenge of tackling illegal migration will remain very much a live issue here in Italy.

From Document 4: OFFICIAL EUROPE: STRATEGIC COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, FRONTIERS AND ASYLUM (SCIFA), 13/14 NOVEMBER 2014 [DIPTTEL 1409309]

Diptel UKREP Brussels

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Diplomatic Telegram, 17 November 2014

Summary

[...] Italian search and rescue activities (Mare Nostrum) have almost been phased out. [...]

[REDACTED]

[...]

AOB – EU ACTION ON MIGRATORY PRESSURE: STATE OF PLAY BY THE PRESIDENCY ON THE UPDATING PROCEDURE

18. The Presidency confirmed that the Roadmap will be finalised at the next SCIFA on 12 December and invited Member States to submit written comments.

[...]

From Document 5: OFFICIAL MIGRATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING: POPE FRANCIS KEEPS UP THE PRESSURE ON THE EU AND UN [DIPTTEL 1502707]

Diptel HOLY SEE

Foreign & Commonwealth Office Diplomatic Telegram, 22 April 2015 15:19

Summary

Appalled by the latest tragedy, the Holy See calls for a “specific” and “concrete” EU response to migration and the deaths in the Mediterranean. Influential Papal adviser Cardinal Marx says Europe’s response “a litmus test of European values”. Pope Francis – who has made this a priority since the start of his Papacy – is likely to recommend a more explicit focus on modern slavery and human trafficking in the SDGs when he meets Ban Ki-Moon next week. Modern Slavery Act opens up possibilities for UK work with Holy See networks.

[...]

7. [...] The Italian government, media and public listened when the Holy See supported Italy’s Mare Nostrum programme, and criticised its Triton successor – specifically over the question of resources dedicated to saving lives.

[...]