Salvini threatens rise in deportations

Italy coalition set to upset EU on migrants and by reversing pension reform

RACHEL SANDERSON — MILAN

Italy’s new anti-establishment government has placed itself on a collision course with Europe, with top ministers from the League and the Five Star Movement threatening to ratchet up deportations of migrants and rip up pension reforms.

Matteo Salvini, new interior minister and head of the anti-immigrant League, took to Twitter yesterday to denounce Europe’s migration policy. “Either Europe gives us a hand to make our country secure or we will choose other roads,” he said.

Mr Salvini’s comments came ahead of a crucial meeting of European interior ministers this week about the region’s migration policy and followed an incendiary visit to the Sicilian port of Pozzallo on Sunday, where the League leader declared Tunisia was sending Italy “convicts”.

Those remarks followed reports of the latest migrant fatalities off Italy, with coastguards saying 47 migrants on a boat bound from north Africa had drowned, including six children.

Mr Salvini also pledged to increase deportations of undocumented arrivals and to create camps where migrants could be held for up to 18 months.

Luigi Di Maio, Five Star leader and the new minister for economic development, also took aim at Europe, saying the new government would rip up a pension reform pushed through by the technocratic government of Mario Monti in 2011. “The money to do this, we will take from Europe,” he said.

Brussels has been braced for confrontation with the new government, which took office on Friday after nearly three months of horse-trading.

The League and Five Star had campaigned for March’s election against the establishment, migrants and Europe.

Mr Salvini said yesterday he would not attend a meeting of European interior ministers in Luxembourg this week, which is due to discuss a contentious overhaul of so-called Dublin rules for asylum seekers in the EU.

“We will send our delegation to vote No,” he said. “The document under discussion, instead of helping, penalises Mediterranean countries to the benefit of northern Europe.”

Italy and other Mediterranean countries are opposed to a plan to make the states of migrants’ first arrival responsible for them for some years after. This means people could be returned to those countries if they later appeared in another EU nation during that time.

Mr Salvini said he would instead stay in Rome for the parliamentary confidence vote — expected today — on the new government, led by Giuseppe Conte, prime minister.

The early dominance of Mr Salvini and Mr Di Maio, deputy prime ministers in the new government, underscores concerns that Mr Conte is poised to play a minor role in government.

Pollsters are already predicting the government may be shortlived and Italy could be back at the polls before the end of the year.

Polls published in Italy’s Corriere della Sera newspaper yesterday showed support for the League had surged since the March 4 elections, from 17.4 per cent to 28.5 per cent. Meanwhile support for Five Star had fallen slightly, from 32.7 per cent to 30.1 per cent.

Addtional reporting by Michael Peel in Brussels

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