States and Migration: The Human Movement Podcast
Episode 29 "Italy's Migration Diplomacy: EU Borders, Tunisia Deals, and the Future of the Schengen System – with Maurizio Canfora"

Enhanced Transcript

By Emmanuel Comte – with the assistance of Andriana Lagoudes

Abstract: As irregular arrivals test Europe's southern border, Italy has stepped into a central role in shaping the EU's migration policy. In this interview, Emmanuel Comte speaks with Maurizio Canfora, Italy's Vice Minister Plenipotentiary and Director General for European Integration. Canfora offers an insider's look at how Italy influences the EU Migration Pact, manages partnerships with Tunisia and Libya, and navigates border diplomacy amid rising geopolitical tension. Listeners will gain insight into Italy's complex balancing act: safeguarding the Schengen zone, supplying its labor market, and curbing irregular migration through strategic cooperation. We explore Italy's evolving stance on Frontex, the legal limits of maritime border control, and the country's high-stakes engagement with France, Germany, and the European Commission. For anyone following Mediterranean migration, EU external relations, or the future of free movement in Europe, this episode is essential listening.

Disclaimer: *This transcript has been produced for educational purposes to support the understanding and integration of information discussed in the related conversation. It is not intended for use in quoting the conversation verbatim. For accurate quotations, please refer to the original recording.*

Introduction

Emmanuel Comte: As sea arrivals fluctuate and the EU's new Migration Pact takes shape, Italy finds itself at the heart of Europe's migration dilemmas. Positioned on the Mediterranean frontline, the country must navigate a complex set of challenges—from domestic labor shortages to regional instability and EU-level negotiations.

To explore this balancing act, I'm speaking with Maurizio Canfora, Minister Plenipotentiary and Director General for European Integration at Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With decades of diplomatic experience and direct involvement in shaping Italy's European policy, Mr. Canfora offers a unique perspective on how Italian migration policy is crafted, contested, and negotiated—in Rome, Brussels, and beyond.

In our conversation, we explore how migration became a central theme in his career, how Italy aligns—or struggles to align—its migration approach with labor market needs, and how its border management functions in practice. We also examine Italy's diplomatic engagement with France and Germany, its influence on EU migration policy, and its cooperation with Libya and Tunisia. This discussion provides an insider's view on the decisions and dilemmas shaping Italy's migration diplomacy today.

Mr. Canfora, thank you very much for joining this interview.

A Diplomat's Journey into Migration

Maurizio Canfora: Thank you, and I appreciate the generous introduction to my professional background.

Emmanuel Comte: Let's begin by looking at your personal journey. How did the topic of migration first enter your career?

Maurizio Canfora: I've been working on EU-related issues for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for quite a long time. Over the course of my 30-year career, approximately 18 years have been dedicated to European Union matters, primarily in the field of external relations, including development cooperation. Currently, in my role as Director for EU Integration within the Directorate General for Europe, I also oversee coordination with the Ministry of the Interior to define Italy's position in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council, particularly regarding EU migration issues.

Emmanuel Comte: So, your engagement with migration policy is connected to your work in EU affairs?

Maurizio Canfora: Exactly. My involvement in migration policy intensified toward the end of a very long negotiation process around the new Common European Asylum System, commonly known in Brussels as the Asylum and Migration Pact. This framework was under discussion for approximately 17 years. Fortunately, shortly after I assumed my current position, the Council reached an agreement with the European Parliament on a new structure for the EU's asylum and migration system. That's when my responsibilities around migration began to take shape within EU-related work.

Emmanuel Comte: You mentioned a 30-year career, with 18 years focused on EU affairs. Out of those 18, how many have been specifically focused on migration?

Maurizio Canfora: Five of those years have been specifically dedicated to migration, especially in the context of EU negotiations and policymaking.

Emmanuel Comte: So, in the last five years, migration has become a growing priority in Italian diplomacy?

Maurizio Canfora: Yes, precisely. Migration has become increasingly central to both Italy's domestic concerns and its position within the EU. It is no longer a secondary issue; it's now a strategic dimension of foreign and European policy.

Emmanuel Comte: As I understand it, your position is quite horizontal. You're not specifically focused on migration.

Maurizio Canfora: That's correct. I don't work exclusively on migration, but I am responsible for preparing Italy's position on EU migration and asylum issues within the Council of the European Union. Each member state represents itself in the Council of Ministers and participates in various working groups that prepare the Council's work.
In the case of migration, the relevant forum is the Justice and Home Affairs Council, where ministers of interior and justice typically convene. Their positions are shaped through preparatory work done by civil servants across the different ministries in each member state. In Italy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs plays a coordinating role in shaping what Italy brings to those discussions in Brussels.

I contribute to this process from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' side.

Emmanuel Comte: That's certainly a very crucial role. From what you're describing, migration appears to be a major topic in both Italy's foreign policy and its engagement at the EU level.

Maurizio Canfora: Yes, migration is one of the most significant issues Italy faces in its EU relations. Over the past few years, this topic has increasingly attracted the attention of European Union institutions and officials. What was once just frequently stated is now broadly recognized: migration issues represent a European challenge that requires a collective European response.

That's why Italy is so committed to keeping migration high on the EU agenda. In the past two or three years, the topic has consistently appeared on the European Council's agenda—the summit of EU heads of state and government—often at Italy's request.

The European Commission is largely aligned with our view on the importance of addressing this challenge. More and more, EU governments are beginning to share the perspective of Mediterranean countries like Italy. Although many of these states are geographically distant from the Mediterranean, there is a growing consensus in Brussels about how to address migration as a pan-European phenomenon.

Labor Markets & Legal Pathways

Emmanuel Comte: That's very insightful. Let's delve into the foundations of Italy's position on these issues. Clearly, Italy is impacted by specific migration flows, but we shouldn't overlook that Italy is also a major tourist destination, as well as a hub for religious pilgrimages. These factors could influence its stance on border controls.

In addition, Italy's labor market has its own particularities. From my perspective, the Italian economy is doing relatively well in the context of the EU. Would you agree with that assessment?

Maurizio Canfora: Yes, broadly speaking, the Italian economy has shown positive performance in recent years.

Emmanuel Comte: That economic strength might create labor demand. However, the labor market in Italy is also segmented and includes a significant informal sector. Given all these dynamics—economic growth, tourism, irregular labor—how do they influence Italy's migration policy? Do these factors soften the country's efforts to restrict migration flows, and if so, how?

Maurizio Canfora: There's an important clarification to make. When I previously referred to the migration challenge, I was specifically talking about irregular migration—unauthorized arrivals—not migration in general. That distinction is central to how we frame the issue in policy discussions.

Of course, a country like Italy—which is both aging and has a strong industrial base—will increasingly need to generate a larger workforce in the future. That will be difficult to achieve if we continue on our current path of declining birth rates. In short, migration is an economic necessity, and everyone recognizes this.

The issue isn't migration itself. Migration is a natural phenomenon that has existed for centuries. The real challenge lies in the dramatic increase in irregular migration flows,

especially those arriving via Mediterranean transit countries. This is what has deeply affected Italy and, by extension, the EU over recent decades.

When I refer to the "migration challenge," I'm specifically talking about irregular migration and its impact. I'm not referring to the broader, long-term question of managing legal migration or integrating migrants into our economy. On that front, it's clear—we acknowledge that legal migration is and will continue to be essential to supply the labor force our economy requires.

I wanted to clarify this conceptual distinction. When we talk about "migration problems" or "migration challenges" in Europe, we are primarily referring to how to address irregular migration and secure our external borders.

That said, this issue is closely linked to another important point: the need to facilitate legal pathways to enter the EU. These are two sides of the same coin. If people have no legal way to migrate—because our visa policies are not aligned with labor market demands—this creates opportunities for illegal and often criminal networks to flourish. People from countries with fewer prospects will still seek better lives in Europe, whether legally or not.

So, again, while these are distinct issues, they are deeply interconnected. Irregular migration brings about social tensions, concerns in public opinion, and security challenges in our cities. That is the problem we urgently need to resolve.

But to do so effectively, we also need a comprehensive perspective on the other dimension you mentioned: how to ensure our economies have enough labor. In other words, how can we promote well-regulated, safe, and legal migration?

These are essentially two separate policy areas, but they must be approached together. Methodologically, we use different instruments to address each.

Border Management & Frontex

Emmanuel Comte: My previous question was exactly about that connection you described—these "two sides of the same coin." There was a time when Italy, due to its needs in tourism and religious pilgrimages, maintained relatively open visa policies.

There was a time when Italy was willing to regularize migrants who had entered the workforce informally. However, such policies often clash with stricter measures aimed at curbing irregular migration.

Listening to you, it seems there has been a shift. It appears that policies designed to move individuals from irregular to regular status—through mechanisms like visa reform or regularization—are no longer actively being debated. In other words, the framework for visa policy and the possibility of regularization seem to be more or less fixed. As a result, the current focus appears to be on managing those who are considered irregular and are likely to remain so, regardless of future policy changes.

Maurizio Canfora: Not exactly. I think it's important to clarify that several concepts are being mixed together in a somewhat confusing way.

First, it's essential to understand that the EU does have a common asylum policy under the Schengen acquis. However, in practice, we do not have a fully unified EU asylum policy. Each of the 27 member states retains national competence over its own asylum system.

We certainly attempt coordination at the EU level, but it's inherently difficult. The European Union is diverse, with countries in very different geographic and economic situations. Some are large Mediterranean countries, others are landlocked, and some share borders with conflict zones—like those now bordering Ukraine.

Given this diversity, interests vary widely. Some member states are experiencing recession, while others are in periods of economic growth. This leads to differing approaches to labor market access and migration policy. One country may be more inclined to open its labor market, while another may take a more restrictive stance. These diverging interests make it extremely difficult to establish a truly common asylum system.

I believe this is one of the central challenges we face today. Developing a harmonized view on asylum policy would likely require treaty reform. Without a synchronized approach, it will be very difficult to manage migration in a coherent and consistent manner across the Union.

Emmanuel Comte: Yes, obviously, each EU member state maintains its own national legislation regarding asylum and immigration. But my question concerns the broader national policies relevant to immigration, including visa policy and regularization programs.

From what you've explained, it seems these instruments are no longer central to the current debate. The focus now appears to be more on managing clearly identified cases of irregular migration, using European-level instruments.

In this context, how does your ministry assess the effectiveness of current border management strategies, particularly around Italy? And how do you view the role of Frontex?

Maurizio Canfora: Frontex has certainly been helpful in preventing certain forms of criminal activity, including migrant smuggling and human trafficking. However, we must acknowledge that Frontex alone is not the definitive solution.

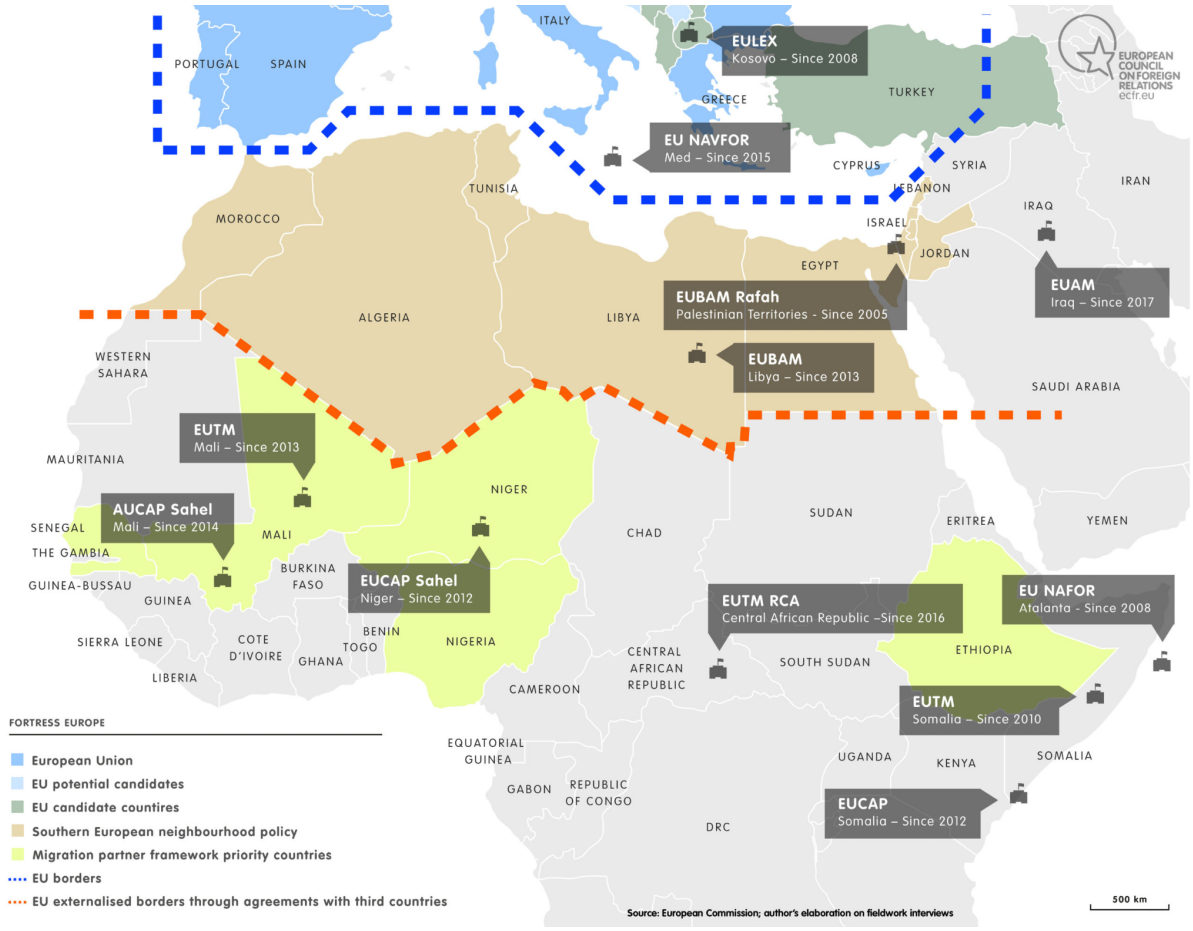
The real solution lies in close cooperation with transit countries—those from which migrants are allowed to leave illegally in an attempt to reach the European Union. This is the strategy Italy has promoted at the EU level, and it's now being adopted by the EU more broadly. It centers on what we refer to as the "external dimension" of the migration issue.

For Italy, this means working with countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, especially in North Africa. The goal is to engage in sustained dialogue and cooperation with these nations so that we can help stop human trafficking at its source. By doing so, we aim to reduce the number of people risking their lives at sea in attempts to reach Europe irregularly.

This approach has become the focal point of the current EU-level discussions. Italy supports this model at both the Council and European Council levels. There's growing consensus among member states regarding the effectiveness of this foreign policy-based model of cooperation—with instruments tailored to countries such as Tunisia, and potentially in the future, Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan.

Strategic Partnerships with North African Countries

Emmanuel Comte: So, the key strategy is not to control Italy's borders in isolation but rather to work in cooperation with neighboring transit countries. That is the more effective way of managing migration flows?



Fortress Europe – European Council on Foreign Relations.

Maurizio Canfora: Exactly. If fewer boats depart from the southern Mediterranean, it becomes significantly easier to manage border control—especially considering Italy's borders are primarily maritime. Maritime borders are inherently difficult to control because international and European law prohibits refoulement, or pushbacks at sea.

You cannot intercept and return people while they're still at sea—that would be a violation of international and European obligations. This makes land borders comparatively easier to manage. At sea, returning individuals without due process is not legally acceptable, and more importantly, it endangers lives.

Emmanuel Comte: Understood. You've mentioned Tunisia and Libya. Are these the main focus countries in Italy's cooperation efforts?

Maurizio Canfora: Yes. In recent years, Tunisia has been the primary focus, as it has been the main point of departure for irregular migration towards Italy and Europe.

We also aim to cooperate with Libya, though that's more complicated. There is an internationally recognized government, which is the one we engage with, but the country is fragmented. There's also a de facto authority in the Cyrenaica region.

Engaging with Egypt is more straightforward. We maintain a bilateral dialogue with Egypt, and we also collaborate through EU frameworks.

The broader EU approach has evolved into something more structured. The European Commission has launched a series of agreements called Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs). These have already been concluded with countries like Tunisia and Egypt, and one is expected soon with Jordan.

The idea behind these agreements is to address irregular migration at its roots. We aim to support the economic development of partner countries so that fewer people feel compelled to migrate. This includes cooperation in key areas such as energy, climate, and the development of private-sector economies.

Through this economic collaboration, we also encourage these countries to take greater responsibility for controlling their borders. Many of them currently lack the capacity to fully monitor their territory, which allows criminal networks to organize migrant boat crossings and trafficking operations from the Sahel region to Europe.

So, our support includes both economic assistance and capacity building—working with local police forces and justice systems to improve enforcement and ensure that human trafficking networks are dismantled.

This is the strategy Italy has adopted, and it is now becoming the broader strategy of the European Union as well, through the agreements I just mentioned.

The focus of these agreements isn't solely on migration. Migration is just one component of the broader cooperation we're working to establish.

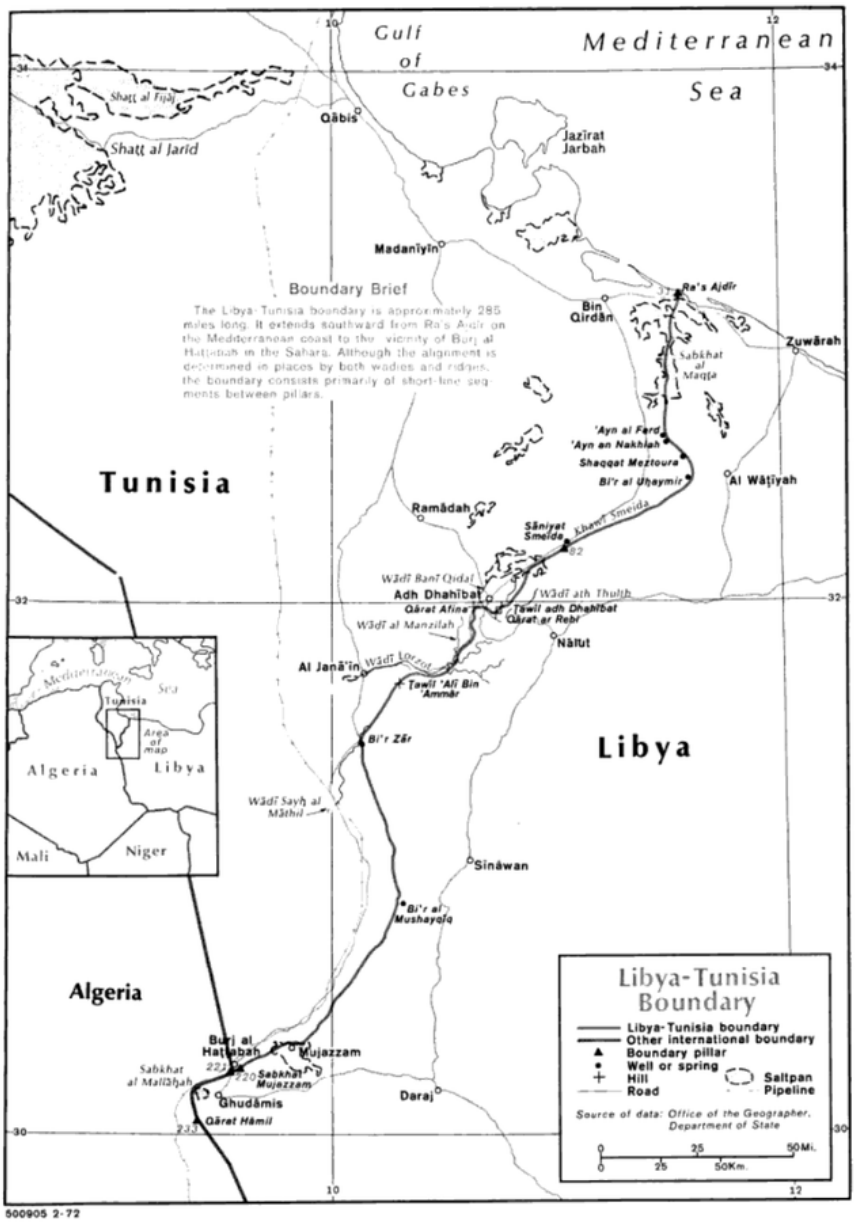
Emmanuel Comte: So these are comprehensive economic partnership agreements. However, from the EU's perspective, there's an expectation that within the framework of these agreements, there will be specific cooperation on border management—helping partner countries better control their borders and prevent the transit of irregular migrants.

You mentioned earlier that the situation in Libya is particularly challenging. I assume this remains a serious concern, especially since Libya has been one of the main points of origin for irregular migrants arriving in Italy. How is cooperation with Tunisia progressing?

Maurizio Canfora: Actually, cooperation with Tunisia has been quite successful. Around three years ago, Tunisia was on the verge of economic collapse. Through the EU's agreement and bilateral cooperation with Italy, they were able to stabilize their economy.

This financial support has made Tunisia more willing to engage in dialogue with both the EU and Italy. In terms of tangible results, we've observed a significant decrease in irregular migration flows originating from Tunisia. In fact, over the past year, the number of irregular migrants taking the Central Mediterranean route has been cut by half.

This route includes departures from both Tunisia and, to some extent, Libya. It's important to understand that while Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia have national borders, those borders are very porous. For instance, many migrants who were waiting in Libya to depart for Europe were regularly smuggled across the border into Tunisia. So, by shutting down key smuggling hubs in Tunisia, we indirectly reduce the migration pressure coming from Libya as well.



The same principle applies to Egypt. While Egypt is geographically closer to the Cyrenaica region of Libya than to Tripolitania, it has also served as a departure or transit point for migrants who eventually made their way through Libya. By cooperating with Egypt, we can also help control the flows accumulating in Libya.

So, in response to your question: yes, Libya poses a major challenge due to the chaotic political situation there. But by focusing on halting the movement of people at critical points in Tunisia and Egypt, we aim to contain the issue upstream—before migrants reach Libyan territory.

Thanks to our collaboration with Tunisia—and through the EU's engagement—we've already seen the route through Tunisia significantly diminished. We hope to replicate that success with Egypt.

Emmanuel Comte: And with Libya, the problem continues primarily because of the political fragmentation?

Maurizio Canfora: Exactly. The situation in Libya remains highly unstable. The country is no longer fully under the control of the internationally recognized government led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh. That government is struggling to resist growing pressure and potential escalation toward a full-scale civil war, largely instigated by powerful militias operating in various regions of the country.

Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, Prime Minister of the Government of National Unity of Libya.

This makes institutional cooperation extremely difficult. Without a stable, unified government in Libya, it's nearly impossible to implement structured agreements or achieve consistent results. That is the challenge we're currently facing. However, we believe that the Strategic Partnership Agreement model—which has worked well with Tunisia and is proving effective with Egypt—could, in the future, also be applied successfully to Libya, once the situation there stabilizes.

We are not giving up on the goal of stabilizing Libya. This is a crucial objective, not only for Italy's national security but also for the security of the entire European Union, given Libya's strategic location at the heart of the Mediterranean.

EU Responsibility & the Schengen Framework

Emmanuel Comte: Thank you for all those insights. I have a few follow-up questions, which I'll ask together.

First, you seem to be looking heavily towards Brussels in managing this issue. I assume that's because the EU is providing the bulk of the economic assistance used as a bargaining chip in migration negotiations with these third countries. Can you confirm that EU funding is indeed a key component in enabling cooperation?

Second, how do you explain the fact that Tunisia has managed to reduce by half the number of irregular migrants departing from its territory toward Europe? Was this the result of better border management, the dismantling of specific smuggling networks, or something else? And is this reduction sustainable? If I understood correctly, this significant decline occurred between 2023 and 2024.

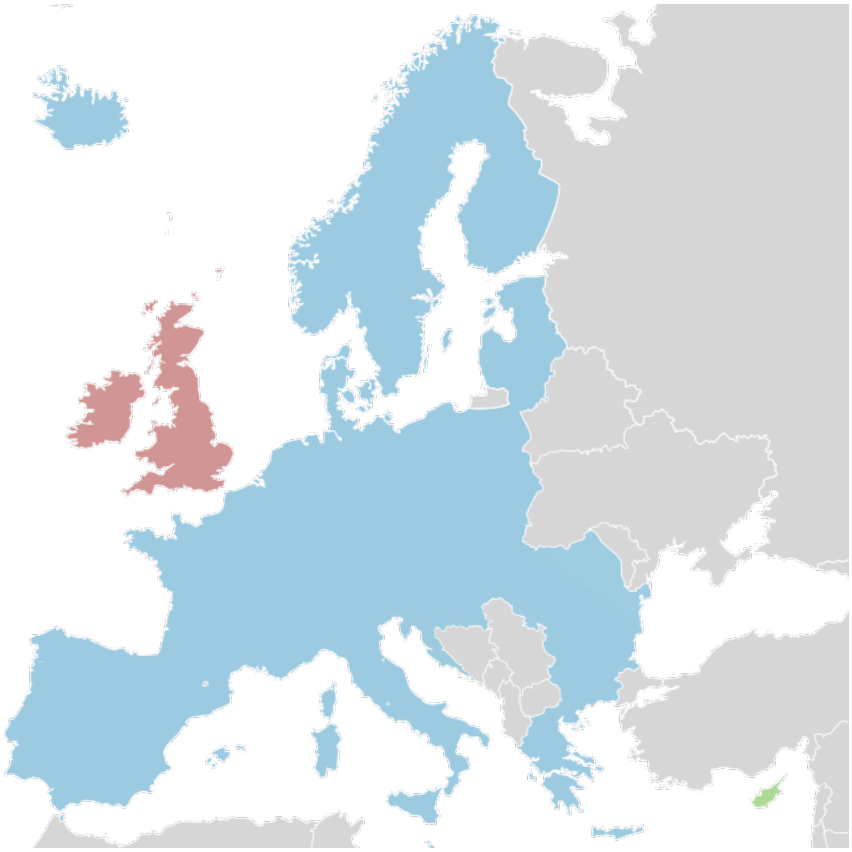
Third, you emphasize that stabilizing Libya remains vital, regardless of progress made through agreements with Tunisia and Egypt. What is your government's broader policy for achieving stability in Libya? Would Italy consider a more assertive or even interventionist approach?

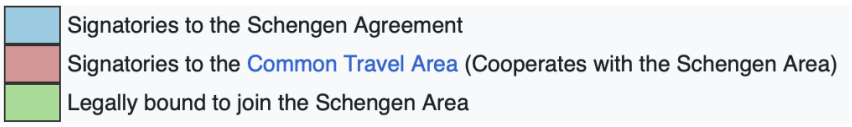
Feel free to answer these questions in any order you prefer.

Maurizio Canfora: Thank you. I'll address them in the order you presented.

First, regarding EU funding: yes, we do rely significantly on the European Union, but not simply because of the financial support. While it's true that the EU provides funding, we must also recognize that Italy is one of its largest contributors—we are the third largest, in fact. As a net contributor, we pay more into the EU budget than we receive.

So, for us, this is not just about money. It's about ensuring that the EU assumes collective responsibility for the control of its external borders. According to the logic of the Schengen Area, border control has essentially been delegated to the member states that sit on the EU's external frontier.





Map showing the extent of the Schengen Agreement.

Italy, with roughly 3,000 kilometers of coastline, has one of the longest and most complex maritime borders in Europe. Managing this border is not only extremely expensive but also operationally difficult—particularly for the reasons I mentioned earlier, such as the legal limitations on maritime returns and the scale of sea-based arrivals.

So, essentially, we're not just talking about Italy's external border—we're talking about the external border of the European Union. While Italy bears the primary responsibility, the EU also shares in that responsibility. It's a joint task to manage these borders in order to preserve the functioning of the Schengen system.

That's why we count on the EU's involvement. This is not merely an Italian issue; it's a European challenge. The agreements launched by the European Commission—starting with the first mandate of President Ursula von der Leyen—have come about because Brussels has recognized this as a shared problem. It directly relates to the sustainability of one of the EU's fundamental freedoms: the free movement of people.

If we want to maintain a functioning Schengen Area, with freedom of movement across member states, then securing external borders becomes essential. And when a country—like Italy—is effectively surrounded by large, difficult-to-monitor maritime borders, it becomes a matter of shared interest and shared responsibility.

This isn't just about helping Italy. It's in the interest of other member states too—France, Germany, and even countries like those in the Benelux region, which only have internal EU borders. For them, Schengen means open and easily managed borders. But for countries like Italy, Spain, and Greece—the so-called first-entry states—the responsibility to manage those external borders is significant and constant.

That's why we strongly advocate for the EU to take ownership of this challenge. It's not just about providing funds through the EU budget. It's about fulfilling a political and legal obligation to uphold a well-functioning Schengen system.

This shared responsibility includes financial support, yes—but also the deployment of personnel and resources for border control, and above all, a unified strategic approach.

It also involves taking a common stance toward transit countries. Not everyone was immediately supportive of initiating dialogue with Tunisia, particularly within the European Parliament. There were concerns regarding the rule of law and fundamental rights under the current Tunisian government.

Nevertheless, dialogue remains essential. We must address these issues through engagement. All member states should approach this challenge with a common, comprehensive perspective. The EU provides the framework to foster this unity.

Ultimately, this is about building shared understanding—even among member states that are not directly affected by irregular migration. While funding and personnel are important, the real issue is political and conceptual. If we are serious about having a European Union with a functioning Schengen system, we must have well-protected external borders. The burden of securing those borders cannot fall solely on the member states that are geographically situated at the heart of the crises. It must be a shared responsibility across all EU member states.

That covers the first question.

Emmanuel Comte: Thank you.

Libya & Tunisia – Diplomacy in Practice

Maurizio Canfora: Now, let me address the second and third questions—on Tunisia and Libya—together.

Regarding Libya: It's well beyond my authority to speculate whether Italy would consider military intervention. But I can say with confidence that such an option is highly unlikely. Our constitution prohibits the use of military force to resolve international disputes, or any kind of intervention that could be classified as war—even if it's not officially called one. So I don't believe military action is a path Italy would pursue.

However, the European Union already has a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission in Libya, called EUBAM Libya. It's a civilian mission tasked with assisting Libyan authorities in developing and organizing their border management systems. Italy was instrumental in helping to establish this mission and has been active in trying to keep it operational.

Unfortunately, due to Libya's security situation, the mission hasn't achieved its full potential. The ongoing instability has made it difficult to support Libyan authorities in effectively tackling trafficking networks and securing their borders.

Nevertheless, this is the kind of engagement we should continue pursuing—working through the EU's available tools and frameworks to assist Libyan institutions in managing migration flows more effectively.

In terms of security, there's also Operation Irini, a maritime military operation. While its mandate is primarily to enforce the arms embargo on Libya, it reflects another way the EU is trying to contribute to regional stability without direct military intervention or "boots on the ground." These instruments are supported by Italy and will continue to be in the future.

Now, about Tunisia: The government there responded positively to the political and diplomatic legitimacy it received through our agreements. The conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding and the recognition of Tunisia's role on the international stage, particularly in the Arab world and the Maghreb, gave the Tunisian government renewed incentive to act.

With the economic assistance we provided, Tunisia was able to mobilize its own internal capabilities to better manage its borders. It became a successful diplomatic exercise.

Internal EU Consensus & Migration Policy

Emmanuel Comte: That's a good transition point. Let's shift our focus northward to Italy's relations with other European countries on irregular migration. What has the relationship been like with France and Germany, especially in terms of migration control? How would you evaluate that cooperation? I realize this may be a sensitive subject—particularly given some well-known disagreements with France—but I'd appreciate your assessment.

Maurizio Canfora: It's not just diplomacy speaking when I say this—I genuinely believe it's true. The cooperation between these three major EU countries—Italy, France, and Germany—was instrumental in finally reaching an agreement on the new Pact on Migration and Asylum. Without alignment between Italy and Germany, but also France, we would never have ended what was essentially a 17-year-long negotiation. That was finalized in 2022.

Of course, the media often highlights controversies, and political rhetoric sometimes adds fuel to the fire. But if we look beyond headlines and polemics—what in France you might call *la politique politicienne*—you'll see that the core interests of these three countries are increasingly aligned, especially on migration.

Emmanuel Comte: Could you expand on that?

Maurizio Canfora: Certainly. As I mentioned earlier, there is now broad EU consensus that migration is a European challenge. This wasn't the case five or six years ago. Back then, France, Germany, and Italy had divergent views—especially regarding the importance of the "external dimension" of migration policy, which involves cooperation with countries of origin and transit to prevent irregular departures.

Italy, along with other first-entry states like Greece and Spain, strongly promoted this idea. But continental states like Germany initially rejected it. They viewed the issue from a different lens: migrants arriving in Italy or Lampedusa would, years later, appear in France or Germany. Their perception was that Italy failed to control its borders, allowing migrants to exploit Schengen freedom of movement.

This view overlooked a critical reality: the journey from Africa to northern Europe is a single continuum. These individuals never intended to stay in Italy; they wanted to reach family or communities already settled in countries like France or Germany.

So, for them, arriving in Lampedusa is just one step—never the destination. The final goal is often reunification with relatives or seeking asylum further north. Unless we address the journey from its very beginning—from departure points in Africa—we will continue to see downstream problems throughout Europe.

This argument eventually gained traction in Germany. We had strong cooperation during the final years of Angela Merkel's chancellorship, and it has continued under Chancellor Scholz. Thanks to that alignment, we were able to push the migration pact forward.

Emmanuel Comte: And France?

Maurizio Canfora: France is a more complex case. Since Brexit, it has found itself in a unique position. On the one hand, France is a Mediterranean country with an external EU border, though it's farther from North Africa than Italy. On the other hand, it now faces significant pressure along its northern coast—from migrants trying to cross the English Channel into the UK.

So, France has essentially become both a first-entry country and a transit country. Migrants who once sought reunification in France are now increasingly using it as a stepping stone to reach the United Kingdom. This dual role places France in a very delicate situation.

I understand—though I don't justify—the often fiery rhetoric we see in the French press regarding Italy and other first-entry states. But the only way forward is continued dialogue through Brussels. That's what's happening now.

Emmanuel Comte: Thank you very much for those detailed responses. So just to confirm: cooperation between Italy and Germany was critical to finalizing the Pact on Migration and Asylum in Brussels.

Maurizio Canfora: Exactly. That alignment was key.

Social Attitudes & Migration Perceptions

Emmanuel Comte: Alright, we now have some members of the audience joining us. Lisa, would you like to ask a question to Mr. Canfora?

Audience Member (Lisa): Yes. Mr. Canfora, we already know each other. I think you've provided a very comprehensive overview of Italy's migration policy and the broader political context. I'd like to shift the conversation slightly to the social level.

How has the image of immigrants changed over time in Italy? Would you say there's been an improvement in how immigrants are perceived, or has there been a growing trend of social exclusion and discrimination?

Maurizio Canfora: That's a very important question. To answer it properly, I think we first need to distinguish between irregular migrants and legal migrants.

In Italy—particularly in the industrial north—a significant portion of the workforce in large companies and manufacturing sectors are legal migrants from third countries. These individuals have settled in Italy over the last 15 to 20 years. They've married, built families, and their children now attend Italian schools alongside local children. They are fully embedded in our society.

Speaking personally, I'm in my 50s. When I was growing up in Italy, the situation was very different. You almost never encountered foreigners working in cafés, restaurants, or factories. Schools were entirely Italian—we didn't have foreign classmates. That has changed completely.

For people of my generation, this represents a dramatic cultural shift. For younger generations—like yours, Lisa—this kind of diversity is the norm. And I think most Italians now view legally resident immigrants who are working, raising families, and participating in society as a natural part of the national fabric.

However, the perception is quite different when it comes to irregular migrants. In my youth, Italy still had a stronger religious sentiment—at least nominally as a Christian country. There was often a sense of pity, even compassion, toward the first migrants arriving—whether regular or irregular. People believed Italy, as a relatively wealthy country, had a moral obligation to welcome a few more individuals in need.

But over the last 15 years, the numbers have increased dramatically. The reception system—whether through the state, the church, or NGOs—has been overwhelmed. As a result, many irregular migrants have fallen into the hands of criminal networks or been exploited by businesses operating outside the legal framework.

This visibility—migrants working irregularly or becoming involved in criminal structures—has led to increased anxiety among the public. Many Italians perceive the current situation as unsustainable or "abnormal," and that sentiment has been reflected in political discourse and, clearly, in the outcomes of recent elections.

Lisa: Yes, I can confirm that. Thank you for your explanation.

Future Priorities & Budget Negotiations

Emmanuel Comte: Thank you very much, Mr. Canfora. One final question: now that the Migration and Asylum Pact has been finalized, what is your next major project at the Ministry?

Maurizio Canfora: I'm now working on something entirely different, though it does connect to an earlier topic we discussed: the issue of funding.

As you know, in 2027, the EU will reach the end of its current seven-year budget cycle. This means the member states and the European Parliament will need to come together to negotiate a new Multiannual Financial Framework for the period from 2028 to 2034. It's a

critical process that takes place every seven years and sets the financial priorities of the entire Union.

This time, however, the context is especially complex. As you've seen, one of the EU's new top priorities is defense spending, which will require significant funding. That shift in focus will inevitably place pressure on other areas of the EU budget.

Emmanuel Comte: Perfect. Thank you very much for all your insights and for taking part in this interview.