Italian prosecutors to probe Libyan coastguard for shooting migrant boat

A Libyan Coast Guard vessel seen in pursuit of a migrant boat, June 30, 2021 © Sea Watch

Rome, July 7 (RHC)-- Prosecutors in Sicily are investigating video footage that allegedly shows a Libyan Coast Guard vessel firing warning shots at a migrant boat in the Mediterranean Sea. The probe, however, will face an uphill struggle.

Video footage captured by Sea Watch, a German organization that pulls refugees from the Mediterranean and delivers them to Europe, shows a Libyan Coast Guard ship shadowing a smaller craft carrying migrants, apparently near Malta.

The Libyan vessel sticks dangerously close to the migrant boat, crossing its path on several occasions. At one point in the video, shots are seemingly fired. While the shots are audible in a version posted by Sea Watch to YouTube, they are difficult to discern in a different version on the group's website.

The video was captured from a Sea Watch plane circling overhead, and the plane's crew attempted to contact the Libyan vessel to warn it off. The Libyans apparently did not heed the warning, circling toward the migrant boat and at one point coming within several meters of it.

At Sea Watch's urging, prosecutors in Agrigento, Sicily, opened an investigation into the incident last week, Italian newspaper Avvenire reported. The Italian team will pore over the video and interview the migrants themselves, who eventually got away and landed on the Italian island of Lampedusa.

The Libyan Coast Guard has also promised its own internal investigation, yet the matter will likely go no further. Avvenire reported that there are no legal agreements between the two countries for Libyan sailors to be tried in Italian courts, and stated that "it is unlikely that Tripoli will deliver the names of the officers on board the patrol boat." Malta, which claims the international waters in which the incident took place as its own, has taken the Libyans' side, calling the use of warning shots "appropriate."

Back in 2017, Italy and Libya signed an agreement declaring the interception of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to be Libya's responsibility. Italy agreed to train and supply the Libyan Coast Guard, and the vessel seen in Sea Watch's video is actually an Italian boat given to the North African nation for the job.

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was driven from power in 2011 by a NATO bombing campaign -- organized and led by the United States -- and shot dead by anti-government rebels. Libya was plunged into civil war and anarchy in the years following Gaddafi's murder, and became a key transit spot for human traffickers smuggling migrants into Europe.

---

https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/263092-italian-prosecutors-to-probe-libyan-coastguard-for-shooting-migrant-boat

Radio Habana Cuba