The lost ships

Over the last few weeks, the poisonous ships affair has returned to the fore after finding the wreck of a ship carrying 120 barrels of suspected radioactive waste, sunk off the Calabria coastline (Cetraro, Cs).

According to the prosecutors’ investigation and depositions collected by the Parliamentary Waste Commission, Italian authorities believe the ship found about 500 meters underwater may be the Cunski, one of the vessels carrying toxic material that was allegedly sunk – between the 80’ and 90’ - by the mob in an international lucrative disposal racket.

In 1999, the attorney of Reggio Calabria, Antonio Catanese, according the evidences collected, claimed that “about 32 ships” had been sunk by the boss of this racket, being in complicity with the Reggio Calabria ‘Ndrangheta clans.

Following, some examples of the lost ships, presumably sunk by mafia:

- the motor vessel NICOS 1, departed from La Spezia (Liguria – IT), July 1985, and never arrived in Lomé - Togo
- the MIKAGAN, departed from Marina di Carrara (Tuscany – IT) and sunk in the Tyrrhenian Sea off Calabria coastline, October 1986
- the RIGEL, wrecked in 1987 off the Reggio Calabria coast
- the FOUR STAR 1, departed from Barcelona and “lost” in the Ionian Sea, December 1988
- the ANNI, sunk in the Adriatic Sea, 1989
- the JOLLY ROSSO stranded in 1990, nearby to Amantea (Calabria – IT)
- the ALESSANDRO, sunk off of Molfetta (Puglia – IT), 1991
- the MARCO POLO, lost in the Sicilian channel, 1993

For 15 years, Legambiente has been reporting - through several detailed dossiers – a scary story, linked to the illegal disposal of toxic and radioactive waste at sea. In order to shine a light on the “lost ships” traffic, Legambiente promoted a “Committee for truth about toxic ships”, consisting of judges, journalists, politicians, the families of mafia victims and environmentalists.

Many courts have been investigating over recent years: the attorney of Reggio Calabria, Paola and Catanzaro, in Calabria, the attorney Matera and Potenza in Basilicata; the attorney of Padoa in Veneto; the attorney of La Spezia in Liguria; the attorney of Bari in Puglia and Asti in Piemonte. They traced several investigations all leading to the same criminal network, involved in the illegal disposal of toxic and radioactive waste at sea, along the Africa coast (Somalia, Libya etc) or in the Calabria and Basilicata mountains. All traces draw the same picture, which involves the same people, belonging to the managerial world, working as ship-owners, and being members of mafia clans or the Italian Intelligence Service, and representing foreigners’ Countries governments.

Several times legal proceedings have been stopped or even buried. For instance, the Captain Natale De Grazia mysteriously died on the 13th December 1995, while working on the JOLLY ROSSO sinking, in collaboration with the investigative team of the Reggio Calabria general attorney. Moreover, in March 1994, 2 Italian RAI journalists, Ilaria Alpi e Miran Hrovatin, were killed on their way back from Bosaso to Mogadiscio (Somalia).

Considering the circumstances, the inquiry conducted by the attorney of Paola could also be stuck by the lack of human and economic resources, by the weakening of media attention, or by the allusion of subversive unreliable plots.

It is necessary not to consider this case as a marine pollution issue, only taking into account the environmental consequences. In fact, the toxic ships case is part of an illegal international traffic.

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Antonio Pergolizzi
LEGAMBIENTE “Legal and Environment” Department coordinator