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AFRICA

Gadaffi threatens to throw Italian firms out of Libya

Misrata

08 October 2003 10:25

Libyan leader Moammar Gadaffi threatened late on Tuesday to throw out Italian companies if Rome did not pay compensation for its 32-year colonial rule.

"Italy will lose its interests in Libya if it ignores the signed agreements with regard to these indemnities," Gadaffi said at a women's festival in Misrata, 200 kilometres east of Tripoli.

"This loss would be very great for Italian companies."

Sanctions would hit in particular the Italian petrochemical giant Eni, which has a number of operations in Libya, Italy's main supplier of oil.

Rome and Tripoli signed in July 1998 a joint statement in which Italy officially apologised to the Libyan people for any harm it did during its colonial rule from 1911 to the middle of World War II.

Italy pledged to help in removing the thousands of landmines still left in Libya from the war and to build a hospital.

Gadaffi is demanding full compensation, while Rome considers the question to have been settled by a 1956 agreement signed by King Idriss, who was overthrown by the maverick colonel in 1969.

During his last visit to Libya a year ago, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi discussed with Gadaffi the implementation of the 1998 declaration.

While demanding payment from Rome, Gadaffi also praised Italy on Tuesday as "a friendly country which supported Libya" in the campaign to lift United Nations sanctions imposed for Tripoli's role in the Lockerbie airliner bombing. - AFP

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