

To the French Government

“Voices are being raised today to go back on our major fundamental texts, which were nevertheless decided on sovereignly by the Member States when they joined. But what should be reconsidered? The equality of men in dignity and in law? The right of everyone to a fair trial by an independent judiciary? And the idea that in order to be more effective, we should go back to the rule of law, confusing the legitimate change of any elected government with the right to change the rule of law ? Instead we should consider that we all have to be part of this rule of law which is existential to our Europe, whose principles have been built by our history and are the fruit of our common commitments.” Emmanuel Macron, before the European Parliament on 19/01/2022

If words still had any meaning, the French government should be at the forefront of the defence of Vincenzo Vecchi, who is threatened with deportation to Italy to serve twelve years in prison for his involvement in the Genoa protests in 2001.

Mere material damage would never have been worth such a heavy sentence if it had not been for the use of an anachronistic law dating from the Mussolini era that had been slumbering for sixty years in the depths of the Italian penal code: the offence of devastation and pillage. This basically allows a demonstrator to be convicted simply because he or she was in the vicinity of the exactions committed.

To take an authentic example from the Vecchi case itself, if you watch a car burning among a crowd, it's necessarily because you set it on fire yourself, even if there is no documentary or testimonial evidence to prove it. And everything is of the same barrel in this case which accumulates "it's necessarily him" and "it's obvious since he was there", supposedly to make up for a pitiful lack of evidence.

The offence of devastation and pillage replaces the presumption of innocence with the presumption of guilt. President Macron has repeatedly stated his commitment to the notion of presumption of innocence in cases involving one or the other member of the government. We do not want to consider that there are citizens who are more equal than others before the law in a democratic state.

No one had ever heard of Vincenzo Vecchi before his arrest in 2019. And for good reason, this "dangerous individual" had been living quietly in Rochefort-en-Terre for about ten years, forging links and friendships that have earned him today the support of dozens of committees and hundreds of individuals across France for the past three years.

Beyond these emotional ties, it is the denial of justice of which he is the object that has allowed this mobilisation. Beyond the denial of justice, it is a certain conception of law and democratic values that is defended: one does not condemn a demonstrator simply because he is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Is France still the country of human rights, or are these just a tourist attraction? The fate of Vincenzo Vecchi will end the suspense.

Comité de soutien à Vincenzo Vecchi