

To the Italian government

"A human rights violation of unprecedented scale in Europe's recent history" (Amnesty International, on the action of the Italian forces of order during the G8 counter-summit in Genoa in 2001)

Vincenzo Vecchi was arrested on August 8th, 2019 on the territory of Rochefort-en-Terre, under two European arrest warrants. One for acts relating to the G8 counter-summit in Genoa in 2001, the other for acts relating to a demonstration against the extreme right that took place in 2006 in Milan - this second warrant turned out to be null and void, the sentence having already been served.

Two French appeal courts refused to send Vincenzo Vecchi back to Italy, but the prosecution was obstinate. The case went all the way to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), which has just ruled that there was no obstacle to his extradition.

Three days after the arrest of Vincenzo Vecchi, Marco Preve remarked in La Repubblica on 11 August: "Eighteen years after that terrible summer comes the moment of imprisonment for one of the protagonists of the violent episodes of the G8 in Genoa. This is not one of the police officers who beat dozens of defenceless demonstrators to a pulp, the culprits - without ever having been identified - of the attempted murder of a British journalist, nor some officials who fabricated false evidence to trap innocent people, nor those who signed false arrest reports."

Eighteen years later, six police cars came to a small French village to pick up Vincenzo Vecchi, the neighbour, the friend, the colleague, a protester who, according to the photographic evidence in the file, can be roughly charged with the theft of three planks of wood from a building site. The rest of the charges are based on his mere presence in the vicinity of damaged property.

On the one hand, there were broken bones, hundreds of injuries and the death of Carlo Giuliani; on the other, there were burnt-out bins and broken shop windows. On the one hand, not a day in prison for the police officers guilty of torture; on the other, dozens of years in prison for damage to property. On the one hand, light sentences that were quickly prescribed, the acts having been qualified as "assault and battery" without the Italian justice system ever having sought to punish the acts committed; on the other, the reactivation of the offence of devastation and pillage defined in the Rocco law, to considerably increase the sentence of the demonstrators.

Italy did not show up to the CJEU to defend the legitimacy of the offence of devastation and pillage. And for good reason, it is indefensible in terms of fundamental rights: in a state governed by the rule of law, you don't convict a demonstrator just because he was there and certainly not to a 12 years' sentence. During the audience of the CJUE, it was the French government that took it upon itself to arrest Vincenzo Vecchi.

The CJEU sought a way to ensure the speedy execution of the European Arrest Warrant and, in order to do so, merely removed defences from a case that should have called for their strengthening. It has favoured bureaucratic efficiency over justice, cooperation between states over the fundamental rights of citizens.

Yet the facts are stubborn: Vincenzo Vecchi has done nothing that deserves 12 years in prison. We know it and you know it. Franco Gabrielli, then head of the Italian police, finally acknowledged in 2017 in an interview with La Repubblica that "an infinite number of people have suffered violence that has scarred them for life. We haven't recognised it enough in the last sixteen years."

It is time to concretely recognise this and to put an end to a relentlessness that only reopens the scar left by Genoa in Italian history by returning Vincenzo Vecchi to his family and friends. Ten years of exile is already too expensive. This is about basic justice, nothing more, nothing less.

Comité de soutien à Vincenzo Vecchi