

## **NO COMMENT**

Despite the enormous efforts of the forest firefighters, the specialized army unit, and many volunteer residents who continued working tirelessly, the fire was getting closer and closer to the village. It wasn't the only fire; there were a total of five active fires in the province. People were preparing to leave their homes. They were desperate, unable to imagine losing the legacy of their ancestors and burying forever the journey of their family and community history. As they had been told, they would go to the sports center in the largest town in the region. They would gather the essentials and leave as soon as the authorities gave the go-ahead.

Suddenly, from one of the narrowest alleyways, a voice boomed: "Only the people can save the people!" That voice was very familiar, and without even seeing him in person, they knew who it was. They knew he was typing on his computer or mobile phone. They knew the aliases he used on various social media platforms. They knew that sooner rather than later, he would take a picture showing everyone how involved he had been during those difficult times. That image would be used to incite conflict, not to foster cooperation; to spread hatred, not to encourage empathy and understanding. They knew all of this. Some applauded these actions; others categorically rejected them because the lies didn't aim to provide a thorough analysis of reality or offer arguments that would allow problems to be overcome through consensus and participation. It was simply a matter of imposing a very negative view, the more negative the better, of denying the facts, of simplifying the causes as much as possible to reach the conclusion that these rulers were incompetent and corrupt and did not care about the priority issues of the population. They, and they alone, should lead the nation. That had been the case for a long time, and that had to continue. Everyone else was illegitimate, despite what was stated in the Constitution.

In the midst of the tragedy, the former mayor died. He had held the position for twelve years with a large majority and, in the final years of his term, thanks to his continuous electoral successes, he even combined the mayoralty with the presidency of the Provincial Council. His health had been precarious for some time; he suffered from cardiovascular problems. The intensity of the smoke for so many hours ended his life. Upon learning of the event, his most ardent supporters and party members, given the extreme circumstances, organized an impromptu farewell ceremony to honor and celebrate the deceased.

For years, investment in forest clearing was reduced, and firebreaks were not properly maintained. By decision of the council members, the funds not spent on these tasks were allocated to expanding the municipal swimming pools and increasing the budget for the town's patron saint festivities—proposals most valued by local residents in a consultation. When the new municipal team took office a few months ago, after the elections, they began the process of restoring traditional forestry practices. They considered these actions urgent because, for a decade, other parts of the world and the continent had been experiencing what they called sixth-generation wildfires, whose enormous flames advanced at breakneck speed, and the firefighting forces, including planes and helicopters, were unable to stop the immense devastation unfolding before them. As the days passed, the number of hectares of land left scorched reached tens of thousands. The feeling of helplessness was absolute. This was evident in the news reports and images provided by the media. The first action they took was to establish a green brigade that would be responsible for prevention tasks throughout the year. The brigade, initially composed of ten members, would operate under the direction of a forestry engineer. Every six months, their work would be reviewed, and if necessary, additional personnel would be added.

That night, the wind shifted. The flames receded both in height and area. It seemed the situation was improving, that an urgent evacuation of the neighborhood wouldn't be necessary. Spirits, though still very high, were beginning to calm.

Many people came to offer their condolences to the family of the former mayor. In online newspapers, supporters offered countless tributes and congratulations. On late-night radio programs, prominent party figures extolled the deceased's character. Not a single comment offered even the slightest criticism of such an illustrious man.

An image of a person throwing a bucket of water on a burning log was flooding social media. Fiber optics can't transmit olfactory sensations; if this were possible, the followers would have been hit with a strong smell of solvent. Under the image, the following lines could be read: "Only the people can save the people. The army hasn't intervened here, the State hasn't provided even minimally sufficient resources. Someone will pocket the cost of the actions they denied us." Although it received countless "likes," some pointed out that the UME (Military Emergency Unit) was the part of the troops specialized in such matters, that the forest firefighters from various regions of the country

sent to the province, and the air resources, were also part of the State. This was called solidarity, and what the message was spreading could only be described as lies, posturing, and hatred.

At midday, the wind shifted again. The blaze grew to enormous proportions, the flames reaching unimaginable heights and hurtling toward the village. The people gathered their most essential belongings and fled, some deeply saddened, others sullen, but all their faces reflecting immense grief and helplessness. Behind them lay their lands, their ancestors, their animals, their tools, their experiences, their memories, their identity forever lost. In a matter of minutes, the fire consumed everything.

The internet user, affected by the criticism he received, wanted to definitively prove the saying "only the people can save the people." He grabbed the hose from a retreating firefighter and, although the smoke prevented him from seeing, he looked ahead to confront his enemy. Instantly, he felt an immense heat devouring his insides.

Days later, a reel (a very short video with background music) appeared on a social network showing a badly damaged and deformed human figure levitating, carried by the wind and flames, above some hills. In the center, the words "A hero" could be read. This message received neither likes nor comments.

**"Stories without Mufflers" (2006 - )**