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Kurdish journalist arrested by Interpol in Belgium: I am not guilty, I accuse!

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Within two weeks, I experienced Interpol in a European country, an interrogation cell in a police station, prison, solitary confinement and the threat to be extradited to a country ruled by a despot. This is the story of the complicity of the European authorities with Turkey and of a series of injustices and absurdities.

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Yes, a journalist can be arrested in a European country, can be considered a terrorist and, at the same time, be treated like an illegal foreigner, despite being a European citizen. Yes, the authorities of a European country can first request the extradition of a journalist to Turkey, and then to another country despite his discharge by a court. Yes, the detention of a journalist can be extended in a European country despite the decision of a court in favour of his freedom. Here is the story of an unjust arrest and of an isolation in Turnhout Prison, where time came to a standstill.

A mechanism of repression in the hands of Turkey: Interpol

I was arrested on December 15 in Brussels by Belgian police at the request of Turkish authorities while driving. The police said I had been reported by Turkey. This was the only reason. I was been handcuffed and spent the night in a police station in Mechelen, in a Flemish region in the Antwerp area. From the moment of my arrest, I began a hunger strike.

Turkey had issued an International arrest warrant against me, via Interpol, which became an arbitrary repressive mechanism. For sure, this was not the first arrest within the Kurdish community. I didn't sign any papers during my custody in order to protest against this injustice. On December 16, they took me, handcuffed, to court in the Turnhout court, 85km from Brussels. The prosecutor asked for my extradition to Turkey. The request was issued from Turkey. The judge decreed my arrest. Yet, the judge admitted that there was no information at the moment to justify this arrest. A scandal! How can you consider as "credible" the charges coming from a country where justice, freedom of information and expression don't exist?

According to my Belgian lawyer Luc Walley and the judge, the report about me was written by the Sirkak court, a Kurdish town I've never been to. Charges are based on articles published since 4 March 2013. According to a document forwarded from Turkey, a Turkish court issued an arrest warrant against me on 31 August 2015. I would risk at least 25 years in prison, not mentioning other

inquiries issued against me in several towns in Turkey. Initial information was very limited. The judge asked me what I thought in the case of extradition to Turkey. "It should be you who should be worried, because this would be a shame for Belgian democracy", I answered.

Two weeks in isolation

At the end of the court hearing, I was sent to Turnhout prison. I carried on with my hunger strike. For three days I had nothing more than some tea and water. I received hot water for tea only in the morning and in the evening. On the first day, the prison director said that I would be subjected to a special diet since I was considered as a terrorist. My contacts with the other prisoners were restricted. Calls and visits were forbidden. They told me that I had the right to call my lawyer everyday, but I was never able to call him. However, I could meet my lawyer three times, because I had no contact with the outside. Except for one visit from my parents, my friends and colleagues could never pass the doors of the jail.

The other prisoners had the right to talk on the phone for fifteen minutes a day. They could go out for a walk in the courtyard for two hours daily. In spite of the special diet, I was put in a room with two ordinary prisoners already there. The paradox. I found myself in an over-populated prison. The first four days, I slept on the floor. There was no space to even move. Toilets were inside the cell, where we ate and slept.

During these fourteen days in the Turnhout Prison, I never had the right to exit the cell. My requests to go to the Prison Library with the hope of finding a book, were never answered. Some books my friends sent me were rejected. Time seemed to stop in this jail. Taking into account my lawyer's suggestion, I gave up the hunger strike after three days, but I was determined to restart the strike if justice would refuse to free me.

I accuse...

After the request of my lawyer for my release on December 19, I was, always handcuffed, taken to the judge in Turnhout, together with other ordinary law prisoners on December 23. I refused to defend myself. Everything had been explained by my lawyer. But my refusal was a reaction to injustice, since I was not guilty. On the contrary, I accuse. I refused arguments that led to my arrest, the mechanisms that have been staged, the methods of this arrest and the humiliating treatment during my detention. I accused the European authorities for their complicity with Turkey and for yielding to the blackmails of Erdogan's regime. I was neither guilty, nor terrorist. The mentalities and practices that produce state terror in democracy are guilty.

Resistance is beautiful

At the court hearing of December 23, the charges in the Turkish dossier based on my articles and others that have been published by the Firat News Agency, whose director I am, were not found as convincing enough to justify my detention.

During this entire period, outside, a large support campaign had been launched for my freedom. The International Federation of Journalists and many media outlets were concerned with my situation. The prosecutor who had previously asked for my arrest, said he was in favour of my liberation. The judge decided in this way, but with the condition of bail, even though I refused to pay the fee.

The same day, upon returning to the prison, the director informed me about the extension of the special diet. In the evening, I received the decision for my release on bail. It appeared that my colleagues and friends had decided to pay. However, there was another decision coming from the Immigration Office. Even though I was a European citizen - since I have French Nationality - the Immigration Office had asked for my detention to continue until extradition to another country, not telling me which one, without any restriction on Belgian territory. It was possible that I would be extradited to France. According to my lawyer, Turkey forwarded the same request to French authorities. In that case, I would risk being arrested in France as well.

I had to be transferred on December 29 to the centre for illegal foreigners in Merkspals. My lawyer forwarded an urgent appeal about this decision. In spite of my release ordered by the judge, I spent five more days in prison, before being freed on December 28. Turkey's threat is still pending. The court is waiting for the complete dossier that must be forwarded by the Turkish authorities. Furthermore, if these methods of injustice and practices of attacking human dignity aim to intimidate, I have to say that they work in the wrong direction, because these attacks will never achieve their objective. I will continue writing, disturbing those in power and fighting for another world.

Resisting is beautiful and even more exciting.

Maxime Demiralp (Azadi)

P.S.

* Kurdish Question. 30/12/2016 - 23:17:

<http://www.kurdishquestion.com/article/3753-i-am-not-guilty-i-accuse>

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