

**Speech by MP Bedia Özgökçe, Peoples Democratic Party of Turkey,
to the congress of the Party of European Socialists,
held in Lisbon on Dec 7-8, 2018**

Bedia Özgökçe is an elected member of the Grand Assembly (Parliament) of Turkey for the People's Democratic Party (HDP) representing the city of Van in eastern Turkey

December 8, 2018

Dear Comrades,

Let me start by sending my warmest regards to Leyla Güven, an MP of my party HDP, who started an indefinite hunger strike in prison on November 7 [2018]. Leyla was arrested because of her criticisms of the Turkey's invasion of the Kurdish enclave of Afrin in Northwest Syria in early 2018. Although she should have been released after she gained her immunity after being elected to the Parliament in June 2018, the court refused to release her. Her hunger strike is to protest the Turkish government who has been unlawfully preventing visits by the lawyers and family members of Mr Abdullah Öcalan in prison.

In prison since 1999, Mr Öcalan was a key figure in peace negotiations between 2013 and 2015. Ms Güven stated that such isolation of Öcalan from his lawyers, family and the public was not simply about the violation of his legal rights but has also obstructed democratic dialogue for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict. Leyla Güven hopes that ending the isolation of Mr Öcalan may help to resume the peace process.

Over the last three years, an authoritarian regime has been established in Turkey. The character of this regime reveals itself best in its crackdown against the Kurdish population and the HDP. The crackdown on the HDP has been going on since the elections in June 2015. Currently, more than 5,000 members of the HDP are in prison, our former co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, one current and seven former deputies, and over seventy elected Kurdish mayors among them.

The European Court of Human Rights has recently made a judgment asking Turkish authorities to end the pre-trial detention of Mr Demirtaş and release him immediately. But President Erdoğan said the court decision was not binding and that he would make his "counter move and finish the job". Due to Erdoğan's interference, a local court refused to implement the judgment of the ECHR. Furthermore, on December 4, the regional Court of Appeals in Istanbul approved a 56-month prison sentence that Mr Demirtaş received from another prosecution for a speech he made in 2013. This court decision was President Erdoğan's 'counter move' to finish the job.

As you may know, during the two-year emergency rule in Turkey that ended in July 2018, more than 150,000 people were purged by decrees. Over 2,000 NGOs and 200 media outlets, many of them Kurdish, were banned. More than 160 journalists are in

prison. About 80,000 people were arrested in total. Among the imprisoned are politicians, human rights activists, journalists, academics, and many others who have nothing to do with the coup or terrorism. The Erdoğan regime views anybody critical of its policies as a traitor or a terrorist.

Although it was lifted in July 2018, all practices of emergency rule continue full force. Arbitrary detentions of our comrades and systematic torture are routine practices of the day. Emergency rule, which is supposed to be an exceptional and temporary measure, has become the rule with the establishment of the presidential system. In the new Turkey, there is no separation of powers and no independent judiciary. We now live under a permanent emergency rule that has no room for opposition voices. And as the new regime is based on racist nationalism, militarism and right-wing populism, we expect the HDP and the Kurds to remain as a main target of state violence in the future.

The crackdown on the HDP is intensifying in the runup to the local elections scheduled for March 2019. The HDP was governing 102 municipalities when emergency rule was declared. The government dismissed elected mayors of 96 of these 102 municipalities and replaced them with appointed bureaucrats called 'kayyums'. More than 70 Kurdish mayors are still in prison. President Erdoğan recently threatened that if the HDP won in the local elections, he would appoint *kayyums* again. Despite such unlawful pressures, we are committed to reclaiming our municipalities and defeating such colonial rule by the Turkish government that does not respect the will of local Kurds.

Unfortunately, the European Union and Council of Europe have not taken a serious and effective position with respect to the developments in Turkey over the last two years; probably mostly due to the refugee crisis. Yes, from time to time they have prepared reports and expressed concern about democracy and human rights in Turkey, but that was pretty much all they have done. This inaction has unfortunately left the opposition in Turkey isolated and helped Erdoğan to consolidate his rule.

To conclude, rising authoritarianism, racist nationalism and right-wing populism are not issues in Turkey alone. They are global problems. That is why we are in need of strengthening internationalist solidarity networks more than ever. Despite extremely difficult conditions, we are confident that with the help of solidarity of our comrades across the world we would survive Erdoğan's authoritarian rule and win.

Thank you for listening.