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Brepoels welcomes release of Kurdish prisoners

Press release by NVA MEP Frieda Brepoels

N-VA MEP **Frieda Brepoels** has welcomed the decision to release seven Kurdish people, including two Kurdish former MPs, from custody at Vorst prison in Brussels. Brepoels and two other politicians visited the prisoners on Monday evening. Remzi Kartal and Zübeyir Aydar have the status of political refugees, both were arrested along with 20 others as part of a major operation several weeks ago which also affected Roj TV.

The aim of the visit was primarily to determine under what conditions they were held. It was a cordial and fruitful discussion with much valuable information exchanged, in the presence of the prisoners' lawyers.

Kartal and Aydar fled from Turkey in 1994 when their Kurdish DEP party, for which they served as parliamentarians, was banned. Others, such as Leyla Zana, were imprisoned for more than 10 years. In 2002 Turkey was ordered to pay 50,000 euros by the European Court of Human Rights for each prosecution. Turkey has since outlawed the DTP - successor party to the DEP - and imprisoned a large number of its representatives.

Frieda Brepoels has been a long time campaigner for the rights of the Kurdish people and has criticised the Turkish regime's treatment of the state's Kurdish population. Brepoels is concerned that in Turkey the oppression of the Kurds is continuing unabated - they have no right to speak their language or to receive an education in Kurdish whilst in many other areas they are discriminated against by the Turkish state which is a candidate for EU membership.

Brepoels who last week held talks with Kurdish leaders in Diyarbakir said:

"I was pleased to join more than a million Kurds celebrating Newroz, their new year festival. I spoke with Leyla Zana and the Mayor of Diyarbakir Osman Baydemir who were both shocked at the brutal manner in which their friends had been treated in some European countries just a few weeks ago.

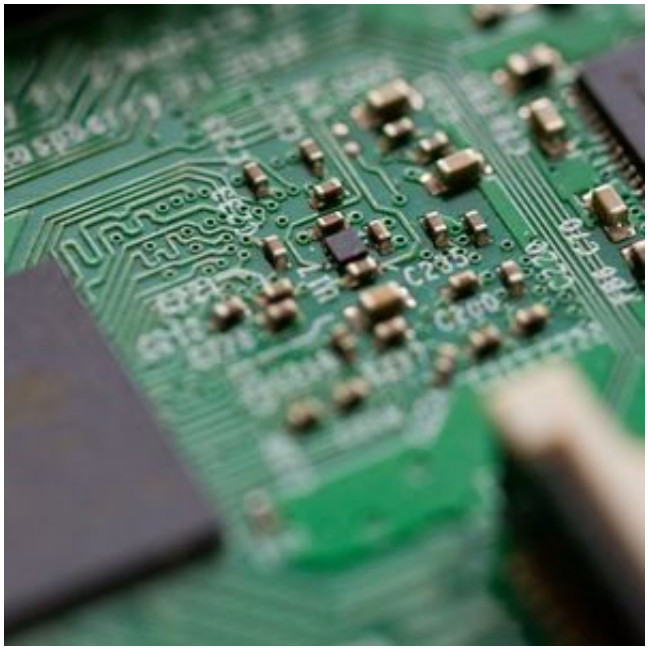
"It was a particularly lively festival but one couldn't help but notice that Turkish police and security forces were everywhere to film and take pictures of those present. They risk facing repressive actions in the coming days and weeks .

"It is not acceptable that someone like Remzi Kartal, who has been a recognised refugee in Belgium since 1994 when he fled Turkish persecution, should be put in a Belgian prison on charges from which his refugee status should protect him."

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