Press release | 25.05.2012

Turkey

Shameful sentencing of Leyla Zana shows dramatic lack of freedom of opinion in Turkey

EP Sakharov Prize winner Leyla Zana was yesterday sentenced to ten years in prison by the Diyarbakır 5th High Criminal Court, in Turkey. The charges against her are nine previously held speeches (including in the European parliament) and for allegedly having close links to a "terrorist organization", the usual formulation Turkey is using against all Kurdish politicians and activists.

Commenting on this court decision, **Hélène Flautre**, President of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Commission, today said:

"I am deeply concerned by the decision taken against Leyla Zana who yesterday was sentenced to ten years in prison by the Diyarbakır 5th High Criminal Court in Turkey for "propaganda on behalf of terror organization". This conviction, similar to the one she faced eighteen years ago, during which time she received the Sakharov Prize, proves that freedom of opinion in Turkey is still under threat from the courts and penal codes.

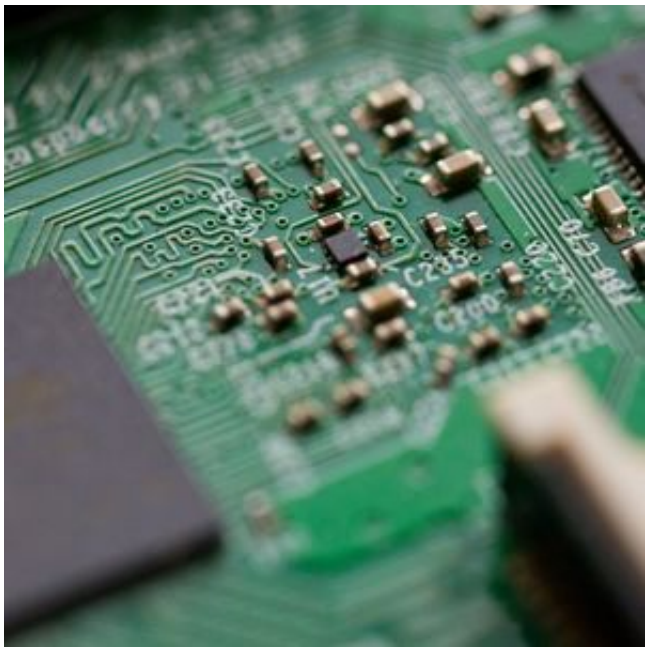
I call upon the Turkish Government and the Turkish Parliament to take the necessary legislative measures to ensure true opinion freedom through, among others, amending the anti-terror law and giving priority to fundamental freedoms and consequently dropping all charges against Leyla Zana.

Leyla Zana's conviction is all the more questionable seeing as she had already been convicted for the same nine speeches in 2007-2008. Her conviction was overturned by an appeals court on the ground that she had not had an adequate opportunity to defend herself. She was given a fresh trial in the main south-eastern city of Diyarbakir, which has now resulted in this ten-year jail sentence. After having already spent ten years in prison, Leyla Zana was released in 2004 - thanks to international pressure. Once again, the European parliament will do everything in its power to ensure that this shameful sentence is revoked."

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