

## **THE REAL ISSUE OF THE "ERDAL AFFAIR": THE TOLERANCE SHOWN IN BRUSSELS TO SOME FORMS OF TERRORISM**

*by Claude Moniquet, Chairman of ESISC*

The Erdal Affair, from the name of the young Turkish terrorist of the extreme left who fled in rather picaresque circumstances when she was on the point of being sentenced by the correctional court of Bruges, has raised a number of questions and reflections. The most important and the **most worrying is the tolerance of the authorities for extreme left-wing terrorism.**

First reflection: Some commentators have, as usual, mounted the hobbyhorse of criticising the "services" – in the case State Security (SE) which had the job of watching over the young lady, then under house arrest. That is a false reflex, and a bad one. **Even if the SE had been on the ground, it would be unfair and quite counter-productive to make them take the blame. Because, in the end, if there have been failures, they were not down to the SE but the government.** It is not disputed that State Security warned the interior ministry on three occasions that Fehriye Erdal was a flight risk and that SE did not have the means to prevent her doing so by themselves. Those reports met with no reaction. But those who seek to attack SE, including former interior minister Johan Vande Lanotte, have no hesitation in demanding an umpteenth reform of the service, or even its integration into the federal police – which would be an error and would cut the SE off from many of its contacts with foreign intelligence services.

A Second reflection: The minister of the interior Patrick Dewael said that in a "state of the rule of law" it was impossible to place Ms. Erdal in detention prior to the verdict against her. But while Ms. Erdal was a foreigner on Belgian soil illegally at the time of her arrest in September 1999, and equipped with false papers into the bargain, his claim seems to say the least debatable. **It should be noted, in addition, that this is the same interior minister who considers it perfectly normal (and not at all contrary to the "rule of law" he holds so dear) to intern illegal immigrants in closed centres, sometimes for years. What is good for a family of unfortunate economic migrants is not, it seems, good for a dangerous terrorist.**

But let us face facts. **We would then have to ask why it took six and a half years to judge this young woman who was found in Belgium in possession of fake documents and arms, and was wanted in her country of origin for terrorism and complicity in murder.** Had Ms.

Erdal been judged within a reasonable delay, the question of her detention would never have arisen in anything like the same terms.

**A third reflection: Was it reasonable to place Ms. Erdal under house arrest at the Brussels office of the terrorist organisation she was alleged to belong to and where she was able for six years to take part in the organisation's activities?**

Fourth reflection: Another question arising from that last matter is a point the least politician might have been able to realise: **the DHKP-C, considered a terrorist organisation by the European Union, has an official office in Brussels, capital of the Union.** And neither Belgium nor any other country of the Union seems to have a problem with that. And we should make it clear that the office is anything but clandestine. It is situated in the rue Stevin, right in the heart of the *European Quarter*, has several email addresses from Belgian ISPs, and is the base from where the DHKP-C propaganda website [www.dhkc.org](http://www.dhkc.org) is managed. On the site one may read a communiqué dated 13 January: "*As a reprisal for the assassination of Serdar Demirel [a DHKP-C terrorist who died in prison as the result of a hunger strike] on 8 January at 20.30 we fired several volleys of shots at a police car on the TEM motorway in Istanbul at the Ridvan Dedeolgu viaduct. On 9 January at 22.00 we destroyed the Yapi Kredi bank in the Caglayan area of Istanbul using explosives and petrol bombs*".

**What are we to think of a government that tolerates the official presence on its soil of a terrorist organisation that openly from Brussels claims responsibility for bomb attacks and killings? We can only think that such a government is operating a double standard: Islamist terrorism is combated (and rightly so) but the terrorism of the extreme left seems to benefit from an unbelievable forbearance.**

Let us be clear: the Erdal Affair is not a matter of some dysfunction or other of the security services. It is purely political. The government tolerates the DHKP-C (not to mention other organisations of the same stripe) and probably never, for its own obscure reasons situated somewhere between cowardice and complicity, wanted to see Ms. Erdal behind bars in Belgium.

The ministers responsible for this judicial failure and for the harm done to Belgium's reputation should have the decency to come to the only logical conclusion. In the meantime, they could at least take the initiative of dissolving the Belgian office of the DHKP-C and begin proceedings against those responsible for a website that lays claim to bombings and murders. Maybe that way Belgium will be able to win back a little of the credibility it has lost in the eyes of its allies.

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