

## **The lion that the hyenas did not kill**

Murat Arslan was arrested on 19 October 2016. He is in a prison cell in Sincan, Ankara, with 16 other detainees: 8 beds and the floor to sleep, a carpet to pray, one shower, one washbasin and two toilets. 20 liters of water a day to wash clothes and body, half an hour a week for visits, though a thick dirty glass, half an hour a month to hug the wife Sevilay and the sons, Burak Emre and Yigit Eren, 16 and 13 years old, a phone call every two weeks, an hour a month to play football, and a weekly order of books and canteen food.

Murat is Turkish, 44 years old and was a judge and president of the Association of Judges and Prosecutors (YARSAV), member of the *European Association of Judges* and *MEDEL - European Magistrates for Democracy and Freedoms*. In a country on a totalitarian drift, he stood out in the fearless and courageous defence of human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. Even before the attempted coup d'état of 2016 - the gift that, according to Erdogan, God gave him to purge "traitors" - there was a prize on Murat and 4500 other "rebel" judges and prosecutors' heads.

Only a few days after the "coup", YARSAV was dissolved by the first state of emergency governmental decree. Murat was in London with his family. Against the advice of friends, he chose to return to be arrested: "If the road to freedom has to pass through the bars of a prison, I will return to face evil directly" - he said. Everything was taken away from him: his job, his home, his money. Wife and sons survive now with the help of family. But Murat did not bend down. In a letter to his brother Mustafa and sister Leyla, he wrote: "In this dark empire of fear, I may have lost my freedom, my bread, my loved ones, but within the hunger, darkness, and screams, I have never lost faith in bright days that will come knocking at our door; never. Every day I go to sleep with hope of better days and inner peace; every morning I wake up smiling."

On 9 October 2017 the Council of Europe awarded the Václav Havel Prize for Human Rights to Murat Arslan, who sent this message from prison: "We must not fall into despair. The existence of our children does not allow us to lose hope. "

On 18 January, a special court, with judges loyal to Erdogan, sentenced him to 10 years in prison for terrorism. The trial was a farce. The decisive evidence was the download of the ByLock application to his mobile phone. As the *Gülenists* used ByLock to prepare the "coup" (although

the application was deactivated 104 days earlier), every downloader is a terrorist. The prosecutor argued that the fact that there is no evidence of any connection of Murat to the *Gulenists* only shows that he hid his secret very well and he is guilty. A striking reasoning ... The angry scream of Murat's wife to the three silently shrunken judges still echoes on the walls of that room: "I wonder how you are returning to your homes and look your children in the eyes; shame on you!"

Murat always knew he was going to be convicted. In his closing speech in court he remained dignified: "I am very well aware that I am talking against a wall and it is futile to do this. In the void of nonsense, the only thing that we hear is again our own voices. This seems a little bit discouraging but the existence of our children who are our future does not give us a reason or right to kneel down or surrender". "You cannot hear the voice of truth in the cacophony of darkness". "You will be ashamed of what you did when we build new Turkey with all free people. Future is ours and we will win".

Erdogan wants to make an example of Murat. He is right in this. Murat is already an example. A friend who shared imprisonment with him (whom I do not identify for security reasons) told me that he did not sign the confession papers because when he saw Murat smiling, he gained new strength to continue.

Arslan means "lion" in Turkish. The hyenas of dictatorship are trying to kill the lion of freedom, but he resists. The *Platform for an Independent Judiciary in Turkey*, formed by European magistrates' associations, does not allow him to be forgotten. From here the voice of the Portuguese judges joins together. While Murat Arslan and other companions are in prison, there will not be a single judge who is truly free.

(supportive messages to Murat to [correio@asjp.pt](mailto:correio@asjp.pt)).

Manuel Soares, President of the Association of Portuguese Judges

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