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## EU, US slam Kazakhstan over opposition leader's jailing

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— filed under: [court](#), [US](#), [prison](#), [politics](#), [Kazakhstan](#)

(ASTANA) - The European Union and United States voiced concern Tuesday over this week's jailing of Kazakhstan's opposition leader, accusing the oil-rich nation of using the justice system to silence critics.

A court in Kazakhstan on Monday convicted the leader of the unregistered Alga party, Vladimir Kozlov, of seeking to incite a coup against President Nursultan Nazarbayev after the activist's involvement in oil workers' protests last year.

He was sentenced to seven and a half years in a penal colony.

In consecutive statements, the US embassy and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton noted their "concern".

"Mr Kozlov's sentence seems disproportionate and, given his political activities, seems to carry political overtones," Ashton said in a statement issued in Brussels.

The US embassy expressed concern over "the apparent use of the criminal system to silence opposition voices."

Kozlov was arrested in January after participating in oil workers' protests that killed 15 people in the west Kazakhstan town of Zhanaozen, tarnishing the nation's image as Central Asia's safe haven.

Kazakhstan's general prosecutor on Tuesday said that "Kozlov's active involvement in Zhanaozen was one of the causes of the mass riots" in the Caspian city in December.

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"Experts have found evidence of stoking social hatred and calls for a violent government overthrow in the flyers distributed to the fired workers on Kozlov's orders," the prosecutor's spokesman said Tuesday

Prosecutors also listed Kozlov's belongings subject to confiscation, including "three expensive cars, 11 apartments, five houses," as well as land in Kazakhstan.

But in her statement, Ashton said the EU delegation in Astana "noted several shortcomings in the judicial process."

"Namely the trial processes did not provide clear insight into the investigation of the events, prove the guilt or direct involvement of Mr Kozlov in the violence in Zhanaozen."

Kozlov's co-defendants activist Serik Sapargali and trade unionist Akzhanat Aminov received suspended sentences Monday.

The court has also accused Kozlov of working under the orders and in the pay of Kazakhstan's fugitive oligarch Mukhtar Ablyazov, a top Nazarbayev opponent who is wanted on fraud charges.

The 52-year-old's arrest came shortly after Kazakhstan's parliamentary polls in January, which gave Nazarbayev's Nur Otan party almost 81 percent of the vote but were called undemocratic by international monitors.

Kozlov pleaded not guilty during the trial and accused the prosecution of politicising the case and convicting him of something he did not do, denying that he ever called for violent action.

Kozlov had been one of Nazarbayev's most vocal critics during the conflict, accusing the authorities of opening fire on demonstrating workers and torturing those detained in the clashes with police.

Nazarbayev has been president of the ex-Soviet country for almost 22 years, bringing economic reforms and prosperity through energy riches, but cracking down on human rights and political opponents.

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