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KAZAKHSTAN: CONFLICTING STATEMENTS ON KOZLOV'S CASE

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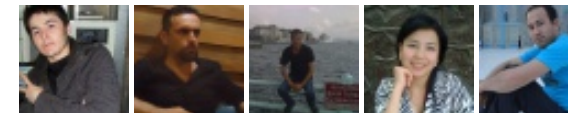
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Conviction of Vladimir Kozlov, leader of the unregistered opposition party "Alga", for seven and a half years has caused contradictory statements from West and Kazakh authorities.

Initially, the U.S. Embassy in Astana has expressed concern with sentencing of the Kazakh opposition leader and stated that the Kazakh government is using the criminal case to suppress the voice of the opposition in the country.

Shortly after the statement by the U.S. diplomatic mission in Kazakhstan, the European Union has also issued its official position on sentencing opposition leader to long term in prison.

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Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, expressed concern over conviction of Vladimir Kozlov. In her view, evidences brought against Kozlov, that he participated in Zhanaozen events, still remain unclear. Ashton also noted a number of shortcomings in the trial process of the leader of "Alga."

The statement of European Union points out that, given his political activities, Kozlov's conviction may have political overtones.

On October 9, influential international human rights organization Human Rights Watch also expressed its concern and displeasure on the case.

The reaction of the Prosecutor General of Kazakhstan to international criticism was fast. The statement released by Attorney General's Office states that the trial of opposition activists was held open and the verdict is based on concrete evidences.

The statement also says that there is no reason to declare that Kozlov's convictions has political grounds.

According to Nurdaulet Suindykov, spokesperson of the Prosecutor General, then-mayor of Zhanaozen city is sentenced to ten years in prison. At the moment, the court is considering the case of the first deputy governor of Mangistau region. Three top executives of the oil company are also sentenced to prison.

"For some reason, during the trial of company executives and officials, no one said that their cases were politically motivated," said the spokesperson.

During the judicial process on Kozlov's case, it was stated that opposition party "Alga" was funded for 95% by exiled Kazakh businessmen Mukhtar Ablyazov.

On Monday, October 8, the Mangistau regional court sentenced the leader of the opposition party "Alga" to seven and a half years in prison on charges of incitement of social hatred, calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order, and creation of an organized criminal group. The court also ruled to confiscate Kozlov's property.

Vladimir Kozlov was arrested on suspicion of inciting social hatred in January 2012 in Zhanaozen city of Kazakhstan, which in December 2011 witnessed oil company workers' strike that turned into mass disorder.

As a result of clashes with police in Zhanaozen fifteen people were killed and over a hundred injured. Trial against opposition activists, who supported striking oil workers and provided legal assistance to them, began on August 16.

It is worth noting that Vladimir Kozlov also became popular in the country after he declared in late 2010 that he would run for presidency of Kazakhstan.

However, immediately after his statement at a press conference, activists of so-called "Zheltoksan" movement threw eggs on Kozlov protesting the fact that a person of another ethnicity was willing to come to power.

But presidential elections in Kazakhstan were held in 2011, ahead of schedule. The leader of the opposition party "Alga" could not register as a candidate. Vladimir Kozlov said he did not have enough time to master the Kazakh language, knowledge of which is obligatory in order to run for presidency.

Recently Bolat Abilov, co-chairman of All Nation Social Democratic Party “Azat”, wrote on his Facebook page that he could not participate in the final hearing of Kozlov’s case. Abilov wrote that he was not able to fly from Almaty to Aktau.

Abilov said that the flight, on which politicians, human rights activists, international observers were to fly out to participate in the announcement of the court verdict on the case of Vladimir Kozlov, Serik Sapargali and Akzhanat Aminov, was delayed.

"It was just our flight that was delayed. All other directions were functioning properly. We believe that our flight is delayed intentionally. The Aktau court starts reading the verdict on the case of Kozlov, Sapargali and Aminov at 14:00, and we will not be allowed to be present in the courtroom. Perhaps they want to show defendants that public is not interested in them, that they are not supported by anyone. But this is absolutely not true!" said Bolat Abilov in the telephone conversation with Zona.kz.

Observers believe that the international community will exert all possible pressure on the Kazakh authorities in the case of Vladimir Kozlov.

At a press conference in Warsaw, Poland's parliament have proposed the application of the resolutions in relation to Kazakhstan to free political prisoner Vladimir Kozlov.

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