

Question for written answer E-003754/2019/rev.1

to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Rule 138

Lefteris Nikolaou-Alavanos (NI)

Subject: New arbitrary prison sentences for trade unionists in Kazakhstan

News from Kazakhstan has triggered serious concern over the violation of basic democratic, trade union rights in that country. In October, Erlan Baltabai, former head of the 'Decent Work' union, was sentenced to five months in prison for refusing to pay the fine imposed on him instead of a seven-year prison sentence. The trade unionist who was a member of the leadership of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions, which was banned by the authorities, spoke of a trumped-up case orchestrated by the Commission of National Security and revealed that the authorities had set up a parallel union with the same name in order to disband the real trade union. His original conviction concerned his refusal to hand over the contributions of union members to the union set up by the authorities.

At the same time, Erzhan Elshibaev, head of the Zhanaozen unemployed movement, was sentenced to five years in prison on fabricated charges of 'assaulting a passer-by' three years ago, despite the fact that neither the victim nor the witnesses had recognised him. Trade unions and other grass-roots organisations in Kazakhstan consider his conviction an act of political persecution.

In the light of the above, will the Vice-President/High Representative say: How does it view the new arbitrary prison sentences handed down to trade unionists in Kazakhstan and the demands to abolish politically motivated jail sentences, to stop political and trade union persecution and to secure the right to organise trade unions and hold demonstrations and strikes?