

Question for written answer E-000467/2024

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

Rule 138

Kostas Papadakis (NI)

Subject: Prosecution of trade unionists in Kazakhstan

A group of 500 workers employed by the West Oil Software company operating at the Zhetybai oil field in Kazakhstan have been on strike since 11 December 2023, demanding the replacement of dated equipment, better working conditions, and equal pay across all businesses in the sector.

Local courts declared the strike illegal on its second day, without any representatives or lawyers present to defend the strikers as the presence of representatives and lawyers was forbidden. Trade unionist dismissals followed and riot police were sent to the nearby town of Zhetybai to put pressure on the rest of the workers.

On 24 January, the district court declared the strike illegal. To add insult to injury, in an act of provocation, representatives of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Energy and managers at KazMunayGas branded the strikers 'extremists', with the latter now facing criminal investigations on charges of 'inciting social hatred'. Bearing in mind that the EU is Kazakhstan's biggest trade partner in the context of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, how does the Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, J. Borrell, view the following:

1. The unrelenting fight by workers in Kazakhstan for trade union rights and freedoms, for the right to strike to be respected and for the country's authorities to revoke the court decision declaring strike action illegal?
2. The unacceptable criminal prosecutions against workers for participating in 'illegal strike action' and the accusations made against them for 'inciting social hatred' when they are simply seeking what is rightfully theirs?

Submitted: 12.2.2024