

# 'Pure Cowardice': World Leaders React to Navalny's Imprisonment

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Leaders in North America and Europe have called for the Kremlin critic's immediate release following Tuesday's controversial ruling. **Moscow Court Press Service**

The sentencing of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to prison on Tuesday sparked swift condemnation from the West.

A Moscow court sentenced the fierce Kremlin critic to two years and eight months in a prison colony over alleged parole violations while recovering in Germany from a near-fatal poisoning he blames on President Vladimir Putin. His suspended sentence for a conviction that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) previously ruled was arbitrary and unreasonable was converted into a real prison term.

**Related article:** [Poisoned Putin Critic Navalny Gets Almost 3 Years in Prison Colony](#)

Leaders in North America and Europe have called for the Kremlin critic's immediate release. Several called the Moscow court's ruling "a bitter blow" to Russia's justice system, with

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling the court's decision "pure cowardice."

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has sharply dismissed the criticisms, calling the statements mere "look-alikes" in an [interview](#) with the RBC news website.

"[You] must not interfere with internal affairs of a sovereign state. I recommend everyone to get busy with their own [domestic] problems [instead]," Zakharova said.

Here's a roundup of international reactions to Navalny's sentencing:

— [Josep Borrell, EU foreign affairs chief](#):

"The sentencing of Alexei Navalny runs counter Russia's international commitments on rule of law and fundamental freedoms. It goes against the verdict of the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled this case arbitrary and unreasonable. I call for his immediate release."

— [U.S. State Department](#):

"We reiterate our call for the Russian government to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Navalny, as well as the hundreds of other Russian citizens wrongfully detained in recent weeks for exercising their rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly."

"Even as we work with Russia to advance U.S. interests, we will coordinate closely with our allies and partners to hold Russia accountable for failing to uphold the rights of its citizens."

— [Antony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State](#):

"The United States is deeply concerned by Russia's actions toward Alexei Navalny. We reiterate our call for his immediate and unconditional release as well as the release of all those wrongfully detained for exercising their rights."

— [Emmanuel Macron, French President](#):

"The sentencing of Alexei Navalny is unacceptable. Political disagreements are not a crime no matter the circumstances. We are calling for his immediate release. Respect for human rights and democratic freedoms is not subject to any negotiations."

— [Boris Johnson, British Prime Minister](#):

"Alexei Navalny's decision to return to Russia after being poisoned was a truly brave and selfless act. In contrast, today's ruling was pure cowardice and fails to meet the most basic standards of justice. Alexei Navalny must be released immediately."

— [Angela Merkel, German Chancellor](#):

"The verdict against Alexei Navalny is far from any rule of law. Navalny needs to be released immediately. The violence against peaceful demonstrators must stop."

— [Charles Michel, President of the European Council](#):

“I reiterate the call of the EU to release Alexei Navalny immediately. We do not accept his sentence — justice must not be politicized. Protesters have the right to demonstrate peacefully and voice their political views.”

— [Heiko Maas, German Foreign Minister](#):

“The verdict against Alexei Navalny is a bitter blow to firmly established civil liberties and the rule of law in Russia.”

— [Marise Payne, Australian Foreign Minister](#):

“The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) concluded that Mr. Navalny’s 2014 conviction, which was used as grounds for his current detention, was ‘unlawful’ and ‘politically motivated.’ We call for Mr. Navalny’s immediate and unconditional release.”

“We reaffirm a call for Russia to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into Alexei Navalny’s poisoning using the banned Novichok nerve agent last August.”

— [Justin Trudeau, Canadian Prime Minister](#):

“Canada strongly condemns Russia’s imprisonment of Alexei Navalny. We call for his immediate release, as well as the release of the peaceful protestors and journalists who have been detained in recent weeks. The justice system must never be abused for political purposes.”

— [Sanna Marin, Finnish Prime Minister](#):

“Alexei Navalny’s prison sentence is unacceptable. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled Navalny’s original conviction as arbitrary and unreasonable.”

— [Edgars Rinkēvičs, Latvian Foreign Minister](#):

“[The] decision to imprison Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny is both appalling cynicism and complete disregard of rule of law and international obligations by Russia. He must be released immediately. EU must impose sanctions, the Council of Europe must act as this is [a] breach of European Court of Human Rights ruling.”

— [Jacques Maire, PACE special rapporteur on Navalny's poisoning](#):

“The attitude of the Russian authorities towards Mr. Navalny is shocking. Instead of fulfilling their obligation under the European Convention on Human Rights to open a full criminal investigation into his attempted murder by Novichok poisoning, the Russian authorities have again violated his rights by arresting and imprisoning him.”

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