

PRESS STATEMENT

Regarding	Human rights under threat in Kazakhstan, say MEPs
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Human rights under threat in Kazakhstan, say MEPs

The issue of human rights in Kazakhstan was debated by members of the European Parliament yesterday in Strasbourg at an event organised by Socialists & Democrats political group members Marju Lauristin, Mady Delvaux and Julie Ward in co-operation with the Open Dialog Foundation and participation of Mukhtar Ablyazov, a Kazakh politician and leader of the opposition. Compelling evidence of the Kazakh authorities suppressing freedom of speech and assembly by arbitrarily arresting and sentencing critics and opponents of the current regime is provided by the recent cases of a journalist Zhanbolat Mamay, leaders of oil-workers Amin Eleusinov and Nurbek Qushaqbaev, "land-reform" protesters Talgat Ayan and Maks Bokayev, blogger Sanat Dosov, as well as former allies of Mr Ablyazov, Tatiana Paraskevich, Anatoliy Pogorelov, Roman Solodchenko and Zhaksylyk Zharimbetov, all discussed at the event.

On 10 February, 2017, Zhanbolat Mamay, an editor of the opposition newspaper Tribuna/Sayasi kalam was arrested. The day after a Kazakh court ordered Mamay held for at least two months pending trial on a charge of money-laundering, which carries a possible seven-year jail sentence. Mamay is alleged to have funded the newspaper in 2013-2014 with the help of Ablyazov.

Earlier this year, hundreds of oil-workers had been on strike protesting the closure of a confederation of independent labour unions. On 21 January, their leaders at Oil Construction Company, Amin Eleusinov and Nurbek Qushaqbaev were arrested on criminal charges. Eleusinov was charged with embezzlement, and Qushaqbaev was charged with organizing an illegal hunger strike. Many other of oil-workers were fined or faced court hearings.

On 28 November, 2016, a Kazakh court sentenced activists Talgat Ayan and Maks Bokayev to five years in prison for attending a peaceful rally regarding the so called "land reform" in the country. The court also banned them for three years from engaging in social activities and ordered them to pay 530,250 tenge (approximately 1,500 euros). Moreover, on 29 August a blogger Sanat Dosov was arrested, and on 27 December sentenced for 3 years in prison for his criticism of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine and military actions in Syria.

Eventually, the Kazakh authorities pursues former top managers and employees of BTA Bank Tatiana Paraskevich, Anatoliy Pogorelov, Roman Solodchenko and Zhaksylyk Zharimbetov, in order to obtain their



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testimonies against Ablyazov in different EU member states. The bank founded by Ablyazov was forcibly nationalised in 2009 by an inner circle of the President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Marju Lauristin MEP, substitute member of the Delegation to the EU-Kazakhstan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, stated:

"The European Parliament has shown its willingness to support human rights in Kazakhstan through the 2016 resolution on freedom of speech in Kazakhstan, and the initiatives taken by individual members, including when Mr Ablyazov was at risk of extradition. Yesterday we heard from Mr Ablyazov how we have had impact in his fight for freedom, but the fight overall is not over. Persecution of opposition endangers the freedom to think and speak freely for all citizens, and we as Europeans have the duty to stand for these rights."

Mady Delvaux MEP, member of the Delegation to the EU-Kazakhstan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, stated:

"Protecting human rights and free speech are part of the DNA of the European Parliament. This is why I am delighted that Mr Ablyazov's extradition request was rejected and that I had breakfast with him yesterday morning."

Julie Ward MEP, member of the S&D political group, stated:

"I consider it a privilege to be able to use my platform to speak out for human rights defenders and political dissidents that stand up for civil liberties and democracy in their own countries, and who are hounded by persecution. It is good to see that when politicians and activists come together around a good cause, we can have a direct impact on an individual's life and the political movement they represent. I was glad to finally be able to meet Mr Ablyazov, and I will continue to support democracy and human rights in Kazakhstan, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. I would like to thank the Open Dialog Foundation for the excellent work they continue to do in bringing to our attention the gross abuses of repressive regimes in the former Soviet Union."