

Kazakhstan to Ban Opposition Parties and Media

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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ALMATY, Kazakhstan — The Central Asian state of Kazakhstan has moved to ban two opposition movements critical of President Nursultan Nazarbayev and to close dozens of opposition media outlets for "propagating extremism."

In a step the opposition denounced as an attack on dissent in the oil-exporting nation, prosecutors linked their request to last month's jailing of Vladimir Kozlov, leader of the unregistered Alga! (Forward!) party.

Kozlov was sentenced to 7 1/2 years for trying to rally workers in a failed attempt to topple the government. After his trial, the United States accused Kazakhstan of using its justice system "to silence opposition voices."

Nazarbayev, 72, has run Central Asia's most successful economy and largest oil producer for more than two decades, but has tolerated little dissent as he has pursued market reforms

and attracted more than \$150 billion in foreign investment.

As well as leading Alga!, Kozlov, a fierce critic of Nazarbayev, was leader of the country's unofficial Halyk Maidany (People's Front) movement, which tried to unite groups with specific grievances against the government.

He was found guilty of colluding with fugitive anti-government billionaire Mukhtar Ablyazov and of orchestrating dissent among striking oilmen in the prelude to riots last December that killed 15 people and dented Kazakhstan's reputation for stability.

Nurdaulet Suindikov, a spokesman for the prosecutor general's office, on Wednesday accused the two opposition movements Kozlov led and various media outlets of "propagating extremism."

"Kozlov's sentence established that the activity of the unregistered Alga! and Halyk Maidany movements, as well as the activity of a number of mass media outlets, was extremist," he said.

Suindikov said prosecutors in Kazakhstan's commercial capital, Almaty, had asked a court to ban the two movements as well as the media outlets.

Suindikov said prosecutors were seeking the closure of eight newspapers and 23 Internet sites that operated under the umbrella of the Respublika publisher, as well as the Vzglyad newspaper and its Internet sites.

Kazakhstan's marginalized opposition enjoys little support among voters. The country has never held an election that Western monitors have deemed fair, but Nazarbayev is popular in the country of 17 million for presiding over relative stability.

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