

Kazakhstan Won't Let Oligarch's Wife Return to Italy

By [The Moscow Times](#)

July 15, 2013

The  Moscow Times

ASTANA — Kazakhstan has said the wife of fugitive former minister and oligarch Mukhtar Ablyazov can not leave the country because she is under investigation, and Ablyazov says his wife and daughter are in danger.

Alma Shalabayeva and daughter were whisked on a private jet to Kazakhstan from Rome on May 31 under an Italian expulsion order. Ablyazov, whose whereabouts are unknown, accused Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev of "kidnapping" them.

On Friday, Italian authorities said there had been serious failings in the deportation procedure, withdrew its expulsion order and said it would continue to investigate the affair.

Shalabayeva is now staying with her parents in Kazakhstan's commercial capital Almaty. Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said she was under investigation for suspected involvement in obtaining illegal passports from Kazakh migration officers for Ablyazov's relatives.

Former minister Ablyazov is accused of major fraud. "Shalabayeva is not accused of Ablyazov's crimes, and she is not facing punishment for his criminal acts," the ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

"To exclude a possibility of A. Shalabayeva's departure from the country before the end of the investigation, she gave a written guarantee not to leave the city of Almaty," it said.

When Italy told the Kazakh ambassador in Rome and the foreign ministry in Astana that it had revoked the deportation order, it also asked that "authorities safeguard her rights," an Italian Foreign Ministry spokesman said Saturday.

"All A. Shalabayeva's rights and freedoms envisaged by the Republic of Kazakhstan's laws and international law are currently being respected in full," the Kazakh ministry said.

In a statement distributed by Shalabayeva's Italian lawyers on Saturday, Ablyazov thanked the "Italian people" and Prime Minister Enrico Letta for revoking the expulsion order but said he was now worried about the fate of his family.

"Unfortunately my wife Alma and my daughter Alua are still in grave danger," Ablyazov said. "The Nazarbayev regime's plan is to put my wife in prison and my daughter in an orphanage."

Nazarbayev, a 73-year-old former steelworker, has ruled the vast steppe nation of 17 million for more than two decades, overseeing market reforms and foreign investment inflows that have ensured rapid economic growth, but tolerating no dissent.

Ablyazov said in an interview in December that he would run for office if free elections were called when Nazarbayev's rule ends.

Ablyazov, a former minister who became an outspoken critic of Nazarbayev, fled the oil-rich Central Asian nation after his bank BTA was declared insolvent and nationalized in 2009.

The bank has brought fraud charges against him and his allies, accusing them of embezzling \$6 billion.

Saying that his life was in danger, Ablyazov was granted political asylum in Britain in 2011 but fled Britain last year after missing a contempt of court hearing at which he was due to be jailed for 22 months.

The scandal could damage Italy and Kazakhstan's major business ties. Italian oil giant Eni has pumped billions of dollars into large Kazakh oil and gas projects.

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