

French Court Approves Kazakh Tycoon Ablyazov's Extradition to Russia

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LYON, France — A French appeals court approved Friday the extradition from France to Russia or Ukraine of jailed Kazakh tycoon Mukhtar Ablyazov, accused of embezzling up to \$6 billion from his former bank BTA.

Ablyazov was arrested last July near the Riviera resort of Cannes, where he had been in hiding since being sentenced to prison for contempt of court by an English judge in 2012.

The court in Lyon, eastern France, approved Ablyazov's extradition to either Russia or Ukraine, though it said Russia had priority. The move followed a ruling by a separate court in April to block his extradition.

The Lyon court asked for guarantees that Ablyazov would be treated with a "guarantee of respect for the Human Rights convention" as well as avoiding any treatment that would hurt his "physical and psychological integrity."

It also asked that Russia should not extradite Ablyazov to a third country such as Kazakhstan

or to subject him to forced labor, and said that French state representatives could travel to Russia to verify the conditions of his detention.

"The French justice system is singling itself out and expressing reservations, as if it recognized that these countries have little respect for international treaties," said Bruno Renstock, Ablyazov's lawyer, adding that his client would seek to appeal to France's highest court.

The Kazakh former minister's family unfurled banners reading, "Stop corruption in France" and "Shame on French justice," outside the courthouse.

The Kazakh bank BTA welcomed the Lyon court's decision.

"This is an important decision that will assist in the bank's efforts to seek to recover billions of dollars that were misappropriated by Mr. Ablyazov during his tenure as chairman of the bank," it said in a statement.

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