

NEWS

France to extradite Kazakh tycoon Mukhtar Ablyazov

🕒 9 January 2014



A French court has ruled that Kazakh tycoon and dissident Mukhtar Ablyazov should be extradited to Russia or Ukraine to face fraud charges.

Ablyazov, arrested on the French Riviera in July, is accused of stealing more than \$6bn (£3.6bn; 4.4bn euros) from Kazakh bank BTA.

The court said that extradition to Russia should take priority.

Ablyazov denies the allegations. His family say his life would be in danger if he were sent back to Kazakhstan.

His lawyers say he will appeal against the ruling.

BTA welcomed the verdict with Chris Hardman, a lawyer for the bank in London, saying: "The extradition will greatly limit his ability to continue to launder the proceeds of his wrongdoing.

"It also demonstrates once again that Mr Ablyazov's repeated attempts to portray himself as being pursued by the bank for political reasons are groundless; he is merely being required to answer for the billions of dollars that were taken from BTA and its creditors."

The US-based organisation Human Rights Watch says that if returned to Kazakhstan, Ablyazov would be "at serious risk of ill-treatment and would face a flagrant denial of his fair trial rights".

Ablyazov is a former Kazakh energy and trade minister, who fled the country in 2009.

In 2011, he was granted political asylum in the UK, but disappeared after being sentenced to jail for contempt of court, only to reappear in France.

Ablyazov, 50, says the allegations against him are politically motivated and designed to eliminate him as a rival to Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Human rights campaigners have accused President Nazarbayev of silencing independent media and persecuting political opponents, as well as using the police and courts to keep a tight grip on power.

'Very naive'

Ablyazov is accused of embezzling \$5bn in Russia and \$400m in Ukraine.

The court in Aix-en-Provence said it favoured his extradition to Russia in view of the greater sum involved.

A lawyer for the tycoon, Olivier Quesneau, said: "French justice is not doing itself an honour."

Another defence lawyer, Bruno Rebstock, said: "Either it's very naive about states widely recognised as corrupt or it [the ruling] is a sign of the political powers' sway over the court."

The defence team say extradition to Russia or Ukraine would be a first step to returning him to Kazakhstan and an uncertain fate.

However, prosecutors argued at a hearing in December that there was no realistic possibility of Russia or Ukraine re-extraditing him as this would breach their extradition agreements with France.



"Extraditing him means condemning him to death," Ablyazov's wife Alma Shalabayeva said.

His elder daughter Madina said the decision shamed the French judicial system.

While on the run, Ablyazov is believed to have also spent time in Latvia, Switzerland and Italy.

A huge political storm broke in Italy last year after his wife and younger daughter were deported from that country to Kazakhstan.

After protests by human rights campaigners, they were allowed to return to Rome in December.

In November the High Court in London found Ablyazov had defrauded BTA Bank of \$300m in investment bonds, and ordered him to pay \$400m to BTA.

That judgement relates to one of 11 sets of legal proceedings against Ablyazov in England.

BBC News Services

[On your mobile](#)

[On your connected tv](#)

[Get news alerts](#)

[Contact BBC News](#)

Explore the BBC

[Home](#)

[Sport](#)

[Shop](#)

[Travel](#)

[Culture](#)

[Future](#)

[Radio](#)

[CBeebies](#)

[iWonder](#)

[Music](#)

[Make It Digital](#)

[Nature](#)

[News](#)

[Weather](#)

[Earth](#)

[Capital](#)

[Autos](#)

[TV](#)

[CBBC](#)

[Food](#)

[Bitesize](#)

[Arts](#)

[Taster](#)

[Local](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Accessibility Help](#)

[Contact the BBC](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[About the BBC](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Parental Guidance](#)

[Get Personalised Newsletters](#)

[Ad choices](#)