

## NEWS

## Kazakh dissident Ablyazov's family allowed back in Italy

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**The wife and daughter of a Kazakh dissident have been allowed to return to Rome after being deported in a case that caused a political storm in Italy.**

Alma Shalabayeva, the wife of Kazakh business tycoon and opposition figure Mukhtar Ablyazov, arrived in the capital with their six-year-old child.

Mr Ablyazov is wanted in Kazakhstan over embezzlement charges.

The expulsion of his family from Italy in May led to the resignation of a top civil servant.

It emerged that they had been entitled to stay, and that the Italian authorities had been acting under pressure from Kazakh officials.

The ensuing scandal saw Interior Minister Angelino Alfano face a no-confidence vote in the Senate, which he survived.

A judicial investigation is now under way.

### Night-time raid

Mr Ablyazov, a former energy minister and chairman of BTA bank, fled Kazakhstan in 2009.



BTA filed a lawsuit against him, accusing him of siphoning off billions of US dollars from the bank. He denies wrongdoing, calling the case politically motivated.

In November **the English High Court found** Mr Ablyazov had defrauded the bank of \$300m in investment bonds, and ordered him to pay \$400m (£245m) to BTA.

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

In a separate case, Ms Shalabayeva's brother, Salim Shalabayev, was sentenced by the High Court to 22 months in prison in absentia, for contempt of court.

## Extradition sought

Mr Ablyazov was arrested in France in July and is facing extradition requests from Russia and Ukraine.

But in May, his wife and their child were arrested in a night-time police raid on their villa in suburban Rome. They were put on a private plane with Kazakh diplomats and flown to Kazakhstan.

The operation was condemned by human rights campaigners.

The Italian government retroactively revoked the expulsion order for Ms Shalabayeva and the girl after it emerged Kazakh diplomats had demanded that they be deported.

They were able to return following efforts by Italian Foreign Minister Emma Bonino, according to reports.

The BBC's Alan Johnston in Rome said Ms Shalabayeva was besieged by the media as she walked through one of the capital's airports on Friday, but that she was smiling and appeared delighted to be back in Italy.

Ms Shalabayeva met Ms Bonino, who she later thanked for her efforts.

During a brief news conference, Ms Shalabayeva said she did not know whether the family would be staying in Italy and said she looked forward to being reunited with her husband.

She said her house was under constant surveillance while she was in Kazakhstan.

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

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