

WORLD NEWS

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Italy gives wife, daughter of wanted Kazakh banker refugee status

Reuters Staff



ROME (Reuters) - The wife and daughter of a Kazakh tycoon who is wanted in three countries for alleged fraud have been granted refugee status in Italy, their lawyer said on Friday.



Alma Shalabayeva (R), the wife of exiled oligarch Mukhtar Ablyazov, talks next to her daughter Madina during a news conference in Rome December 27, 2013. REUTERS/Max Rossi

Lawyer Anton Giulio Lana said in a statement that an Interior Ministry committee had granted Alma Shalabayeva and daughter Alua a five-year, renewable permit of stay.

Shalabayeva is the wife of oligarch Mukhtar Ablyazov, a political adversary of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev who has ruled for more than two decades and tolerates no dissent.

Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan have laid charges against Ablyazov. He denies accusations he embezzled up to \$6 billion from BTA, the bank he once controlled and which is now majority-owned by the state of Kazakhstan.

Ablyazov, a former Kazakh government minister, says the allegations against him are fabricated and designed to rob him of his assets and eliminate him as an opponent to Nazarbayev.

Kazakhstan wants the return of Ablyazov from France, where he is currently being held. On April 9, a French appeals court blocked his extradition to Ukraine or Russia, overturning a lower court ruling because of an administrative error.

A legal adviser for BTA said when the extradition was overturned that the first court ruling had upheld the Russian and Ukrainian requests on their merits.

A spokesman for BTA said the case would start again because of the administrative error and that the bank expected the new French court to reach the same decision as the first court.

Ablyazov had been in hiding since being sentenced to prison for contempt of court by an English judge in 2012.

The saga took on a strange twist in May last year when Shalabayeva and her daughter, who had been living in Italy, were detained in a lightning police operation and days later bundled onto a private plane to Kazakhstan, where they were confined to the city of Almaty.

They returned in December to Italy, where their earlier deportation had created an uproar. Opposition politicians and the press accused the government of having ignored normal judicial and diplomatic procedures to please Kazakhstan, a major oil producer.

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