

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/kazakhstan-main-opposition-media-silenced-in-28-12-2012,43751.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Kazakhstan

Endgame

Main opposition media silenced in space of a month

28 December 2012

Kazakhstan's leading opposition media have all been banned as "extremist" in the past month in response to a request by the prosecutor-general's office (see below).

"This unprecedented blow to pluralism is the result of an outrageous misuse of the Kazakh justice system," Reporters Without Borders said. "Reduced to a tool of repression, the courts no longer even try to maintain appearances, flouting defence rights, holding summary hearings and violating procedure.

"President Nursultan Nazarbayev's administration is in the process of completing its transformation into an extremely authoritarian regime. This calls for a strong response from the international community."

To help circumvent this censorship Reporters Without Borders has created mirror sites for each of the following banned media and urges as many people as possible to create similar [mirror sites](#):

- *Respublika*: <http://respublika-kz.rsf.org/>. Download [the site archive](#)
- *Vzglyad*: <http://vzglyad.rsf.org/>. Download [the site archive](#)
- *Stan TV*: <http://stan.rsf.org/>. Download [the site archive](#)
- *K+*: <http://kplus-tv.rsf.org/>. Download [the site archive](#)

Leading opposition media banned

A court in the business capital of Almaty issued an order on 25 December banning the eight different versions that the newspaper *Respublika* had been forced to create over time [to avoid the consequences of legal proceedings](#). They included *Golos Respubliki* (Voice of the Republic), *Respublika-Delovoye Obozrenye* (Republic-Business Magazine) and *Vsya Respublika* (Entire Republic).

The prohibition also applied to the 23 websites and online social network accounts that carried these newspapers' content.

The order was the latest in a series of prohibitions on national opposition media issued in recent weeks. The *Stan TV* news website was banned in Kazakhstan by an Almaty court on 4 December. The satellite TV station *K+* was banned on 6 December and the newspaper *Vzglyad* was banned on 20 December. All of these media have said they will appeal.

The bans were issued in the course of sham legal proceedings in which the prosecution did not even try to produce any evidence of the "extremist" nature of these media.

The judicial authorities claim that this was demonstrated during the trial of Vladimir Kozlov, the head of the opposition party *Alga*, who was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison on appeal in November. But, paradoxically, none of these media was ever invited to take part in this trial.

In another arbitrary decision, a court ruled that all of the newspapers containing the word

“Respublika” constituted a single news outlet although each of the newspapers is in fact legally distinct, with different owners and managements.

Kafkaesque ploy

After another opposition news website, Guljan.org, was suspended for three months on 5 December, its editor, Guljan Yergaliyeva, tried to launch a newspaper called ADAM Reader’s instead but was blocked by the culture and information ministry’s Kafkaesque manoeuvring.

On 20 December, on the eve of the printing of the first issue, Yergaliyeva was told that her new publication had been “cancelled” because she had forgotten to cancel the licence of the newspaper she had published under the same name from 2009 to 2022,

In fact, under Kazakh law, the licence would have lapsed automatically after three months without an issue being published.

On the same issue, read our latest publication on Wefightcensorship.org: ["Zhanaozen: How a censored event was used as grounds for censorship"](#)

04.12.2012 - Opposition newspapers convicted before court rules on case

Reporters Without Borders condemns the unprecedented pressure being put on the independent and opposition media in Kazakhstan. The two main opposition newspapers, *Golos Respubliki* and *Vzglyad*, were forced to halt publication a matter of days after [the prosecutor-general’s office announced it had asked an Almaty court to ban a number of independent and opposition national news outlets](#), and before any ruling had been made on the substance of the case.

“The Kazakh justice authorities have acted in contempt of all laws in an unwarranted display of cynicism,” the press freedom organization said. “The closure of the newspapers prior to a court verdict amounts to a de facto conviction, yet they have not been given a chance to defend themselves.

“Such a move, the first time it has been done in Kazakhstan, stems from a distortion of the law that is all the more shocking since the laws themselves are tailor-made by Parliament. From the outset, the proceedings have been marked by so many irregularities and inconsistencies that the fairness of the decision is highly questionable.

“The immediate seizure of all reprints from the banned newspapers and raids on their premises rounded off an organized campaign to stifle critical voices in Kazakhstan.

“As the personality cult around President Nursultan Nazarbayev grows apace, we renew our appeal to the international community to make clear to the government in Astana that such abuses are unacceptable. The rapid turn of events in recent weeks is a demonstration, if one were needed, that urgent action is required. Civil society in Kazakhstan needs support more than ever.”

Instant censorship

The prosecutor-general’s office [announced](#) on 21 November that it had asked an Almaty court to recognize the “extremist” nature of the two main opposition parties and the main independent and opposition media organizations in the country. On the same day, the court ordered the precautionary suspension of the newspaper *Golos Respubliki*. On 27 November, *Vzglyad* was told the same thing. The two newspapers were ordered to halt all printing and distribution. They announced they would turn themselves into online outlets, despite the fact that their websites and social network accounts were included in the prosecutor-general’s order.

Harassment of banned newspapers and those reprinting their stories

On November 28, representatives of the department for executing court decisions carried out a violent raid on the premises of the two newspapers. The lawyer for *Golos Respubliki*, Sergei Utkin, reported that he was pushed violently by bailiffs who entered the editorial offices. [According to the editor of *Vzglyad*, Igor Vinyavsky, who was jailed for nearly two months early this year](#), the bailiffs forced open the door and threatened staff, ordering them to hand over the latest edition of the newspaper.

The court officials also tried to seize a collection of stories with a print run of 99 copies, published under the title *Ne Vzglyad* ("This is not *Vzglyad*"). Under Kazakh law, a publication that prints fewer than 100 copies does not need to register with the authorities. However, most copies of *Ne Vzglyad* were seized by the police when they went on sale in the street.

Similarly, the 30 November edition of the opposition newspaper *Azat*, which reprinted some stories from *Golos Respubliki*, was withdrawn from sale.

Justice denied

The preliminary hearings, on 27 November for *Golos Respubliki* and 30 November for *Vzglyad*, were a public spectacle of a justice system that is prepared to resort to any irregularities to force through the bans on the two newspapers. The court did not acknowledge the fact that the trial was based on the conviction of a third person (Vladimir Kozlov, the leader of the Alga party), or the fact that the prosecution grouped eight titles together under the generic name *Respublika*, or the fact that a media organization is not a legal entity under Kazakh law.

A request by defence lawyers to subpoena the owners of the newspapers, not the titles themselves, was rejected. The *Golos Respubliki* trial is due to resume on 6 December and the *Vzglyad* case on 14 December.

The persecution of the independent media and [the bias of the justice system](#) are just a few signs of the ultra-authoritarian morass into which Kazakhstan is sinking. With great fanfare, the country celebrated a new festival on 1 December: First President's Day. Nursultan Nazarbayev, [a predator of freedom of information](#) who has been in power since Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, was hailed throughout the country with cries of "One country! One destiny! One leader!"

You can read [Respublika](#), [Vzglyad](#) and [Ne Vzglyad](#) on Facebook.

(Picture: Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev - credit Viktor Drachev / AFP)

You can download those documents on our website :

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