

# Kazakh Court Jails Opposition Politician

October 08, 2012

**The**  **Moscow Times**

A court in Kazakhstan has sentenced a vocal opposition leader to 7 1/2 years in prison for allegedly seeking to overthrow the government, ending a trial that undermined the Central Asian nation's claims to being an emerging democracy.

A judge in the city of Atyrau ruled that the unregistered Alga party's leader, Vladimir Kozlov, incited oil workers to violence as part of a plot hatched with exiled businessman and government foe Mukhtar Ablyazov, the politician's wife, Aliya Turusbekova, said.

Observers described the trial as politically motivated and designed to stifle robust opposition in the nation.

The charges relate to clashes in mid-December in the town of Zhanaozen between locals and police that followed a seven-month occupation of the central square by striking oil laborers. At least 14 people died when police opened fire on rioters. Alga's property is also to be confiscated, effectively leading to the abolition of the authorities' most robust critic.

Kozlov and two fellow defendants, who were given suspended sentences for similar offenses, visited and consulted with the workers in Zhanaozen demonstrating in a demand for higher

salaries.

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