

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024037327448 France has granted political asylum to Kazakhstan's exiled opposition leader Mukhtar Ablyazov, according to his lawyer and a French newspaper. The French daily Le Monde reported on October 5 that France's National Court of Asylum Issues, the CDNA, had granted asylum to the fugitive former banker. In its ruling, dated September 29, the court deplored direct pressure from Kazakhstan and "the obvious attempts by outside agents to exert influence on the asylum authorities," according to the report. Le Monde said the court had reviewed for several months Ablyazov's appeal against an earlier decision by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons to reject Ablyazov's asylum request. His lawyer, Bota Jardemalie, wrote on Facebook on October 4 that the CDNA's decision was made "despite the most massive political pressure by Kazakhstan on the leadership of France, international lobbying organized by [Kazakhstan's] regime, its dirty PR, fabricated accusations, manipulations and direct pressure on the French justice [system]." Ablyazov has been a vocal critic of Kazakh President Qasym-Zhomart Toqaev and his predecessor, Nursultan Nazarbaev. In recent years, he has been organizing and coordinating the activities of his Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan movement and protest rallies in Kazakhstan's capital, Nur-Sultan, and other towns and cities via the Internet. Ablyazov, a former head of Kazakhstan's BTA bank, who has been residing in Europe for more than a decade, is wanted by Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine on suspicion of embezzling some \$5 billion. In November 2018, a court in Kazakhstan sentenced Ablyazov in absentia to life in prison after finding him guilty of organizing the 2004 murder of Erzhan Tatishev, the head TuranAlem bank, which was later renamed BTA. In a separate in-absentia trial in Kazakhstan that ended in 2017, Ablyazov was convicted of embezzlement, abuse of office, and organizing a criminal group and sentenced to 20 years in prison.