

## **Kazakstan "Hitler" Magazine Editor Says He's Victim of Moscow Pressure**

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Outcry led by Russian media turned debate into a political issue.

Writers and analysts say that outrage in Kazakstan over the April edition of a magazine devoted to Adolf Hitler was exacerbated by pressure from Moscow, which was angered by the comparisons made with President Vladimir Putin.

On May 11, Jarylkap Kalybay, chief editor of the *Anyz Adam* magazine, was fined over 1,200 US dollars, although this was not for featuring Hitler, but on a technicality – the offence of not informing the authorities of which printing company he was using.

There were accusations that some of the articles contained positive descriptions of the Nazi leader and his ideology, but most of the anger came from Russia, because of the parallels drawn between Hitler's annexation of neighbouring countries and Putin's actions in Ukraine.

The Russian foreign ministry sent a formal protest note to Kazakstan. In a statement, it said that publishing material sympathetic to fascism was "absolutely unacceptable", and "doubly sacrilegious" on the eve of Victory Day on May 9, which marks the defeat of Nazi Germany. The ministry urged the Kazak government to take "appropriate action".

The magazine's editorial, penned by Kalybay, said the choice of subject meant as a warning to nations that allowed leaders to drag them "into the abyss", and to "protect ourselves from the policies pursued by the modern-day Russian empire as it waves the banner of nationalism and chauvinism".

The issue is particularly sensitive given the suggestions aired by Russian nationalists earlier this year that Kazakstan, with its large Slav minority, deserved similar treatment to Ukraine.

Ethnic Russians, who are concentrated in Kazakstan's northern regions along a 7,000-kilometre border with Siberia, are the country's second-largest ethnic group, accounting for just over one-fifth of its 17 million people.

Speaking to the media, Kalybay apologised to veterans of the Second World War for any offence caused, but denied that the magazine issue promoted fascism. He said the case against him was politically motivated, and was fuelled by Russian-language media and by protests from Moscow.

Political analyst Rasul Jumaly, who was among the contributors to the edition, told IWPR that what really enraged Moscow were the parallels drawn between Russia's intervention in Ukraine and Nazi expansionism.

One article in the *Anyz Adam* edition focused on Hitler's seizure of the Sudetenland, the predominantly German-speaking areas within the former Czechoslovakia, and made a clear comparison with Russian nationalist claims to north Kazakstan.

Jumaly gave the example of a Andrei Zubov, a philosophy professor in Moscow who was sacked in March after drawing comparisons between Putin's policies and the Nazi annexation of Austria.

"What's more, it seems they [the Russian authorities] believe that they can punish people outside Russia as well," Jumaly said.

Kazakstan's State Agency for Communications and Information said it was investigating whether the magazine had violated a law prohibiting hate-speech, an offence which could lead to a jail term of up to seven years.

At an April 21 press conference, where Kalybay was supported by members of the Kazak intelligentsia, the editor expressed his disappointment that Russian-language media in the country had joined in the wave of criticism. He said that his fiercest critics were Russian-speakers who objected to the magazine's content without having read it, as they did not speak Kazak.

The briefing was also attended by representatives of the Kazakstan branch of a Russian nationalist group, the National Liberation Movement,, who shouted that Kalybay should be put in jail. NOD encourages pro-Moscow sentiment among Russians in former Soviet countries.

*Anyz Adam*, which Kalybay owns as well as edits, has a 25,000-strong circulation, making it one of the

most popular Kazak-language publications.

Russian remains in wide use in Kazakhstan, and enjoys official status, while Kazak is the formal state language. The language question is closely tied to the idea of Kazak nationhood, and is a recurring source of tensions. Many Kazaks speak Russian well, but some see its continuing strength as a Soviet legacy and as sign of Moscow's continuing influence.

Yerkin Irgaliev, the head of the Aspandau academic foundation told IWPR that he was against people being punished for expressing a point of view, but he said that in any case, all sense of perspective had been lost here because of the political ramifications.

Irgaliev said the Kazakhstan government had been forced to tread carefully so as not to antagonise Russia, particularly after the angry protest that came from Moscow. He noted that sensitivities in Russia had increased following the annexation of Crimea and events in eastern Ukraine. The attitude now was, he said, "If you aren't with us, you're against us".

Irgaliev pointed out that broadcast and print media based in Russia were influential in Kazakhstan. As a result, he said, "even an insignificant article can could provoke a strong reaction like this".

"In a situation like this, it's almost impossible for the authorities to do the right thing. because both sides, the [Kazak] nationalists and the pro-Russia critics will be unhappy whatever they do," he said.

In Almaty, local people divided in their responses to the "Hitler" edition.

Sholpan Jumanova, a Kazak-language teacher, told IWPR that she saw nothing controversial about it, arguing that on the contrary, it had helped educate young Kazaks by explaining how dangerous Hitler and his political views were.

However, Sergei Pashevich, head of a group of former combatants from the Soviet war in Afghanistan, said fascism must not be whitewashed.

"It's a crime against our remembrance of the [1941-45] war. They want to take away our right to commemorate our common victory," he said.

Another resident, Irina Muravyova, said the magazine had not only hurt the feelings of war veterans but also deepened the rift between Kazakhstan's two largest ethnic communities.

"It pits Kazak and Russian people against one another. It's a deliberate act and it shouldn't be allowed," she said.

Anyz Adam features a different personality every month, mostly famous Kazaks but sometimes world historical figures. Recent issues have featured Nelson Mandela, Napoleon Bonaparte and Mahatma Gandhi. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, responsible for countless deaths in Kazakhstan, featured in 2011, and that issue passed without public controversy.

**Dauren Altynov is a pseudonym for a journalist in Kazakhstan.**

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