

FREEDOM OF SPEECH BAROMETER IN KAZAKHSTAN

We present an overview of the situation regarding the rights of journalists and the media in Kazakhstan for the first quarter of 2026.

The first quarter of 2026 proved to be a period of unprecedented testing of resilience for Kazakhstan's media community. The main event was the nationwide referendum on the adoption of a new Constitution, which, contrary to declarations of democratisation, resulted in a wave of pre-emptive pressure on independent journalists. The 'Barometer' records an alarming trend: from mass DDoS attacks and the blocking of social media accounts to administrative fines for conducting editorial surveys.

The entry into force of the law on artificial intelligence, with mandatory content labelling, and the introduction of a ban on LGBT propaganda have created new areas of legal uncertainty, allowing sanctions to be applied selectively. Of particular concern is the return to the practice of criminal prosecution under Article 274 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 'Dissemination of knowingly false information', against well-known journalists. These cases, alongside the increasing frequency of closed court hearings and the disregard of requests for information under the pretext of 'confidentiality', point to a critical decline in the level of transparency of state bodies.

Massive attacks on the websites of independent publications, hacking of journalists' personal accounts and the blocking of major media platforms demonstrate the use of sophisticated technological tools to suppress criticism. Against the backdrop of preparations for the referendum, 'Barometer' notes not only external pressure but also an intensification of internal censorship within state media.

1. General situation (adoption of new laws, statements by public figures, introduction of new regulations).

January. The international human rights organisation [Amnesty International highlighted pressure on the media](#) in Kazakhstan, expressing concern over the state of freedom of expression. The statement noted that there have been cases in the country of journalists being persecuted, criminal cases being brought against them, and other actions that may hinder the independent work of editorial teams. Human rights activists called on the Kazakhstani authorities to ensure the

protection of freedom of expression and to cease practices that put pressure on the media.

On 16 January, [a law on artificial intelligence](#) came into force in Kazakhstan. One of its provisions concerns the labelling of AI content: failure to do so is punishable by heavy fines (ranging from 15 to 200 MCI). The labelling must be machine-readable, meaning it must be automatically recognised by software and digital systems.

February. [The Legal Media Centre and the journalistic community of Kazakhstan published an open letter](#) to President Tokayev calling for the current wording of Article 20 of the Constitution, which addresses freedom of speech and creativity, to be retained and for the proposal to amend it to be rejected. The appeal was signed by around 1,000 people, including representatives of the media, human rights organisations and experts.

The authors of the appeal emphasise that the proposed Article 23 introduces elements of sector-specific regulation into the Constitution. The text lists types of creative work, mentions intellectual property, and includes provisions already enshrined in civil and criminal legislation. The authors of the appeal believe that such an approach erodes the role of the Constitution and turns it into a set of detailed regulations, whereas the Constitution should set out frameworks and principles, rather than duplicating codes.

Journalist and media manager [Yerlan Bekkhozhin stated that Kazakhstani television is losing its audience](#) because it continues to wait for permission from regulators, whilst viewers are turning to social media. He noted that state-run channels possess the resources – professional journalists, correspondents and analysts – but are unable to make full use of them due to self-imposed restrictions. As a result, the information vacuum is rapidly being filled by websites and social media, where narratives and opinions are formed, often not in favour of the official line, whilst the trust and influence of traditional television continue to decline.

March. On 2 March, [a ban on the promotion of non-traditional sexual orientation](#) came into force in Kazakhstan. The provision is enshrined in no fewer than eight laws. Yet even after reading them, it is very difficult to understand where the line lies beyond which a news item or opinion becomes propaganda. As a result, one risks a hefty fine or even arrest.

[Journalists in Kazakhstan](#) have appealed [to President Tokayev](#) to launch a presidential initiative to decriminalise the article on knowingly false information. “We ask you to take personal charge of the case of Botagoz Omarova and to protect us, journalists, from such incidents, as Article 274 of the Criminal Code is often used as a tool to exert pressure on journalists. We call on you to ensure a

comprehensive, objective and thorough investigation into all the circumstances of the case, to guarantee strict adherence to procedural norms and rights, and to assist in bringing an end to the criminal prosecution of the journalist Botagoz Omarova,” the appeal states.

[Azat Peruashev](#), a Member of Parliament and former leader of the Ak Zhol party, [highlighted the urgency of decriminalising Article 274 of the Criminal Code](#), which provides for criminal liability for the dissemination of knowingly false information. According to him, recent events surrounding the persecution of media representatives make this issue particularly significant.

[The Airan project has announced the cessation of its operations](#). The decision is linked to difficulties that have arisen, the details of which have not been disclosed. It is noted that the channel had previously suspended its activities and ceased publishing new content, whilst the management reported on negotiations and attempts to resolve the issues that had arisen.

2. Legal pressure (lawsuits, pre-trial claims, arrests, detentions)

January

[‘Nasha Gazeta’ responded to a pre-litigation claim](#) by Kazbek Nurmagambetov regarding the correction and removal of an article dated 22 May 2013. The claimant objected to the fact that the publication mentioned his being wanted by the police and the criminal case against him. The response stated that the published information had been obtained from official sources (the press service of the Kostanay Region Internal Affairs Department) and was accurate at the time of publication. The newspaper noted that it had no intention of discrediting anyone and was acting within the framework of the Law ‘On Mass Media’. The claimant’s complaint was deemed unfounded.

The weekly newspaper ‘Nasha Gazeta’ received a pre-trial claim from bailiff Ismukhambetova regarding the publication of the article ‘A man from Kostanay was charged nine years’ worth of child maintenance for children who lived with him’ dated 19 June 2025. In her letter, the claimant expressed her disagreement with the article and demanded the publication of a retraction. The newspaper’s editor-in-chief, Timur Gafurov, replied that the information set out in the article had been obtained from an official source – the press office of the Kostanay Regional Court – and was accurate at the time of publication. The article did not contain any surnames or other personal data that would allow a specific individual to be identified.

[Journalist Kirill Berdetsky won](#) the [court](#) case concerning the protection of honour, dignity, professional reputation and compensation for non-pecuniary damage. The Taraz City Court dismissed Zhanna Mamasheva’s claim against Berdetsky.

Furthermore, the claimant was ordered to pay court costs of 100,000 tenge and over 112,000 tenge for the forensic examination.

The Appeals Panel of the Astana City Court upheld the lower court's decision to refuse [accreditation](#) to [seven journalists from RFE/RL-Kazakhstan](#) (the RFE/RL representative office in Kazakhstan, Radio Azattyk).

[The Astana City Administration refused to disclose the topics of the rallies on the grounds of 'personal data'](#). The Specialised Inter-District Administrative Court of the Kostanay Region refused to hear the case, citing lack of jurisdiction. As a reminder: the Legal Media Centre is challenging the actions of the Astana Internal Policy Department, which violate the law on access to information and the constitutional right to freedom of information. The city administration continues to ignore the request for information regarding the topics and timing of the rallies in the capital. The next court hearing will take place in Astana on 15 April.

The Court of Appeal [upheld the ruling in the case of SpetsTradeTM LLP v. SotReport.kz](#). Previously, a court in Astana had dismissed the company's claim for protection of its business reputation and its demand to remove the publication. In the appeal, the claimant argued that the court had incorrectly assessed the evidence and misapplied the law. He insisted that the disputed statements in the article were not evaluative judgements but statements of fact. However, the appeal contained no specific objections to the court's findings – the claimant merely repeated general references to Article 143 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan without providing detailed grounds. The court confirmed that the SotReport.kz article was based on official and verifiable sources – data from the public procurement portal, court rulings and responses from state bodies.

[The court dismissed the plaintiff's case for protection of honour and dignity](#) against Botagoz Omarova. The journalist received a legal claim following the publication of a video interview with businessman Oleg Morozov, who alleged the unlawful use of the 'Briz' yacht club jetty in Aktau. Askar Karabekov, a resident of the city, demanded that Omarova and Morozov each pay 2 million tenge and remove the publication, considering the statements to be defamatory to his reputation. During the court proceedings, the defence presented an independent philological and linguistic expert report confirming that the material contained no insults or defamation, and that the disputed phrases constituted evaluative judgements and a discussion of a topic of public interest. The court dismissed the plaintiff's claim, finding the demands to be unfounded.

February

[The case against journalist Akmaral Maikozova has been dismissed.](#) On 18 February, the Court of Appeal heard the appeal in the case of Akmaral Maikozova.

The lawsuit was brought by JSC 'SPK Aktobe', which accused her of spreading false information. The case stemmed from a publication containing information about management bonuses for 2024. SPK reported the payment of remuneration amounting to 64.1 million tenge. The organisation later clarified that this was the total annual payroll, which included salaries and other payments. The Court of Appeal agreed with the court of first instance and, finding no violations in the journalist's actions, upheld the decision.

[Tamara Eslamova](#), editor-in-chief of the newspaper Uralskaya Nedelya, [reported that local police officers had come to her to take a statement](#) following a complaint from a legal entity offended by the newspaper's publication. According to her, over the newspaper's 25-year history, the authorities have taken many actions against journalists, but this was the first time local police officers had demanded linguistic explanations from her regarding the text of a news report.

[Radio Azattyk and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan intend to conclude a mediation agreement regarding the case concerning the withdrawal of journalists' accreditation](#). A representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in court that the ministry had no objection to the matter of accreditation being reconsidered. Following the hearing, the parties agreed to sign a mediation agreement within the framework of the administrative case. The discussion has been extended until the end of April.

[The Russian Ministry of Justice has included the website "Respublika.kz.media" in the register of foreign agents](#). This is the first time a Kazakhstani media outlet has been included on the list. In its justification, the Russian Ministry of Justice stated that 'Respublika' had disseminated materials from foreign agents and organisations deemed undesirable in Russia, as well as 'inaccurate information' about decisions made by the Russian authorities. Furthermore, the ministry claims that the project was created with the support of a foreign organisation and is managed from outside the Russian Federation.

March

[Journalist Zhanar Baisemiz was held administratively liable under Article 490 of the Code of Administrative Offenses for conducting an interview with an imam](#). The interview, published on a YouTube channel, featured the imam stating that he had "married off his second wife, who did not obey him, to his student." The video sparked widespread public reaction.

[Amir Kaseinov, editor-in-chief of KazTAG, has had his house arrest extended.](#)

The restrictive measure will remain in force until 25 April 2026. This was reported by the journalist's lawyer, Salimzhan Musin. Kaseinov is under house arrest as part of a criminal case linked to the agency's publications. Earlier, Aset Mataev, CEO of the KazTAG International Information Agency, and the publication's editor-in-chief, Amir Kaseinov, were named as suspects in the case. The investigation was prompted by a statement from Freedom Finance. The journalists are charged under Article 274 of the Criminal Code – the dissemination of knowingly false information.

[Since 21 March, Botagoz Omarova, author of the Telegram channel 'Aitpa, Botagoz!',](#) has been under house arrest following a ruling by the investigative court. She is accused of disseminating knowingly false information. The investigation was prompted by reports on the construction of the presidential stables, in which the contractor claimed that he had not received the promised payment from the client company. The house arrest will last for two months.

KomTransLeasing LLP has filed a lawsuit against journalist Olesya Vertinskaya to protect the business reputation and honour of its director, Sergei Samoilov. The company claims that on 12 and 16 February 2026, Vertinskaya published videos in which she disseminated false information about alleged fraud involving guarantee agreements drawn up without the citizen's consent, and accused the LLP and its director of 'aiding and abetting fraud'. The LLP is seeking a declaration that the information is false and defamatory, an order requiring Vertinskaya to publish an official retraction, and reimbursement of legal costs.

According to journalist Zhanna Baitelova, [the appeal court upheld the sentence against journalist Oleg Gusev.](#) He was given a three-year suspended prison sentence and banned from practising his profession for the same period. The basis for this was a hyperlink to an article by journalist Alexander Alyokhov. Gusev was charged with a 'crime' for mentioning the criminal convictions of blogger Elena Sadvakasova. The court of first instance acknowledged that the information Gusev had taken from the court records section of the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan's website was publicly available, yet he was found guilty for providing a hyperlink to an article containing personal data.

[The Russian regulator Roskomnadzor sent](#) a notice to [the Kazakhstani publication Exclusive.kz](#) demanding the removal of previously published

material concerning those killed in Ukraine. In the notice, the agency stated that the publication contained, in its view, “inaccurate information of public significance” and demanded its removal. Roskomnadzor stated that, in the event of refusal, access to the disputed page could be restricted.

[A preliminary court hearing was held](#) regarding a claim for the protection of business reputation brought by the Department of Energy and Housing and Utilities of the West Kazakhstan Region against the publication ‘Ural Week’. The reason was the headline of a publication concerning the region’s problems linked to an acute shortage of autogas. The court ordered an expert examination of the publication.

[The media channel Ayel and Akzhaik received pre-trial claims](#) from an Almaty businessman demanding the removal of all publications and a public apology. The businessman’s wife, actress Anelia Amangalieva, accused her husband of systematic harassment and threats.

3.Obstruction of journalists’ professional activities (beatings, threats, assaults, bans on filming, denial of access to events)

January

According to BES.media, [the trial of journalist Mirbolat Bishuinov](#) in Almaty is taking place under conditions that do not allow for the normal attendance and observation of the proceedings by the public. There is not enough space in the courtroom, the audio feed is frequently interrupted, and some people were forced to go outside as they could not follow the proceedings. At one point, the broadcast was switched off completely, making it impossible for those present to monitor the progress of the hearings.

[Tamara Vaal](#), editor-in-chief of the magazine ‘Vlast’, [reported that journalists were not allowed to attend the 13th Congress of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs ‘Atameken’ in Astana](#). According to Vaal, the presence of journalists could have clearly demonstrated how the chamber protects business interests. However, the NCE’s press service replied that the congress was closed and the media were not permitted to attend.

After the verdict was announced, [a relative of the Totakanovs – a family whose members were involved in a high-profile case – attacked a journalist](#). The mother of Daulet Totakanov’s husband caused a scene and cursed all the media representatives present, accusing them of publishing in the ‘tabloids’ and claiming that ordinary people had been ‘dragged through the mud’. The incident was recorded by journalists and reported on Syrmedia.kz.

[On 15 January, a journalist from Ulysmidia.kz was detained by police](#) in Astana [for unknown reasons](#). The journalist had come to cover the situation outside the House of Ministries, where a group of parents who had lost their children had gathered. They were planning to submit a collective petition to the presidential administration. The police confiscated the journalist's phone and other equipment, and demanded that he delete the footage he had filmed.

On 20 January, journalist Zhania Urankaeva reported that, prior to the start of a public court hearing in Aktau, prosecutor Malik Ospanov stated that filming the prosecutor whilst he was performing his duties required his permission, without specifying the legal basis for this. Urankaeva emphasised that, together with colleagues from 101tv.kz and lmc.kz, they had decided to lodge a complaint against the prosecutor's actions for violating the Constitution, as in open court journalists have the right to film all participants in the proceedings unless the judge has imposed a ban. She noted that the situation appears particularly alarming when prosecutors in court are unaware of the country's laws.

February

In Kostanay on 16 February, at Court No. 2 during a hearing on the so-called 'meat case', journalists from local and national media were present whilst foreign experts were giving evidence. However, Judge [Meray Amanzholov demanded that the media representatives leave the courtroom](#), citing a decision to ban video recording, without explaining the reasons or announcing the ruling on which this decision was based. When journalists attempted to clarify where they could access this document, the judge repeated his demand that they leave the courtroom and refused to provide further explanation. According to the journalists, the ban extended not only to video recording but also to audio recording, which significantly hampered their work.

Zhaniya Urankaeva, a correspondent for www.press.kz, stated on her social media that on 13 February she had travelled to the Kyzylorda region to cover the trial in the Shielinsky district. She said that the judge had banned journalists from making audio and video recordings of the hearing, thereby restricting the media's work in the courtroom. Journalists note that such restrictions make it difficult to fully inform the public about the progress of the trial and raise questions about the transparency of the court's work.

[BES.media correspondent Nana Iksanova reported](#) that the hearing to appoint the akim of the Turksib district of Almaty was scheduled for 8.30 am on 2 February. An announcement regarding the session appeared on the maslikhat's website, but after that access to information effectively ceased, and the hearing took place behind closed doors. Journalists were not invited, and the Maslikhat's administration refused to organise the usual broadcast, citing a 'lack of technical

capability'. Due to the closed-door format, the name of the new head only appeared in the media almost three hours after the hearing began.

March

[Lukpan Akhmedyarov, Raul Uporov and Yerkeulan Gaupov](#), participants in the Kazakh media project 'Just Journalism', [were detained at passport control](#) at Astana Airport. This occurred following their arrival from Ukraine, where they had been on a work trip.

On 5 March, Indira Kakimova, a journalist [with www.orda.kz](#), reported that residents had been invited to the East Kazakhstan Regional Administration to discuss the repayment of subsidies. However, [media representatives were initially denied access](#). Only 40 minutes later, following lengthy negotiations and consultations, were the journalists permitted to enter the hall where the agricultural workers had been invited.

[Kirill Berdetsky, editor-in-chief of Taraznews.kz](#), reported that on 11 March 2026, Taraz Court No. 2 prohibited the media from covering an open criminal hearing, even though there had been no ruling to hold the proceedings in camera. The editor noted that this contravened the law and lodged a complaint regarding the violation of the principle of open court proceedings.

[According to journalist Tolegen Imanov](#), on 18 March 2026, an administrative case was heard in open court at the Specialised Court for Administrative Offences in Petropavlovsk.

Imanov, representing the media outlet 'Law-abiding Citizen', was present at the hearing; however, Judge Alnazirov removed him from the courtroom without a reasoned decision to move the hearing to a closed session. Following the incident, the journalist lodged a complaint with the Supreme Court and the regional prosecutor's office.

In Almaty, [Aset Mataev, founder of the KazTAG news agency](#), was detained following a brawl in the Medeu district. The police department clarified that the conflict took place on the night of 17 March. The department added that all those involved in the incident were detained and taken to the police station. A criminal case has been opened on charges of hooliganism.

4. Internet censorship (blocking, hacking, DDoS attacks)

January

On January 10, 2026, an article titled "Language Conflict: The Behavior of the Head of 'Batys Su Arnasy' Outraged Residents of Uralsk" was published on the website [Total.kz](#). Following the publication, the website total.kz was subjected to a cyberattack (DDoS attacks and access restrictions at the level of specific internet

providers). The editorial team considers this an attempt to limit the dissemination of information and to influence editorial policy. After the referendum, the website became accessible again.

[On 29 January, the 'Vlasti' website became inaccessible due to a new DDoS attack](#). The site experienced disruptions, and technical specialists are working to restore stable access. This attack was the first major one in 2026 and appears to have been aimed at hindering the editorial team's work.

[Journalists Lukpan Akhmediyarov and Raul Uporov reported](#) that their Facebook accounts had been hacked. On 24 January, they announced to subscribers of the 'Just Journalism' channel that, following the deactivation of their old pages, they had created new profiles on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. On 20 January, journalist Lukpan Akhmediyarov reported on Facebook that the platform had restored his previous page, although it had previously claimed that it had been deactivated permanently.

[Roskomnadzor, through the Moscow City Court, filed a lawsuit](#) to block the websites of two Kazakhstani media outlets – Ulysmmedia.kz and Cmn.kz – due to publications concerning Russian businessman Timur Turlov, the founder of Freedom Finance. The Russian authorities are demanding that the technical capability to host and distribute materials be removed, as they believe these materials infringe copyright or present disputed facts regarding Turlov's activities and the financial structures associated with him. Kazakh media outlets note that the authorship and rights to the materials belong to the publications themselves, and this is not the first instance of attempts to block Kazakh news websites in this manner. Experts believe that such measures may form part of a broader strategy to block websites under agreements within the Eurasian Economic Union.

February

[Channels have appeared on the dark web openly offering services to hack the accounts](#) of Kazakhstani media outlets, including Respublika and Basa. According to sources at Respublika.kz.media, such orders are placed directly from Kazakhstan.

[Unknown individuals hacked the account of Kazakhstani journalist Vadim Boreiko](#). Posts appeared on his Instagram page containing statements uncharacteristic of the journalist, as well as generated images. Boreiko's Facebook account became inaccessible.

March

On [6 March, the 'Vlasti' website was](#) once [again subjected to a massive DDoS attack](#). Attacks on the site had been active in the final weeks of 2025, subsided at the very end of the year, and resumed in January. Technical specialists are stabilising the site, but it is operating intermittently.

[Radio Azattyk's Instagram account has been blocked](#). The page owner is shown a notification stating that the profile is hidden from other users and unavailable for use. The platform's administration stated that the account or activities on it allegedly violate rules relating to the use of intellectual property. The Azattyk page published material on the socio-political life of Kazakhstan and the world, including exclusive editorial content, as well as audio and video content from news agencies and social media users. The Azattyk editorial team has contested the decision and lodged a complaint with Meta, the owner of Instagram.

5. Access to information and censorship (refusal to provide information, ignoring requests, incomplete responses, evasion of answers).

January

On 28 January, Aizhan Auelbekova, the Zhambyl region correspondent for the newspaper Vremya, sent official requests to the police department, the prosecutor's office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the case of Gulayim Rakhmonova. The journalist had previously contacted the police, but responses were delayed pending consultation with prosecutors. The regional prosecutor's office informed Auelbekova that they were not imposing any restrictions and recommended that she submit her requests via the e-Otynysh system. The journalist submitted her requests to the regional prosecutor's office and copied them to the General Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. She forwarded the questions to the police, which had not been answered, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The prosecutors replied within two days, whilst the Ministry of Internal Affairs provided a response on 12 February, noting that Auelbekova was not a party to the case. No response was ever received from the police department.

[The editorial team at Exclusive.kz sent](#) an official request to [the Kazakhmys Corporation](#) in December 2025, but the company refused to answer the questions on their merits, citing that the required information had allegedly already been published in open sources and that some of the questions fell outside its remit,

including matters relating to the work of the government and parliament. The journalistic enquiry covered topics such as possible discrepancies with official data on concentrate exports and raw material controls, the company's stance on processing and export analytics, industrial safety measures following the tragedies at the Zhomart mine, the environmental situation and residents' complaints, working conditions, social issues and payments to the families of deceased miners.

[Journalist Daniyar Moldabekov reported that Kazakhstani state bodies continue to respond with form letters](#) to enquiries regarding security personnel killed during the January 2022 events. According to his information, on 11 January 2022, the National Security Committee (NSC) claimed that border guards had prevented the seizure of strategically important sites in Almaty, including the Kok-Tobe TV tower, and repelled an attack by 'bandits'. However, two years later, Lieutenant Colonel Galymzhan Sadvakasov of the KNB Border Service stated that at the height of the events on 6 January, security forces fired at each other in the confusion, rather than at 'bandits', as the KNB had claimed. Sadvakasov reported that a special police unit had been sent to the TV tower instead of the alleged 'bandits', and the shootout took place in full view of civilians.

On [23 January, journalist Zhania Urankaeva](#) reported difficulties accessing the declaration of National Bank head Timur Suleimenov. She attempted to locate the document on the official website but was unable to find the declaration. Suleimenov did not respond, demanding a written request and citing that he was not obliged to remember the details of his declaration. A request was sent to the head of the National Bank's press service, Gassan Akhmetzhan, asking him to provide a link to the published declaration; however, no response had been received by the time this post was published.

[Konaev's administration declined to disclose the financial details](#) of the construction of a number of major administrative buildings, citing the 'official use' classification. These include buildings for central government bodies, the National Security Committee, the Prosecutor's Office and the Palace of Schoolchildren.

February

[The Deputy Prosecutor General did not answer](#) journalists' [questions](#) in the Mazhilis building during the session. Journalists attempted to obtain comments on current issues, but the Deputy Prosecutor General ignored them, offering no explanations and refusing to engage in dialogue. This behaviour drew criticism from media representatives, who believe that officials have a duty to be open and to respond to press enquiries.

[The Ministry of Culture and Information gave a non-response to a query regarding problems accessing the KazTAG website.](#) The news agency sent a request

regarding problems accessing the website to the Ministry of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Development, which was itself unable to respond to the request and forwarded it to the Ministry of Information, which attached the same 'null' message as a response. In both cases, the status of the requests in the eOtinish system is marked as 'completed'.

March

[The Ministry of Emergency Situations has classified the details of the budget programme](#) 'Implementation of measures for the formation and storage of the state material reserve' for 2026–2028, publishing a document marked 'top secret' on the Open Budgets portal. This classification conceals the programme's description, its content, the level of management and the method of implementation, and the amount of planned expenditure is not specified.

Deputy Prime Minister Serik Zhumangarin [reacted sharply to journalists' questions](#), urging them "not to be rude" and expressing dissatisfaction with the wording of their queries. This reaction followed attempts by media representatives to clarify the details. The questions concerned the official's wife's income, as stated in the declaration, in particular a substantial sum received on the stock market. Journalists attempted to obtain further clarification regarding this information; however, during the conversation, Zhumangarin indicated that he did not intend to answer questions if he considered them inappropriate.

[The editorial team at Juzmedia sent official requests](#) to the Committee on the Penal System asking which specific institutions are housing convicts known for high-profile, scandalous court cases, under what conditions they are serving their sentences, whether they receive incentives or penalties, whether they work, and whether they participate in the social life of the colonies. However, the department did not address the substance of the questions; only a form letter was received in response.

According to journalist Botagoz Omarova, [Darkhan Zhazykbay once again chose not to meet with the press](#). The Chairman of the Civil Service Agency entered the Mazhilis and left it in such a way that journalists were effectively unable to see him. Journalists are open to any form of dialogue, but there is no real communication. According to the press service, Zhazykbay was urgently summoned to Akorda, which served as a way to avoid awkward questions.

According to BES.media, [Kazakhstan's Ministry of Digital Development did not provide a direct response](#) to a request regarding the publication of scans of identity cards on the public procurement portal. The reason for the enquiry was that journalists had discovered full copies of tender participants' identity cards – complete with photographs and signatures – in the public domain. In its response,

the ministry limited itself to explaining what data is considered public, but did not clarify the legality of publishing the identity documents themselves. Previously, MPs had stated that such publications could violate personal data protection regulations.

6. Referendum on the adoption of the new Constitution

On 15 March, a nationwide referendum on the adoption of the new text of the Constitution took place in Kazakhstan. It was preceded by the blocking of channels run by independent journalists and activists, fines imposed on publications, and numerous warnings from state bodies.

[The police were instructed to respond harshly to provocations](#) and the dissemination of false information about the draft new Constitution. The Ministry of Internal Affairs emphasised that discussing the Constitution and expressing opinions are not prohibited, but that those spreading knowingly false information, particularly aimed at destabilisation, will be held accountable.

[The Ministry of Culture is dealing with technical attacks on the media](#) and public groups, Aida Balaeva reported. The minister noted that, against the backdrop of discussions on the draft new constitution, users have become more active online, attempting to 'destabilise' the socio-political situation in the country.

[Elmedia's editor-in-chief, Gulzhan Yergalieva, stated](#) that with the emergence of the draft Constitution in Kazakhstan, the situation in the country is escalating, and the next stage could be an active purge of the information and political landscape. According to her, a list of several dozen journalists, bloggers, lawyers, political analysts, cultural figures, athletes and media outlets deemed 'untrustworthy' is being circulated in certain circles. Due to the current situation, Yergalieva has been forced to send the Kazakh editorial team of the 'Eldauysy' channel on unpaid leave from next month.

Journalist Nazymgul Kumyspaeva reported that [journalists at state television channels have been sent instructions](#) asking them to update their profile pictures on social media according to a specific template. A step-by-step guide appeared in work chat groups: follow the link, select a photo (preferably conveying an expression of 'deep state optimism'), add a 'New Constitution' frame and set it as your profile picture. According to the correspondence, the instructions were sent to staff at the 'Kazakhstan', 'Khabar' and Jibek Joly TV channels.

[In Astana, Radio Azattyk correspondent Zholdas Orisbay was detained at the polling station in the Palace of Schoolchildren.](#) The district police department confirmed the detention. According to a police officer who identified himself as Seit Bukharbay, the police intend to establish whether the journalist had committed any

unlawful acts. It is also reported that an Informburo.kz correspondent was detained alongside Zholdas Orisbay. After some time, Zholdas Orisbay was released from the police station. He had spent three hours there. No charges were brought against him, nor were the reasons for his detention clearly explained.

At the same polling station, [journalist Saniya Toiken was detained](#); she was accompanied by her daughter, with whom she had come to vote. Toiken later reported that violence had been used against her during the detention, and that they were held at the station for four hours.

[Radio Azattyk journalist Darkhan Omirbek was barred from](#) observing the vote count at a polling station in Astana.

In the village of Otegen-Batyr (Almaty region), [attempts were made to prevent an Orda.kz journalist from observing at polling station No. 351](#). Members of the commission stated that the seats for observers were already taken and asked the correspondent to leave the building, saying: "You can see there are no seats. You should have left." Meanwhile, some staff turned away whilst she was filming. After voting and photographing the process, local residents noted that such actions were allegedly "done for the report."

Press.kz journalist Zhania Urankaeva reported that on 16 March, whilst attempting to record the announcement of the preliminary referendum results, she and her colleagues were prevented from working, citing obstruction by staff.

[The publisher of "Nasha Gazeta" was fined under the article on violations of the procedure](#) for conducting [polls](#) related to the referendum. The reason was the "Question of the Week" column, published on 5 February on the publication's website. Readers were asked to answer the following question: "The proposed amendments will affect 84% of the text of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Changes are being prepared for 77 articles at once. If a referendum on the amendments were to take place in the near future, how would you vote?"

The Prosecutor's Office noted that the publication released the results of the 'Question of the Week' after President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev had signed a decree on holding a referendum. The ruling notes that the decree comes into force on the day of its official publication – 12 February. On the same day, "Nasha Gazeta" reproduced the results of the poll in its print edition. The ruling notes that such data may create "distorted and manipulative public opinion".

["Ural Week" was fined for conducting the poll](#). The court held the publication liable under Article 120, Part 3 of the Code of Administrative Offences and imposed a fine of 129,750 tenge. According to the Constitutional Law "On Elections", "polls may be conducted by registered legal entities with at least five years' experience

in conducting public opinion polls, provided they have given prior written notice to the Central Election Commission”.

[Ahead of the referendum, many Kazakhstani bloggers and activists faced account blocks](#), hacks and deletions on social media. For instance, the YouTube channel of the Legal Media Centre was removed, as were critical posts about the constitution by Diana Okremova and Gulmira Birzhanova. Posts by a number of other users were restricted or deleted. Among them were the blogger Jurttyn Ballasy, and the journalists Asem Zhapishova, Irina Petrusheva, Musagali Daulov, Murat Daniyar, Tamara Eslamova, Vadim Boreiko and Dinara Yegeubaeva. The websites of KazTAG, Vlast.kz and ‘Ural Week’ were blocked. Journalists Dina Elgezek and Zhalgas Ertai reported that, following their comments on the draft Constitution, the police visited their homes to carry out ‘explanatory work’.

Meta removed dozens of posts from the Respublika.kz.media social media pages. According to the editorial team, 57 posts about the Constitution of Kazakhstan disappeared from the media outlet’s Facebook account, and all posts on the same topic were removed from Instagram.

The notifications cited a violation related to the use of the Giorgio Armani trademark as the reason for the removal. What all these posts have in common is that their authors publicly expressed critical views regarding the proposed amendments to the Constitution.

A few days later, Meta restored hundreds of posts by Kazakhstani journalists, human rights activists and users on Facebook and Instagram, which had previously been removed following mass complaints allegedly made on behalf of Giorgio Armani.

[The Law ‘On Mass Media’ will be brought into line with the new Constitution.](#)

‘Legislation in the field of mass media continues to be improved. It is planned to ensure that the legal framework more fully reflects the principles of freedom of speech, the inadmissibility of censorship and citizens’ right to receive and disseminate information. At the same time, mechanisms to protect the honour, dignity and business reputation of citizens will be strengthened, which will ensure a balance between freedom of expression and the protection of constitutional human rights,’ said Minister of Culture and Information Aida Balaeva at a government meeting.

If you wish to report violations of journalists’ rights or have any questions, please contact us at mediastana@gmail.com