

Kazakh detained over empty placard vigil

BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-48187353>) · by Menu

- Published

7 May 2019

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Image source, Uralskaya Nedelya/YouTube

Image caption,

Aslan's stance initially confused the police

By News from Elsewhere...

...as found by BBC Monitoring

The Kazakh police took a young activist into custody after he decided to test whether he could get away with standing in the street holding a placard with no writing on it.

Aslan Sagutdinov took the placard to the central Abay Square of his native city of Oral in the west of the country, and held it up opposite the central council offices.

The video blogger took the precaution of having a colleague capture the whole thing on film, which the local Uralskaya Nedelya (<http://www.uralskweek.kz/2019/05/06/policiya-zaderzhala-molodogo->

cheloveka-s-pustym-plakatom-v-centre-uralska-video) news site embedded in its report.

"I'm not taking part in a protest, and I want to show that they'll still take me down the police station, even though there's nothing written on my placard and I'm not shouting any slogans," the 24-year-old told reporters who'd turned up to see what happened.

'We'll sort that out'

"I want this to stop, before we turn into North Korea," he said, shortly before the police arrived - led by Yerbol Kushekov, the mayor's internal affairs chief. He assured him that nobody was going to detain anyone before walking off to consult his mobile phone, Uralskaya Nedelya reports.

A traffic police patrol then turned up and bundled Mr Sagutdinov into a patrol car.

When he asked why he was being detained, the police said "we'll sort that out later", as the video shows.

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Kazakhstan has seen a wave of street protests since the resignation of President Nursultan Nazarbayev in March.

These were initially triggered by the government's decision, taken without public consultation, to rename the capital city (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-47652680>) after the long-serving leader.

'You can't run from the truth'

But demonstrations have since acquired a more political edge (<https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-courts-start-issuing-jail-sentences-against-may-day-protesters/29916164.html>), expressing concern about the fairness of snap elections in June and the enduring influence of the former president and his family.

The police and courts have responded by breaking up protests and handing down jail sentences, sometimes for as little as unfurling banners during a marathon saying "You can't run from the truth" (<https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-tokayev-gets-nod-for-presidential-run-in-choreographed-contest>).

Political commentator Dosym Satpayev was one of the most prominent public figures to mock the detention of Aslan Sagutdinov.



Image source, Ruslan Pryanikov/AFP/Getty Images

Image caption,

Protests have spread across the country

"This is a political joke. Soon plain paper and white cloth will be counted as weapons, and you'll need a permit to buy a fresh sheet," he wrote on his Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/dosyms/posts/2236472659774461>)

page.

"They'll say it's a protest if you go outside with a roll of toilet paper (https://www.facebook.com/dosyms/posts/2236472659774461?comment_id=2238002309621496&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D) next," mocked another Facebook user.

The story has also been picked up by the independent media of neighbouring Kyrgyzstan (<https://kloop.kg/blog/2019/05/06/kazahstan-politsiya-uralska-zaderzhala-parnya-kotoryj-stoyal-na-ploshhadi-s-pustym-listom-bumagi/>), as well as Russia (<https://govoritmoskva.ru/news/197235/>) and Belarus (<https://belsat.eu/news/ya-prosta-stayu-u-kazahstane-zatrymali-hloptsa-z-chystym-arkusham-papery/>).

Mr Sagutdinov has been covering local protests in Oral since they started, and was briefly taken in for questioning (<http://www.uralskweek.kz/2019/04/01/v-uralske-policiya-stala-zaderzhivat-grazhdan-dlya-razyasneniya-zakona-video/>) during May Day protests.

The police let him go again after the blank-placard protest. "They clearly didn't know what to charge me with (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GWVaWT1Wk8>)," he told Uralskaya Nedelya later.



Image source, Uralskaya Nedelya/YouTube

Image caption,

The traffic police later released Mr Sagutdinov after filling in some paperwork

Reporting by Elbek Daniyarov and Martin Morgan