

**Digest of Information Released in Response to Nicola Beckford's Request under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) to disclose any communications between the British Embassy in Kazakhstan and the Foreign Office in London relating to the actor Sacha Baron Cohen's character Borat and his portrayal of Kazakhstan.**

**The relevant part of a telegram from Almaty to the FCO dated 1/12/05:**

MFA complains about British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen.

Sacha Baron Cohen

12. The MFA spokesman has complained about Sacha Baron Cohen's performance on the MTV Europe Music Awards in his role as Kazakh journalist Borat. The spokesman suggested there might be a political agenda behind the performance aimed at presenting a negative image of Kazakhstan, and threatened legal action.
13. There have been constant grumblings about Borat, but it looks like the MFA's patience has finally snapped. They have not yet complained to us, however, and we have received no press enquiries. So far the press have, if anything, questioned the MFA's judgement.

**The relevant part of a British Embassy Kazakhstan/FCO e-mail exchange dated 23/6/06:**

Yes. Could [Name withheld] use the existing (reasonably robust) Borat line, adding a background sentence to the effect that there is a slight possibility that the Kazakhs may complain about the Borat character given publicity surrounding a forthcoming Borat feature film?

**The relevant part of a British Embassy Kazakhstan/FCO e-mail exchange dated 23/6/06:**

Thanks. Indeed, we'll need to update our press lines (action: [Name withheld]) and prepare for possible complaints. Apparently, the film revolves around his quest to interview his idol, Pamela Anderson.

**The relevant part of a British Embassy Kazakhstan/FCO e-mail exchange dated 23/6/06:**

A friend of mine back in the UK sent me the following link. He wondered whether we receive any problems on the subject of Borat. Anyway I think we may wish to bear in mind "Borat the movie" is due for release in November and there could be a few political complaints sent our way. There is also the possibility that it gets raised with HRH during his visit.

<http://www.popoholic.com/2006/06/21/borat-the-movie-trailer-released/>

**The relevant part of an FCO internal minute dated 31/8/06:**

the 'Borat' TV character (due to return to Channel 4 on Friday 1 September, and a major film of Borat is due for release world wide in November 2006);

**The relevant part of an FCO internal minute (Press Lines) dated 15-09-06:**

Borat

Kazakhstan Government has serious concerns about the Borat character. His site is banned by Kazakhstan telecommunication operator. Publicity surrounding the forthcoming (November 2006) Borat Movie may provoke the Kazakh authorities to take up further steps.

*Borat representing Kazakhstan in Western people's eyes?*

We do understand your concern. However, the aim of this comic act, as I understand it, is not about discrediting Kazakhstan, but about revealing the prejudices of certain people.

Borat is an entirely fictional character that no informed person would see as a representative of Kazakhstan or a Kazakh journalist.

*Will HMG do anything about it?*

Media in the UK operate in a free and unobstructed way. There is an independent broadcasting commission that considers and rules on complaints about ethical issues in TV and radio programmes. Anybody can make a complaint to the commission.

**The relevant part of an FCO internal e-mail dated 28/9/06:**

Para-8 – After "Borat TV character" replace text in brackets with " a major film or Borat is due for release world wide later this year".

**The relevant part of an FCO internal e-mail dated 28/9/06:**

Borat – agree with [Name withheld] amendment, could I also suggest we amend the first part of sentence 2 to 'However, the aim of this comic act, as I understand it, is not to discredit Kazakhstan, but...' and then in the last sentence 'no informed person would see as a *representative* of Kazakhstan...'

(My concern here is to put us at arm's length from the actor a bit more and for there to be no hint of us defending him – while pointing out of course that we have a free media.)

In the follow-up question could I suggest for sentence 2: 'There is an independent broadcasting commission that considers and rules on complaints about ethical issues in TV and radio programmes. Anybody can make a complaint to the commission.'

**The relevant part of an FCO internal e-mail exchange dated 28/9/06:**

- On Borat, I suggest rather than the phrase "but about...of the world" we go for "but about revealing the prejudices of certain people."

**The relevant part of an FCO internal e-mail exchange dated 28/9/06:**

I think the Borat lines are correct – they are the last that I have saved. But I have removed the second sentence from the second answer about the Govt never controlling what goes into the media...

**The relevant part of a British Embassy Kazakhstan to FCO internal e-mail exchange dated 28/9/06:**

Forgot all about Borat.

Borat:

I've been asked about Borat in almost every press conference I have done here. You should add the revised Borat lines (i.e. my revision, not [Name withheld] original line) we worked up a couple of months back.

**The relevant part of an FCO internal minute (Press Lines) dated 29/09/06:**

Borat

Kazakhstan Government has serious concerns about the Borat character. His site is banned by Kazakhstan telecommunication operator. Publicity surrounding the forthcoming (November 2006) Borat Movie may provoke the Kazakh authorities to take up further steps.

*Borat representing Kazakhstan in Western people's eyes?*

We do understand your concern. However, the aim of this comic act, as I understand it, is not about discrediting Kazakhstan, but about revealing the prejudices of certain people.

Borat is an entirely fictional character that no informed person would see as a representative of Kazakhstan or a Kazakh journalist.

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