

Vienna Court Wants Kadyrov to Testify in Murder Case

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From left, suspects Turpal-Ali Yeshukayev, Suleiman Dadayev and Otto Kaltenbrunner in a Vienna court last week. **Ronald Zak**

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov should be called as a witness in the trial against three men accused of killing Chechen refugee Umar Israilov, a court in Vienna said Friday.

Kadyrov should be heard via a video link, Judge Friedrich Forsthuber said, the national Austria Press Agency reported.

The judge responded to a request from Rudolf Mayer, the lawyer of Otto Kaltenbrunner, who is accused of organizing the brazen shooting of Israilov, 27, on a busy Vienna street on Jan. 19, 2009.

Mayer told the judge that his client would ask his sister to pass the request to Kadyrov and notify the court Monday.

At the opening of the trial Tuesday, prosecutors showed a photo of Kaltenbrunner embracing Kadyrov that was found on Kaltenbrunner's cell phone.

Mayer has also said he would like to see Prime Minister Vladimir Putin called as a witness.

Putin, who appointed Kadyrov in 2007 as Chechen president, is widely thought to be Kadyrov's mentor.

Israilov's lawyer and human rights activists have accused Kadyrov of ordering the killing to silence a vocal critic of the Chechen leadership. Prosecutors say they suspect Kadyrov but do not have enough evidence to implicate him.

Kadyrov himself has vehemently denied any involvement and denounced the allegations as part of a campaign to discredit him.

His spokesman Alvi Karimov said Friday that he could not comment on the trial because he had not followed it.

Kaltenbrunner, a Chechen native who changed his name after arriving in Austria in 2007, told the court earlier in the week that he was a close friend of Kadyrov and had known him since 1998. He denied having anything to do with the murder.

He told the court Wednesday that on the day of the killing Lecha Bogatyryov and Suleiman Dadayev had taken his car to the crime scene while he had been lying drunk in bed.

Bogatyryov, who is believed to be living in Chechnya, is accused of firing the deadly shots at Israilov together with another Chechen, Turpal-Ali Yershukayev.

Dadayev is accused of driving the getaway car, a Volvo registered under Kaltenbrunner's name, according to the indictment, a copy of which was obtained by The Moscow Times.

Yershukayev told the court that his countrymen betrayed him by asking him to drive to the crime scene that day.

He said Dadayev had asked him to go there, merely saying "a man would come." After a long wait in his Opel car, he decided to take a short walk when he suddenly heard shots and saw Bogatyryov running past.

Despite his fear, he decided to run after Bogatyryov, whom he claimed to have never met before in his life.

When the gunman suddenly threw his weapon over to him, he tossed it into a garbage can, Yeshurkayev told the jury, Vienna's Die Presse reported.

Dadayev is expected to be heard Monday, but his lawyer Lennart Binder said last week that he was "a pawn in the murder plans of Putin and his henchman Kadyrov," Die Presse reported.

All three defendants have pleaded not guilty.

The trial is expected to last until late January.

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