

Vienna Jails 3 in Killing of Kadyrov Foe

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From left, Yeshurkayev, Dadayev and Kaltenbrunner attending their sentencing in a Vienna court on Wednesday. **Herwig Prammer**

An Austrian court has convicted three Chechens of accessory to murder and sentenced one of them to life in prison for the 2009 murder of a former bodyguard and critic of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

The Vienna court found Otto Kaltenbrunner, 42, guilty of serving as a ringleader for the trio and handed him a life sentence, the Austria Press Agency reported.

The court found that the group had originally planned to kidnap 27-year-old Umar Israilov, a Chechen, who had come to Austria seeking asylum after serving and later turning against Kadyrov.

Israilov was gunned down on a Vienna street on Jan. 19, 2009 in a case that proved embarrassing for Austrian authorities after it emerged that he had been denied their help after alerting them that he believed he was being followed and in danger of losing his life.

Austrian investigators have said they believed — mostly based on circumstantial evidence —

that Kadyrov ordered the kidnapping.

Kadyrov's spokesman Alvi Karimov has consistently denied Kadyrov's involvement, and a court attempt to get Kadyrov to testify via video link came to nothing.

"It is up to you whether you will allow political murders to take place in Austria," prosecutor Leopold Bien told the jury Wednesday.

Suleiman Dadayev, 37, was handed a 19-year sentence for his role in the killing and 32-year-old Turpal Ali Yeshurkayev, a sentence of 16 years in prison.

The three men were also ordered to pay damages of 25,000 euros (\$35,940) to each of Israilov's close family members.

All three had pleaded not guilty to charges of accessory to murder, forming a criminal organization and attempted kidnapping.

The suspected shooter has fled the country, prosecutors have said.

Amnesty International official Heinz Patzelt hailed the verdict and appealed to Russia to follow up on the case, noting that the court had made clear that "the people in the background are to be sought abroad and that this is a political contract murder."

Israilov, the father of four children who once served as Kadyrov's bodyguard, was a key witness against Russia before the European Court of Human Rights. His accounts of abuse — including being beaten by Kadyrov's cousin Adam Delimkhanov, a State Duma deputy, in Kadyrov's presence — had also formed the basis of a criminal complaint against Kadyrov on charges of torture and attempted duress filed by Austrian lawyers in June 2008.

The Kremlin credits Kadyrov, who fought against Russia in the first war but then switched sides, with maintaining security in Chechnya, still tense after two wars over the past 15 years.

But rights activists say that in return for relative stability the Kremlin turns a blind eye to Kadyrov's heavy-handed rule and torture at home and abroad, accusations he has consistently denied.

Dubai police have accused Delimkhanov, Kadyrov's cousin, of masterminding the March 2009 killing of former Chechen commander Sulim Yamadayev in the emirate and issued an international arrest warrant for him through Interpol. Delimkhanov has denied wrongdoing and says the allegations are aimed at destabilizing Chechnya.

Yamadayev's brother Isa has accused Kadyrov of killing Sulim, as well as of orchestrating the 2008 murder of his other brother Ruslan, although Isa has since made peace with Kadyrov.

(AP, Reuters, MT)

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