

Kremlin Envoy Criticizes Kadyrov

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Young people in Chechnya want more freedom than allowed by Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin's top envoy to the North Caucasus said in rare government criticism of Kadyrov.

"Youths lack a certain freedom. They want to develop more dynamically," Alexander Khloponin, who heads the North Caucasus Federal District, told a group of foreign journalists last week. "We do have a certain problem with it, it is obvious.

"I do not entirely agree with many of his doctrines, but nevertheless we have a very serious dialogue," Khloponin said of Kadyrov, who has headed the republic of 1.1 million since 2007.

Khloponin dismissed assertions by human rights activists that Kadyrov had organized killings of opponents at home and abroad — claims that Kadyrov has also dismissed.

Khloponin, a former business executive and governor, was appointed with a mandate to bring investment and create jobs in the North Caucasus, where high unemployment is seen as a factor feeding the persistent Islamist insurgency.

Khloponin estimated the number of insurgents in the North Caucasus at about 1,000 and said they operate in about 15 armed units.

Suicide bombers killed at least nine people in Chechnya's capital, Grozny, on Aug. 30 in one of the republic's deadliest attacks in recent months.

Government officials have generally avoided any criticism of Kadyrov, who has the strong support of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and has helped tame the threat from separatist fighters that battled Moscow for much of the 1990s.

Kadyrov downplayed the criticism Saturday, saying Khloponin had reasons for his remarks, but that he and the Chechen administration were working together to improve youth policies in the republic, his press office said by e-mail.

(Reuters, MT)

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