

Chechen Leader Begins Sharing Thoughts on Twitter

By [Nikolaus von Twickel](#)

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Ramzan Kadyrov's photo from his official Twitter account.

Ramzan Kadyrov has launched a Twitter account, in a sign that the controversial Chechen leader is carefully adapting his public relations strategy.

The account @RKadyrov was announced late Thursday, first on Kadyrov's spokesman Alvi Karimov's Twitter feed (@alvikarimov), then in a statement [posted](#) on the Chechen government's website.

By Friday evening, Kadyrov had garnered more than 6,800 followers, although he sent out just seven messages on the popular microblogging platform.

However, most of his messages were trivial. The first read, "In ten minutes I am meeting with youth [representatives]." Later on Thursday, Kadyrov posted that he had spoken with journalists for two hours and that he had been asked if he would travel to the summer

Olympics in London next month.

But it took him eleven hours to answer the question, explaining in a subsequent message that he was not going.

"No time. And I don't like traveling long distances. We'll watch together on a screen in Grozny. And pray for our [athletes]," he wrote.

He also showed no visible reaction to critical replies that came flooding in Friday.

"Will you also let cars pass that carry abducted rights activists at gunpoint?" user Mari Bastashevski, a Paris-based photographer, [replied](#) to a message in which Kadyrov announced that checkpoints should be removed from Chechnya's main east-west highway.

Critics accuse Kadyrov of killings and abductions and of ruling the once war-ravaged North Caucasus republic as his personal fiefdom. Public appearances with him regularly trigger outrage from human rights activists. Hollywood star Hillary Swank issued a public apology for appearing at his birthday last fall.

Kadyrov, who has denied wrongdoing and repeatedly accused journalists of waging a "media war" against him, has limited his travels to Arab countries and Turkey in recent years.

Reached by telephone Friday, his spokesman Karimov was adamant that Kadyrov writes his tweets himself.

"I assure you that Ramzan Akhmatovich is the sort of person who will never allow anybody to write something under his own name," he said, referring to the Chechen leader with his patronymic.

He added that this was also the case with Kadyrov's LiveJournal blog, which he opened to much fanfare in 2010. The blog triggered a flood of offensive and disdainful messages at the time. It has been dormant since last July.

Karimov explained that Kadyrov just does not have enough time to update his blog and that Twitter, which limits entries to 140 characters, is much better tailored to his needs.

Kadyrov, 35, said earlier this year that he has little respect for social networks because they allow people to write "baseless stuff" without taking responsibility. "Twitter and YouTube — that is not for me," he told Komsomolskaya Pravda in a [video](#) interview in February.

Karimov was adamant that Kadyrov had not changed his mind.

"He really believes that people should not register under fake names and should take moral responsibility for their posts," he said.

Kadyrov's spokesman also denied media speculation that the launch of the Twitter account was connected to a visit by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev earlier this week.

Medvedev, who is the country's most popular Twitter user with over 1.2 million followers, was in Grozny on Tuesday, where he chaired a session of the government's North Caucasus

development commission.

"You do not make such a decision in a minute. It is a long-term decision," Karimov was quoted as [saying](#) by Lifenews.ru.

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