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Kadyrov Denies Sending Chechen Troops to Eastern Ukraine

By Anna Dolgov

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has denied he has anything to do with the presence of armed Chechens in eastern Ukraine.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has denied sending men to fight in eastern Ukraine, despite news reports claiming that separatist gunmen in the region are acting in his service.

In a statement posted Tuesday on his Instagram account, Kadyrov said any Chechen who might have turned up in eastern Ukraine was acting on his own accord.

"No 'Chechen troops' and especially no 'military convoys from Chechnya' are taking part in the conflict," Kadyrov said on his Instagram page. "If somewhere in the conflict zone somebody saw a Chechen, that's his personal business."

On Tuesday, The Financial Times reported that dozens of Chechen militants had joined the fighting in eastern Ukraine on the side of pro-Russian separatists.

"Our president [Kadyrov] gave the order. They called us and we came," one of the fighters, a 33-year-old named Zelimkhan, was quoted as saying.

Residents of the Chechen cities of Grozny and Gudermes were also discovered among 43 separatists who were injured and hospitalized after clashes between rebels and government forces earlier this week, Ukraine's regional news portal Ostrov reported Tuesday, citing the Kiev-loyal mayor of Donetsk, Oleksandr Lukyanchenko.

Meanwhile, Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov posted evidence of what he said were armed Chechen fighters in Ukraine, saying Wednesday on his Facebook page that Ukraine should appeal to Putin to "withdraw Kadyrov's men and other saboteurs from Donetsk."

"This is what the 'Russian spring' in Donetsk looks like," Nemtsov wrote on Facebook alongside a picture of heavily armed militants. "Kadyrov's men are conducting namaz [Muslim prayer] during a break between fights for the city's airport. The situation is the same as in 1999 in Dagestan and Chechnya."

"These goons are there on Kadyrov's orders, and therefore on Putin's," Nemstov added.

After the fall of Ukraine's previous, Moscow-backed administration, Kadyrov offered to send soldiers into the country to "protect" Russian and Chechen residents in Crimea from "terrorists" who came to power.

Putin also called the Chechen leader earlier this week to thank him for helping secure the release of two Russian journalists, who had been detained in Donetsk by Ukraine's government forces since mid-May, Izvestia reported, citing Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

However, Kadyrov has denied he has anything to do with the presence of armed Chechens in eastern Ukraine.

"Foreign policy is the jurisdiction of the Russian president and the Foreign Ministry," he said in his Instagram post. "They are making every effort to bring order and stability to brotherly Ukraine. We strongly support the stance of Russian President Vladimir Putin in this issue!"

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