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EU Scolds Kadyrov in Human Rights Dispute

By Allison Quinn

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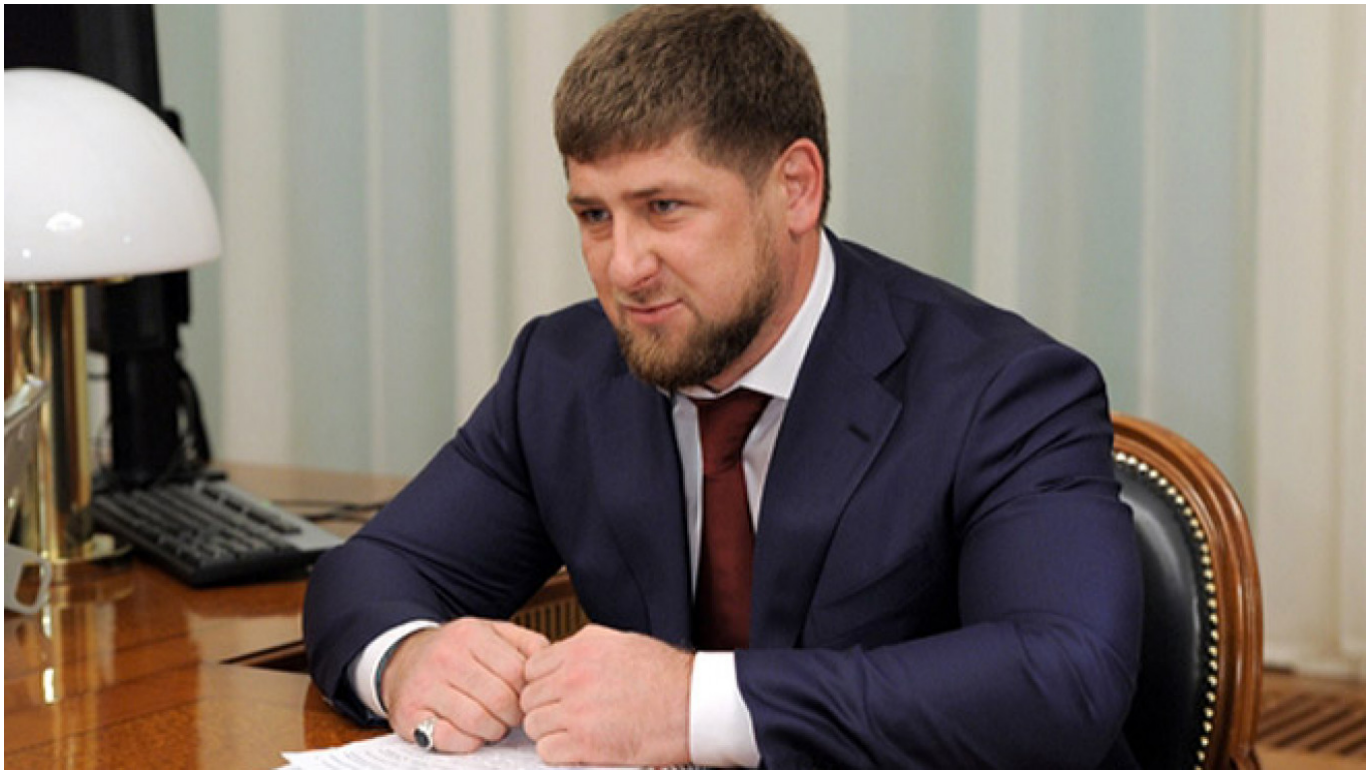

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov

The European Union has stepped into the ongoing fray between Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and a group of human rights activists who criticized his calls for collective punishment on social media, urging Kadyrov to respond to ongoing tensions in the republic with a "measured response."

In the wake of the Dec. 4 attack on Grozny, several rights activists warned that Kadyrov's calls on Instagram for the families of militants to be held responsible had resulted in several homes being burned down and threatened to destabilize the situation further. Shortly thereafter, the activists themselves saw their offices burned down.

The head of the Kremlin's human rights council, Mikhail Fedotov, stepped in to ensure the safety of the activists, saying after the arson attack last weekend that "if anything happens to these activists, it would be incredibly stupid."

Kadyrov, for his part, accused the group in question — the Committee Against Torture — of collaborating with terrorists, and its head, Igor Kalyapin, of having ties to the late militant leader Doku Umarov.

Kadyrov continued in that vein on Wednesday, saying on Instagram that Kalyapin was funded by the U.S. State Department "to destroy Russia by using Chechnya."

"The U.S. State Department and its helpers launched a new project, 'Kalyapin and Co.' A beautiful legend was invented about some group of young people, all with athletic builds and from Nizhny Novgorod, fighting in Chechnya for human rights. But the reality is that Kalyapin and his group aren't interested in the rights of people. They are interested only in the militants, the terrorists and their families. Why? Because the one who pays is the one who gets to pick the tune. And who is paying and how much? The British Embassy and other Western partners," Kadyrov wrote on Instagram.

Kalyapin responded to Kadyrov's comments on Facebook, offering to sit down with the Chechen leader and show him official documents on the group's financing.

"I would gladly answer all questions both about financing, a large portion of which the Committee Against Torture receives from Russia, and about the distribution of these funds, particularly about how many Chechens who have been subjected to unlawful violence in Chechnya have actually received full treatment thanks to these funds," Kalyapin wrote.

It was unclear if Kadyrov's latest Instagram tirade was prompted by the EU's criticism of his policies.

The EU's European External Action Service warned in a statement on its website Wednesday that "in spite of the grief [of the Grozny attack], calls from president Kadyrov for the collective punishment of families of armed militants will only exacerbate tensions."

On the same day, the Memorial human rights group released a report warning that at least three more homes of families of militants had been destroyed, this time with bulldozers. Earlier, another six homes had been torched by masked men.

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