The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Strongman Leader Kadyrov Named Honorary Chief of Chechen Night Wolves

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May 24, 2015



Ramzan Kadyrov, center, already rules Chechnya. Now he will serve as chief of a branch of patriotic bikers, too.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced over the weekend that he had become the honorary leader of a new regional branch of the Night Wolves, a group of fiercely patriotic bikers.

The Night Wolves, led by Alexander "the Surgeon" Zaldostanov, is known for its brash demonstrations of patriotism — often via lavish variety shows — and unconditional support for President Vladimir Putin.

Zaldostanov flew to the Chechen capital of Grozny on Saturday to open the group's new branch in the republic and bestow the title upon Kadyrov, the Chechen leader's Instagram page said. Kadyrov said he accepted the honor because he "fully shares" the group's ideas and objectives.

"We are not simply opening a branch of the Night Wolves in Grozny, the meaning of this [inauguration] is much broader," Zaldostanov said, according Kadyrov's Instagram page. "We live in an era in which Russia is becoming united. [...] This is a symbol that we are together, that we are one country, no matter what our religion is and where we live."

"And Kadyrov's role in this unity is great, it cannot be overestimated," he added.

Kadyrov and the new members of the organization — including Magomed Daudov, the head of Kadyrov's administration — received leather vests featuring the group's logo, signed its oath and drank an unidentified liquid from an ornate chalice to seal their membership.

A photo of Zaldostanov, Kadyrov, Daudov and two other men close to the Chechen leader holding the Night Wolves' black flag, featuring a flaming wolf's head, was uploaded onto Kadyrov's Instagram page Sunday. The men posed in front of the portraits of Putin and Akhmat Kadyrov, the current leader's father and predecessor, who had pledged loyalty to Moscow at the outbreak of the Second Chechen War.

The Night Wolves recently stirred controversy over their plan to mark the 70th anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in World War II on May 9 by riding their motorbikes from Moscow to Berlin, replicating the path taken by the Soviet army. The group's members were denied entry into Poland, and later into Germany. A Berlin court later overturned the entry ban, saying that it had found insufficient evidence the bikers constituted a threat to public order, domestic security and the country's foreign relations.

Kadyrov wrote on Instagram Saturday he had ordered some Berlin-based Chechens to help the Night Wolves sort out of their legal issues at the time.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/05/24/strongman-leader-kadyrov-named-honorary-chief-of-chechen-night-wolves-a46818