The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Celebs Back Chechen Leader Who Called Opposition 'Traitors'

By Peter Hobson

January 21, 2016



Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov (R)

Russian celebrities came out in support of Ramzan Kadyrov after the Chechen leader labeled opponents of President Vladimir Putin "jackals" and "enemies of the people."

Meanwhile, a prominent opposition figure promised to publish a far-reaching report into Kadyrov's links to political murders and his relationship to the Kremlin.

Pictures of Fedor Bondarchuk, a famous film actor and director, and singer Nikolai Baskov holding up signs saying "Kadyrov is a Russian patriot" were published among others on Instagram by an ally of Kadyrov's, the leader of the Chechen parliament, Magomed Daudov.

The photos are part of a flash mob on social media promoted by Kadyrov's allies under the banners "Kadyrov is a Russian patriot" and "Kadyrov is the pride of Russia."

They are the latest stage of a confrontation between Kadyrov and opposition media and

activists that began when the Kadyrov last week published a statement saying opponents of Putin should be treated as “traitors.”

As the row escalated, Kadyrov branded opposition figures “jackals” who intend to “destroy our state” and — in a flashback to Soviet-era punishments — suggested they be given psychological treatment in Chechen hospitals.

The outbursts alarmed opposition figures already facing a crackdown by the Kremlin and increasing anti-Western rhetoric and demonization of “fifth-columnists.” The social media campaign suggests that many Russians support Kadyrov's stance, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday gave a qualified endorsement.

When a regional lawmaker responded by calling the Chechen strongman a “disgrace to Russia” in a Facebook post, he was apparently pressured to record a video apology.

Kadyrov is seen as particularly dangerous — Chechens linked to him have been implicated in the murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov beneath the walls of the Kremlin last year.

Meanwhile, Ilya Yashin, an opposition activist and former associate of Nemtsov said he was preparing a report into Kadyrov's activities titled “A threat to national security.”

Yashin told the Vedomosti newspaper that the report, to be published on Feb. 23, would examine Kadyrov's actions as a rebel fighter against Russia in the 1990s, his possible links to political murders, the methods of his rule in Chechnya and his relationship with Moscow.

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Original url:
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