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'Shorten His Tongue, Pull Out His Teeth,' Says Chechen Official In Apparent Threat to Journalist

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Magomed Daudov **Denis Abramov / TASS**

A prominent Caucasus news agency has vowed to take legal action after a Chechen parliamentarian appeared to threaten its chief editor on social media.

The speaker of Chechnya's parliament, Magomed Daudov, who also goes by the nickname "Lord," published a picture on his Instagram account on Jan. 4 of a dog with its tongue tied into a knot. The pictured was accompanied by the text: "How to untie the Caucasian Knot?"

In a comment alongside the photo, Daudov described the dog as "a mongrel nicknamed 'Swede,'" in an apparent reference to Grigory Shvedov who is the chief editor of the Caucasian Knot news agency. In Russian, "Shvedov" closely resembles the word for "Swedish."

"He puts out his long tongue, ties it into a dangerous 'Caucasian knot' and starts yapping,"

the parliamentarian wrote.

“It's time to call the vet with the large pliers,” he continued. “To pull a couple of 'wisdom' teeth from the Swede and shorten his tongue to a normal size.”

Shvedov told the Kommersant business daily on Monday that the agency's lawyers were preparing to lodge a complaint with the Investigative Committee on charges of obstructing journalism.

“[Daudov] isn't trying to refute our articles,” Shvedov told Kommersant. “Instead he's published a post with two clear appeals: to cut off part of my tongue and pull my teeth. It's difficult to interpret this in any other way than as an open threat.”

Shvedov said he did not think the post was a response to a specific article but was meant as “a reaction to our work in general” and to intimidate the journalistic community.

The Moscow-based Caucasian Knot is a unique source of independent news on the restive North Caucasus region where authorities have a reputation for cracking down on dissent.

In April last year, the portal published an online video appeal to President Vladimir Putin from a Chechen resident in which he complained about living conditions and accused the Chechen authorities of extortion. The man's home was later reported to have been burned down and he was forced to flee the republic.

Prominent human rights lawyer Pavel Chikov told Kommersant that Russia’s Presidential Human Rights Council would review the alleged threat to Shvedov at its first session.

“There is almost no reliable and qualitative information from Chechnya,” Chikov said. “There's the 'official position' and information gathered piecemeal, under the threat of retribution.”

“We see that officials of the republic react very nervously and sharply to such unofficial information,” the lawyer said, “So we should take very seriously any hints made by the Chechen authorities and be concerned about Shvedov’s fate.”

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