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Chechen Dissident Killed in France Amid Series of High-Profile Murders Abroad

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Imran Aliyev was a vocal critic of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov on his YouTube page. **Youtube**

A Chechen emigre and vocal critic of the southern Russian region's ruler has been stabbed to death in the northern French city of Lille, Agence France-Presse reported Monday.

Local media initially reported that the body of an as-yet-unidentified man with multiple stab wounds was discovered in a hotel room last Thursday. An unnamed source close to the murder investigation told AFP that the victim was Imran Aliyev, 44, who criticized Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov under the alias "Mansur Staryi" (Mansur the Elder) on his YouTube page.

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The killing "bears all the hallmarks of having a political motive," the AFP source was quoted as saying.

The AFP source said Aliyev arrived in Lille from neighboring Belgium, where he reportedly

had political asylum, with another man of "presumably the same nationality."

Tumso Abdurakhmanov, another Chechen video blogger who has received death threats for his criticisms of Kadyrov, implicated a fellow Chechen native with alleged ties to high-level Chechen officials in Aliyev's death.

"According to my information, the criminal is now back in Chechnya and will be rewarded there," Abdurakhmanov said on his YouTube page Sunday.

Musa Tayipov, a Strasbourg-based Chechen opposition journalist, cast doubt on Kadyrov's role in Aliyev's killing. Aliyev had allegedly received threats from natives of neighboring Ingushetia over comments he made about a Chechen-Ingush border dispute, Tayipov told The Guardian.

Aliyev's stabbing is the latest in a series of high-profile murders of ethnic Chechens outside Russia that have been suspected to be politically motivated. In August, former separatist Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, whom President Vladimir Putin called a terrorist, was shot and killed in Berlin.

The killing also follows a series of public threats against online critics by Kadyrov and other Chechen officials. A Chechen lawmaker described as Kadyrov's right-hand man in November called on members of the Chechen diaspora in Europe and North America to stop their countrymen from "disgracing the Chechen people."

Kadyrov has ruled Russia's predominantly Muslim republic of Chechnya since 2007. Tens of thousands of Chechen refugees are estimated to live in Europe, having fled two separatist wars against Moscow and, years later, Kadyrov's rule.

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