The Moscow Times
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Dagestan Leader Steps Down, Putin Names High Court Judge as Successor

May 04, 2026



Fyodor Shchukin. **Musa Salgereyev / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin on Monday dismissed Sergei Melikov as head of the republic of Dagestan, replacing him with the outgoing chairman of the North Caucasus region's supreme court.

Fyodor Shchukin, who had led Dagestan's Supreme Court since February 2024, was named acting head of the republic until a formal election is held. In a move that appeared closely coordinated, Shchukin submitted his resignation from the bench shortly before the appointment was made public.

The reshuffle follows Putin's surprise announcement on Thursday that Melikov would step down later this year for a new, unspecified position. Monday's decree noted that Putin had accepted Melikov's resignation request for "personal reasons."

The head of Dagestan is not elected by popular vote. Instead, the selection follows a multi-stage process that involves the president presenting a list of three candidates to Dagestan's

regional parliament for a vote. To take office, a candidate must secure a simple majority of votes from regional lawmakers.

Putin said during a Kremlin meeting with senior Dagestani officials last week that he thought Shchukin would be a good candidate for the position of regional head.

Shchukin's appointment marks a notable shift in Dagestan's elite politics. While Melikov was born outside of Moscow and was of mixed Russian and Lezgin descent, Shchukin, originally from the Nizhny Novgorod region, is reportedly the first ethnic Russian to lead the North Caucasus republic.

Related article: Dagestan Was Already Facing an Infrastructure Crisis. Then Came the Floods.

A former army general, Melikov was appointed in 2021 to stabilize one of Russia's most complex regions. However, he struggled to address Dagestan's chronic infrastructure issues, and the region today remains notorious for frequent power outages and poor road conditions.

A series of high-profile security failures further tested his leadership. In October 2023, an anti-Israel mob overran the regional airport in an incident that local law enforcement failed to prevent. That was followed by attacks on religious sites in June 2024 that left 20 people dead.

The final blow to Melikov's standing in the Kremlin appears to have been catastrophic flooding in late March and early April. At least five people were killed and thousands were displaced after heavy rain triggered rockfalls, bridge collapses and a breach at a reservoir.

Melikov, who appeared slow to react to the initial flooding in March, later blamed part of the destruction on "reckless" real estate development, a comment that ignited a firestorm of condemnation on social media.

Later on Monday, in his first public statement since stepping down, Melikov expressed confidence in Shchukin as his replacement but said he had asked Putin to allow him to continue working in Dagestan for the foreseeable future.

"I know from experience that [Shchukin] will need time to ease into things, so I asked not to be assigned to a new area of work for now. I'll help and give as much guidance as I can, for as long as it's needed," he wrote on Telegram.

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