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PACE Keeps Chechen Dissident on Advisory Panel After LGBTQ+ and 'Honor Killing' Comments

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Ruslan Kutayev. **Ruslan Kutayev / YouTube**

Europe's leading human rights body decided Wednesday not to remove a Chechen member of its Russian dissident advisory panel after earlier suspending him from his post over comments he made about LGBTQ+ people and so-called "honor killings" in the North Caucasus.

Ruslan Kutayev is one of five representatives of Russia's Indigenous peoples and national minorities serving on the 15-member Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

In April, Kutayev stirred controversy when he said in an interview with journalists that he had "no desire to look into" the issue of women and LGBTQ+ people fleeing violence in Chechnya. He also refused to condemn so-called "honor killings," a practice sometimes used to justify the murder of relatives perceived to have brought shame to the family.

PACE President Petra Bayr later said that she decided to suspend Kutayev's membership in the Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces after receiving "several complaints" about his adherence to the assembly's rules.

Kutayev later clarified that he does not condone violence and was instead expressing attitudes within Chechen society as a whole.

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On Wednesday, PACE announced following a meeting in Monaco that it would "not modify the current composition" of its Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces "at this stage."

The panel of Russian exiles is scheduled to address member conduct at its next session. Moving forward, members will be required to sign a "commitment to the principles and values of the Council of Europe, including respect for diversity and equality."

Kutayev previously served as deputy prime minister of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria from 1996 to 1997. A court in the republic of Chechnya recently designated a group claiming to represent the unrecognized state in exile as a "terrorist" organization.

The Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces was established in January after years of lobbying efforts by leading opposition figures like former businessman Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who is a member of the advisory panel. Other members include dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza and Pussy Riot co-founder Nadya Tolokonnikova.

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