

Voting in Ingushetia and Chechnya Again Scrutinized

Ingushetia's election commission reported on March 4 that 92.3 percent of the republic's eligible voters voted in the Russian presidential and republican legislative elections, both of which were held on March 2, Kavkazky Uzel reported. According to the commission, 91.6 percent of those in Ingushetia who voted in the presidential election cast their ballots for Dmitry Medvedev, while 6.1 percent voted for Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, 1.5 percent voted for Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov and 0.1 percent voted for Democratic Party leader Andrei Bogdanov. In the election for Ingushetia's People's Assembly held the same day, the pro-Kremlin United Russia party received 74.09 percent of the vote, the LDPR won 11.06 percent, the pro-Kremlin A Just Russia party received 7.39 percent of the vote and the Communist Party won 7.34 percent.



Magomed Yevloev, the proprietor of the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website who also organized the "I Didn't Vote" campaign after the Russian parliamentary election last December 2, claimed that no more than 3.5 percent of Ingushetia's population participated in the March 2 vote. "Our observers were at all 160 polling stations [and] counted everyone who arrived to vote," Yevloev said. "The only polling station where we didn't have someone was in Magas. The police didn't allow observers there. The observers counted 5,700 people who participated in the voting." The "I Didn't Vote Campaign" collected statements from more than 90,000 of the republic's inhabitants—54 percent of its eligible voters—declaring that they did not vote in Russia's State Duma election last December 2 (Chechnya Weekly, January 31). According to the official results, 98.3 percent of the Ingushetia's eligible voters went to the polls on December 2.

In Chechnya, according to official statistics, 91.2 percent of the republic's eligible voters took part in the March 2 Russian presidential election (down from 99.5 percent of the Chechen electorate which, according to election officials, turned out to vote in the State Duma election last December 2) and of those, 88.7 percent voted for Dmitry Medvedev, Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 3. The website quoted an unnamed Chechen election commission official as saying that LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy came in second, with 8.15 percent of the vote, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov came in third, with 2.19 percent of the vote, and Democratic Party leader Andrei Bogdanov placed fourth, with 0.85 percent of the vote.

According to Kavkazky Uzel correspondent Muslim Ibragimov, many of the Grozny residents with whom he talked said they did not vote on March 2 because they were certain that "everything was decided long ago" and the election was a farce. "I don't doubt for a second that Dmitry Medvedev will win the Russian presidential election," said Vakha Gaisumov. "Everyone understands this. I simply don't understand why Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy and Bogdanov are pretending. Even they, in my view, know full well that they don't have the slightest chance to win. Probably they simply like the process of participating in this undertaking. For them, probably, it's like with failed athletes, who have the slogan: 'The most important thing is participation, not victory!'"

Speaking at a forum held by the Moscow Carnegie Center on March 3 on the theme, "The North Caucasus after the elections," Tatyana Lokshina, currently a researcher with Human Rights Watch, said that Grozny residents generally do not participate actively in elections and that many, fearing rebel attacks, leave the city during elections. "And although the level armed confrontations is extremely low in Chechnya now, judging by what my colleagues are telling me from Grozny, a great many inhabitants, out of habit, left the city on election day," Kavkazky Uzel quoted her as saying. On the other hand, inhabitants of Chechen villages do participate in elections, Lokshina said. "In the village everything is in full sight," she said. "The consolidated regime in Chechnya is extremely harsh and no one wants to stand out. Not to vote in elections is in and of itself an act of protest and villagers cannot [risk] that."

In addition, since the elections in Chechnya in 2003, there has been a kind of informal "socialist competition" among district and village administrations over who will have higher turnout, Lokshina said. "The winners are awarded honors [and] receive high-priced gifts—for instance, automobiles. Therefore, inhabitants are essentially forced to appear at the polling stations. Above all, this concerns government workers. Despite the fact that the number of kidnappings has significantly dropped over the last couple of years [and] that there have been fewer cases of torture in the Chechen Republic, people are extremely frightened and must refrain not only from protesting, but from simply expressing dissent."

Commenting on the election results in Ingushetia, Lokshina said she believes that while the official turnout of 92.3 percent was unquestionably greatly inflated, the 3.5 percent figure given by Magomed Yevloev was a gross underestimate. She added that she had received a complaint that employees at schools in Ingushetia, which were used as a polling station on March 2, "beginning with the teachers and ending with the janitors," had been forced to stand around at the polling stations all day in order to create "crowd scenes." In addition, Lokshina said she also received complaints that teachers had been forced to vote several times. "Moreover, I heard from people in Ingushetia that they went to polling stations on March 2 and found that someone had already voted in their place," she added.

All the republics of the North Caucasus are united by the fact that none of them have the conditions necessary for free voting, Lokshina said. She added: "True, in the context of the most recent elections, that phrase already means nothing. It is no longer possible to speak of an electoral process anywhere in Russia."

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Opposition in Ingushetia Plans to Hold a Council and Another Protest

An initiative group consisting of local opposition activists announced on March 6 that it is planning to hold an extraordinary congress of the Ingush people on March 8, Kavkazky Uzel reported. According to organizers, representatives of various teips (clans) and families have been invited, as have the heads of various public organizations; officials in the administration of Ingushetia's president, the republic's government, People's Assembly and Nationalities Ministry; and the heads of districts and cities.



"We are several dozen people who have united in an organizing committee in order to react to the current situation in Ingushetia, the anarchy and lawlessness, corruption and other problems that are worrying the Ingush people today," said Magomed Khazbiev, a member of the organizing committee for the congress. He said that the purpose of the congress is to create a public organization made up of representatives from various teips that could in the future create an alternative to the republic's existing parliament. "We haven't yet determined what it will be called," Khazbiev said. "In all probability it will be something like the Council of Elders, Mekhk-Kkhel (Council of the Republic) and so on. The exact name and structure of the organization will be discussed at the upcoming event and confirmed after an agreement [is reached] with the delegates to the congress."

Khazbiev said there is a need to create such an organization because representatives from the most influential Ingush teips are not represented in the new People's Assembly, which was elected on March 2. "The makeup of the republic's parliament is not the result of the will of the citizens," he said, adding that those elected to the legislature have "no influence" with the Ingush people while those with real authority were not elected. "So we want to create an organization that would represent the interests of all the teips and families," he said. At the same time, Khazbiev said the new body would not try to take the place of the official parliament or other state bodies and that its decisions will be strictly "recommendations."

Kavkazky Uzel noted that the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website, citing representatives of various families, has reported over the past month that leading teips have been holding meetings at which representatives to a republic-wide congress are being elected (Chechnya Weekly, February 29). However, the deputy chairman of Ingushetia's People's Assembly, Tamara Khautieva, said such a congress would have no legal basis and insisted that the four political parties which contested the Popular Assembly election on March 2 had candidates from all of Ingushetia's teips. For its part, the office of Ingushetia's prosecutor said it was told by representatives of the republic's teips that they have not been holding meetings to elect representatives to a republic-wide Council of Elders or Mekhk-Kkhel.

Meanwhile, a leading analyst of the North Caucasus has raised questions about one of Ingushetiya's leading opposition figures, Ingushetiya.ru proprietor Magomed Yevloev. Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 5 that Yevloev is wanted by the federal authorities for alleged complicity in a murder that took place in 1999, while he was working in the republican prosecutor's office, as well as for allegedly instilling inter-ethnic hatred on his website. Yevloev is reportedly also wanted for his alleged role in fomenting "mass riots" in Nazran on January 26, when opposition supporters attempting to hold a protest rally clashed with police and several buildings were set on fire. Yevloev said the opposition was not responsible for the arson attacks or other acts of violence in Nazran, which he blamed on "provocateurs acting in the interests of the authorities" (Chechnya Weekly, January 31).

Speaking at a forum held by the Moscow Carnegie Center on March 3, Human Rights Watch researcher Tatyana Lokshina noted that despite being a wanted man, Yevloev regularly gives radio interviews, which suggests that the authorities are not really trying to catch him. She said the reason for that might be his connections.

"Magomed Yevloev is not an independent figure," said Lokshina. Another well-known person stands behind him—Musa Keligov. According to Kavkazky Uzel, Keligov served in the Soviet army in Afghanistan under the command of Ruslan Aushev—who later became Ingushetia's president—became vice-president of Lukoil International in 1993 and served in various federal posts starting in 2000. Keligov became deputy presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District in October 2003 and returned to the private sector in May 2004, after he lost his job when the number of deputy presidential envoys was cut.

"Yevloev is Keligov's man," Lokshina said. "They have been connected for a long time, and the latter has such an interesting biography that it is possible what we know as the principled opposition in Ingushetia is actually tied to one or another group inside the Russian presidential administration." She noted that every time the opposition in Ingushetia announced a protest demonstration before the State Duma elections last fall and the presidential election earlier this month, the organizers of the protest subsequently canceled the demonstration, citing requests by the federal authorities. "In November, a demonstration nonetheless took place," she said. "But it was not a result of the efforts of Magomed Yevloev and other people connected to the Ingushetiya.ru site, but [the efforts] of activists whose relatives had been kidnapped." Lokshina also noted that the protestors mobilized by Yevloev organized under slogans expressing support for the federal center—"For Putin, Against [Ingushetian President Murat] Zyazikov," "For Russia, Against Corruption in the Republic." This, she said, was a signal to Moscow asking for Zyazikov to be removed.

Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 4 that members of the opposition plan to hold a protest in Nazran on March 12. "This demonstration is aimed, above all, against the leadership of the republic and the actions of the members of the power structures, whose victims are often citizens who have nothing to do with the militants, and also against the unsanctioned detention and extra-judicial punishment of young people whose involvement in the illegal armed formations has not been proven," an unnamed organizer of the protest said. There was no indication of exactly who was behind the announcement of the planned demonstration.

For her part, Tatyana Lokshina of Human Rights Watch said that the lack of avenues for legitimate protest in Ingushetia is playing into the hands of the armed militants. "There is no independent media in Ingushetia, protest demonstrations are broken up, there are no means to express one's protest," she said. "An atmosphere is created in which some young people go up into the mountains. I think that they constantly feel under threat and see no other way out. After all, a person who has fallen under the ray of attention of the law-enforcement bodies can be detained again many times. It is predominantly those people who are abducted, detained, shot on the spot, tortured."

Lokshina said that in order to improve the situation in Ingushetia, "counter-terrorist practice" needs to be conducted on the basis of the law, the "persecution of followers of Salafi Islam needs to be excluded" and the policy of Ingushetia's authorities aimed at stopping any leaks of information, which simply engenders rumors, must be ended.

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Kadyrov Joins Union of Journalists—For a Day

Russian news agencies reported on March 5 that the Chechen chapter of the Russian Union of Journalists had conferred membership on Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov for services rendered to Chechen journalism. However, on March 6, following protests from several leading journalists, the union's leadership in Moscow announced that Kadyrov's membership had been rescinded.



According to Newsru.com, Chechnya's minister for ethnic policy, information and press, Shamsail Saraliev, gave Kadyrov his Russian Union of Journalists membership card during a meeting Kadyrov had with members of the republic's media in Grozny's Press House on March 5. Saraliev said that Kadyrov had been accepted into the Russian Union of Journalists for "huge services in the cause of the formation of Chechen journalism [and] a free press [and] the creation of ideal circumstances for the work of local media." Kavkazky Uzel on March 6 quoted Saraliev as saying during the meeting: "Ramzan Kadyrov, while he was still working in the [Chechen] government [as prime minister], constantly paid attention to creating good circumstances for the work of journalists, protected their right to cover events taking place in the republic objectively, and therefore deserves such recognition from the journalistic community."

Kadyrov, for his part, promised that everything possible would be done in Chechnya so that "journalists can without any hesitation, not fearing for their lives, speak the truth and write about what is really happening." At the same time, Kadyrov signed a decree conferring the honorary title "Distinguished Journalist of the Chechen Republic" on Grozny Mayor Muslim Khuchiev. In conferring the award, Kadyrov said Khuchiev's contributions to the development of the local media have been "extraordinarily great." Khuchiev is a graduate of Moscow State University's journalism faculty who previously worked as the Chechen president's press secretary.

According to Newsru.com, a large group of local Chechen journalists also received awards, with several receiving the title "Distinguished Journalist of the Chechen Republic." Two journalists received keys to apartments in Grozny, while Kadyrov gave several veterans of Chechen journalism—including a journalist who started his career as a Chechen newspaperman in 1954—Volga automobiles and cash awards.

As Newsru.com noted, this was just the latest in a series of awards and titles that have been conferred on Ramzan Kadyrov. In 2006, when Kadyrov was still Chechnya's prime minister, he was made an honorary academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic. Earlier, Kadyrov was made an honorary member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, after which then Chechen President Alu Alkhanov conferred the title "Distinguished Builder of the Chechen Republic" on him. In December 2004, President Vladimir Putin presented Kadyrov with the "Hero of the Russian Federation" award for courage and heroism "shown in the discharge of duties." In June 2005, Ramzan Kadyrov received Chechnya's highest award, the Order of Akhmad Kadyrov, for "support of legality, law and order and public security in the Chechen Republic." Kadyrov also earned a doctorate after defending his dissertation on the "Optimal Management of Contractual Relationships in the Construction Industry."

Reacting to the news that Ramzan Kadyrov had been made a member of the Russian Union of Journalists, Aleksandr Minkin, the well-known Moskovsky Komsomolets columnist, announced that he was quitting the union in protest. "If Ramzan Kadyrov is in the Union of Journalists, then I'm not," Minkin told Ekho Moskvy radio. "I consider it unacceptable that a person like Ramzan Kadyrov, given what we know about him and his actions, is in the Russian Union of Journalists. I hope that I am not alone in quitting the union. I even think that I am not the first. Maybe someone else found out about it earlier and immediately quit the union." Minkin said he was planning to write the union demanding Kadyrov's ouster and said he could rejoin it if Kadyrov is "thrown out or not finally accepted" as a member.

Dmitry Muratov, editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, said in a statement: "I will not remain a member of the Russian Union of Journalists for one second if it is confirmed that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov has become a member of the Russian Union of Journalists. I will not comment on my position. I am simply categorically not prepared to be found in the same union as cannibals." Muratov said he understood that the decision to make Kadyrov a member of the Russian Union of Journalists was taken by the union's chapter in Chechnya and was interested to see what the parent organization would have to say about it.

Gazeta.ru quoted Russian Union of Journalists General Secretary Igor Yakovenko as saying: "Personally, I am not acquainted with the professional activities of the journalist Kadyrov, I am not familiar with a single one of his articles and do not know what can confirm his professional status. Some journalists might find it unpleasant to find out that Kadyrov is in the union with them. But if it becomes easier for even one Chechen journalist to work, then I will put up with it. Such are the times. Stalin was the best friend of all athletes."

APN Severo-Zapad quoted Dmitry Polyagin, head of the Sverdlovsk chapter of the Russian Union of Journalists, as saying: "It is necessary to annul the Russian Union of Journalists membership card given to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov; otherwise, the very idea of the [Russian Union of Journalists] will be discredited. Only professional journalists or so-called freelancers regularly working for media can be members of the union. Kadyrov, of course, belongs to neither the first nor the second category. I can understand that the Chechen journalists are grateful to Kadyrov for certain preferences, but a journalistic certification should not be a means of payment for those preferences."

On March 6, Igor Yakovenko, the Russian Union of Journalists' general secretary, announced that it had rescinded to the decision taken by its chapter in Chechnya to confer membership on Ramzan Kadyrov. "Two hours ago the secretariat of the Russian Union of Journalists rescinded the Union of Journalists of the Chechen Republic's decision as contradicting the charter of the Russian Union of Journalists," RIA Novosti quoted Yakovenko as saying. "In this case it was simply a mistaken decision that was rescinded. Given that Ramzan Kadyrov is not a professional journalist, no one could accept him into the Russian Union of Journalists."

The chairman of the Russian Union of Journalists, Vsevolod Bogdanov, said he understood the desire of journalists in Chechnya to make Kadyrov a member of the union, adding that they did it "out of a desire to cooperate with the authorities," Integrum.ru reported. "All the more so given that Kadyrov is trying to do a lot for the Union of Journalists and the media. No one here is impugning the honor and dignity of Kadyrov, who is a Hero of Russia. It's simply that the Union of Journalists is more for professionals."

Lema Gudaev, who heads the information-analytical department of the Chechen Republic's president and government, told Ekho Moskv Radio on March 6 that the Chechen chapter of the Russian Union of Journalists had picked the wrong way to express gratitude to Ramzan Kadyrov "for everything he has done in terms of supporting the republican press." Even though "any journalist could give a number of concrete positive examples" of the Chechen leader's contributions, the Chechen journalists picked a form that contradicts the Russian Union of Journalists charter, Gudaev said.

During the meeting in which Ramzan Kadyro was erroneously made a member of the Russian Union of Journalists, he announced that March 5 will from now on be celebrated in Chechnya as "Mass Media Workers Day."

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Briefs

- Dagestani Journalists Assaulted

Zaur Gaziev, an opposition journalist who is a political correspondent for the Dagestani weekly Svobodnaya Respublika, and Ruslan Gabibulaev, an anchorman with the Republican State Broadcasting Company (RGVK), were severely beaten in Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital, on February 29. The website of The Other Russia opposition coalition on March 1 quoted Gaziev as saying that doctors had diagnosed him with a concussion but that he refused hospitalization out of fear for his family. Gabibulin, who had a tooth knocked out and a swollen cheek, told the website he felt "normal compared with Zaur." On March 3, Kommersant quoted Gaziev as saying that he had been repeatedly threatened over the prior month and believed the attack was an attempt to intimidate him. Gaziev previously worked as an RGVK anchorman but stepped down after he started writing articles for Svobodnaya Respublika criticizing Dagestan's president, Mukhu Aliev and his protégés, accusing them, among other things, of "debaucherhy and theft."

- Police Convoy Bombed in Dagestan

Two bombs hit a police convoy in Khasavyurt, Dagestan, on March 2, injuring two people, the Associated Press reported. The news agency quoted Mark Tolchinsky, spokesman for the Dagestani police headquarters in Makhachkala, as saying that the first bomb exploded as a police patrol truck passed by and that while no one was hurt in that blast, a second bomb detonated when police reinforcements came to investigate, injuring one officer and a passer-by.

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Kadyrov Seeks to Use Leading Human Rights Group against His Rivals

By [Andrei Smirnov](#)

On February 22, Ramzan Kadyrov, the pro-Russian Chechen leader, met in the republican capital Grozny with leaders of Memorial, the biggest and the most influential human rights organization in Russia (Chechnya Weekly, February 29). Memorial has been monitoring human rights violations in Chechnya closely since the beginning of the first Chechen war in 1994. About a month before the meeting with Kadyrov, Memorial issued a report on the human rights situation in the Chechen Republic in 2006-2007 that sharply criticized the pro-Russian Chechen authorities, Russian federal security structures and Ramzan Kadyrov personally. For example, the report concluded, among other things: "the political course directed towards peace [in Chechnya] that has been declared by Ramzan Kadyrov continues to be based on terror" [1].

The Chechen government's press service even issued an official statement rejecting all accusations and criticism coming from Memorial (Vesti-Severny Kavkaz, January 18). Late last year, Ramzan Kadyrov declared at a meeting with leaders of some Chechen non-government organizations that "Memorial spreads rumors that can not be confirmed and does it with just with one aim: to discredit the Chechen authorities" (Kavkazky Uzel, February 21).

Considering these uneasy relations, the Chechen president's decision to meet with his longtime stubborn critics in Memorial looks rather strange. Kadyrov invited both Memorial's Russian leaders and the heads of the organization's branch in Chechnya to meet with him in the Government Palace in Grozny. At the meeting, Memorial was represented by Oleg Orlov and Svetlana Gannushkina, members of Memorial's board in Moscow, and by Chechen members of the organization, including Natalya Astemirova, Liliya Yusupova, Shakhman Akbulatov and others. Kadyrov was accompanied by, among others, his right-hand man—or henchman—Adam Delimkhanov, who recently became a deputy in the Russian State Duma; Duvakha Abdurakhmanov, speaker of the Chechen parliament; Abdulkakhir Israilov, head of the Chechen presidential administration; Nurdi Nukhazhiev, Chechnya's human rights ombudsman; Muslim Khuchiev, the mayor of Grozny; Ruslan Alkhanov, the Chechen Interior Minister.

Kadyrov did not hide what he wanted from the human rights activists: cooperation with the authorities. He opened the meeting by saying: "I am also a human rights activist. We have common goals, let's unite." According to Novye Izvestiya, the human rights people started to talk about such burning issues as the fabricated criminal cases against Chechens, the use of torture by security officials and the problem of identifying the dead bodies that are found regularly in Chechnya (Novye Izvestia, February 28). Kadyrov promised to help, and blamed the federal authorities for not allowing a laboratory to identify bodies in Grozny to be set up and for slowing down the process of transferring convicted Chechens from prisons throughout Russia to prisons on Chechen territory. Kadyrov also rejected any hints that some of his armed groups could have been involved in kidnappings or the torture of detained persons. The Chechen leader shifted the blame to former Chechen Deputy Interior Minister Alambek Yasaev, who tried to organize a revolt against Kadyrov and was sacked from the police at the end of the last year.

During the meeting, the Chechen president appointed Natalya Astemirova to be head of the Human Rights Public Council in the Grozny administration. In addition, he ordered Grozny Mayor Muslim Khuchiev to accompany her to the so-called "Shanghai" settlement on the outskirts of Grozny where homeless people live in very poor conditions. Khuchiev and Astemirova met with people in "Shanghai" and the mayor promised to find ways to provide some of the families living there with good apartments in Grozny (Kavkazky Uzel, February 23; Novye Izvestia, February 28).

It must be said that Ramzan Kadyrov did his best during the meeting to charm the Memorial activists. Kadyrov called on Memorial to cooperate with the Chechen authorities to improve the human rights situation in Chechnya. It looks like the Memorial leaders were really impressed by Kadyrov's words. "Memorial is fully satisfied with the negotiations held with the Chechen authorities," Oleg Orlov declared in Moscow on February 28.

Human rights activists in Russia are always happy when the authorities meet and listen to their complaints. Every time officials invite them to a meeting they expect that meeting to mark the beginning of a new attitude toward the human rights problem in Russia, and especially in Chechnya. However, the authorities have their own aims in establishing contacts with non-governmental organizations, especially with those who usually criticize them.

The Kremlin and Ramzan Kadyrov each have their own goals in dealing with Memorial. First, the Russian authorities want to neutralize Memorial as a source of objective information about the situation in Chechnya. The Kremlin has always tried to control Memorial and find tools to play down the harsh criticism in their regular reports on Chechnya. The best way to do this is to incorporate Memorial into Russian policy in the region and to exploit the prestige that the organization still has among Chechens to strengthen the position in the republic of Kadyrov, who is still regarded by many Chechens as a traitor and a Russian puppet. The Russian authorities would like to redirect Memorial's attention from the abuses committed by security officials against civilians to such social problems as those of refugees and homeless people.

At the same time, Kadyrov personally would like to use human rights organizations in his struggle against his rivals in the Chechen pro-Russian camp. In an interview shown on Chechen television just several days before the meeting with Memorial, Adam Delimkhanov, the Chechen politician who is most loyal to Ramzan, accused Sulim Yamadaev and his Vostok battalion, which is subordinated to Russian military intelligence, of murders and kidnapping civilians in Chechnya's Vedeno district. Both Kadyrov and Delimkhanov have declared publicly that Vostok should be removed from Vedeno and replaced by squads loyal to the Chechen president (Forum.msk.ru, February 29). It should be noted that the Yamadaev brothers, Sulim and Ruslan, are Kadyrov's main rivals in the Chechen power struggle. Ramzan Kadyrov is trying to incite public anger against Yamadaev's Vostok battalion, so Memorial and other human rights groups need to be very careful not to fall for the line that Vostok is responsible for all the human rights abuses now occurring in Chechnya.

Notes

1. Memorial, Report on the Status of Residents of Chechnya in the Russian Federation, August 2006-October 2007.

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