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# Putin's talks with the two Kadyrovs - attempts to prevent the storm



Putin's Achilles' heel is not only in Ukraine. Dynastic and tribal relations in Chechnya can become his second one. On Victory Day, May 9, 2004, the Kremlin announced that Vladimir Putin had received Ramzan Kadyrov, the son of Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov, who was assassinated on the same day. Ramzan, who was then 28 years old, became Deputy Prime Minister of Chechnya the very next day. Since then, he has been the de facto leader of Chechnya.

He was appointed president by the decision of Vladimir Putin in 2007, when he met the condition of being over 30 years old in order to become president. Memories of the meeting between Ramzan Kadyrov and Vladimir Putin surfaced when Putin received Akhmad junior, Ramzan's son, for an unofficial visit. Associations with the 2004 meeting were further fuelled by reports that the Chechen leader was seriously ill and unable to perform his duties.

Could Kadyrov Jr.'s unofficial reception in the Kremlin have the same political epilogue as his father's meeting with Putin almost 20 years ago?

## Speculation about Kadyrov's illness and mistrust in Moscow

There is speculation (published by Das Bild) that Ramzan, all-powerful Chechen warlord and leader of Chechnya, who has often enjoyed calling himself Putin's infantryman, allegedly suffers from kidney failure. This fuelled further speculation that his serious illness was a result of intentional poisoning which is why, allegedly, a top nephrologist from the UAE, Yasin Ibrahim El-Shahat, arrived in the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, because Kadyrov does not trust Russian doctors.

Poor health was probably the reason Ramzan Kadyrov missed Putin's address to the upper chamber of Russian parliament and the nation on the anniversary of the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The Chechen Republic, just as all other republics in the

Northern Caucasus, is a far more complicated structure than one may think.

## Tradition and complicated relations between tribes

Whilst all people in Chechnya are considered Chechen people, in reality all people in Chechnya and in nearby republics such as Dagestan, are a combination of much smaller ethnic groups: tribes or "taips" of the Northern Caucasus. For example, the leader of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, belongs to the Benoi taip. Affiliation to the taip, those local micro ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus, by far exceeds the importance of affiliation to the republic and even to citizenship of Russian Federation.

The republics of the Northern Caucasus were subverted by force before the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. After a separatist request from the Chechen Republic was crushed in the 1990s and a government loyal to the Kremlin was installed by president Putin, the Chechen Republic, as the only republic in the region, was granted a right to have a local army. That right was granted to Chechen Republic in the name of an anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya and nearby republics.

Over time, Ramzan Kadyrov has literally become a smaller version of Putin in the Chechen Republic and in the region of the Northern Caucasus in general. No other republic in Northern Caucasus and possibly in the entire Russian Federation has as much financial and military autonomy as Ramzan Kadyrov does in the Northern Caucasus.

## Conflicts over power in Grozny – a nightmare for Putin

If Ramzan Kadyrov is no longer able to hold power in the Chechen Republic, the situation in that region, with its historical internal frictions and grievances, could soon be on fire. The power structure in Chechnya is authentic

and feudal. All power is in the Sultan's hands, while his entourage, key helpers and assistants are from the same taip as Ramzan Kadyrov.

Therefore it is fair to say that the power in Chechnya is in the hands of one taip. Historically, taips have constantly fought one another. Therefore the moment Kadyrov's grip loosens, we can expect many more conflicts in the Northern Caucasus region. The reason is that Ramzan Kadyrov was Moscow's vicegerent in the region, while his small army, dominantly consisting of people from his taip was the Kremlin's regional security force.

Any struggle for supremacy in Grozny would absolutely not suit the Russian president. It would be a nightmare for Putin. The opening of a new conflict, at a time when the invasion of the greater Ukraine has not brought the expected results after a year, would pull the Kremlin's great resources where it does not want them. It is not just any territory. It is Chechnya. It is Russia's "Achilles' heel" that Putin managed to rehabilitate by force and management of complicated tribal and dynastic relations. That is why Putin's meeting with Kadyrov junior represents a preventive measure before the storm. Just like his meeting with Ramzan almost 20 years ago.