

Extrait du Reporters Sans Frontières

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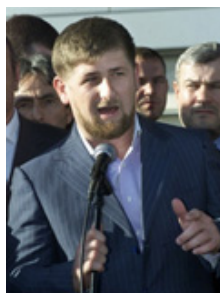
Freedom in Caucasus?

Report on fact-finding visit to Russian Caucasus - the media iron curtain

- Anglais - Information - Mission reports -



Reporters Sans Frontières



Reporters Without Borders today released the report of an investigation into the situation of the media in the Russian Caucasus, for which it visited Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia and met with Chechen President **Ramzan Kadyrov** (photo AFP) and Ingush President **Yunus-Bek Yevkurov**, as well as local journalists and human rights activists.

The press freedom organisation examined the ability of local and foreign journalists to gather and report information amid considerable tension, finding that the media and the civil society representatives who defend free expression are subject to a great deal of harassment. Reporters Without Borders also looked at how the public gets access to independent news and information and asked government officials to give their take on the situation.

The official insistence that the situation in the Russian Caucasus is under control is not borne out by the continuing violence, tension and human rights violations in this southern region. Claiming that Chechnya was back to normal, the Russian authorities lifted its status as a Zone of Anti-Terrorist Operations (KTO) in April only to temporarily reimpose KTO status on three Chechen districts a few days later.



Yevkurov, the Ingush leader (photo AFP), was badly injured in a targeted car-bombing just three days ago. Many people had thought his appointment as president of Ingushetia would help to defuse the violence and unrest in Chechnya's western neighbour. In Dagestan, the interior minister was shot dead on 5 June.

Although prey to almost daily violence, the population of these southern republics has been abandoned by the Russian government. Seeing the prevailing chaos, which affects journalists, one wonders if this is because Moscow is powerless or because it lacks the political will. And in either case, what prospect does the local population have?

Both the Russian and international press pays much less attention to the Russian Caucasus now than 15 years ago, when the First Chechen War began, although journalists such as **Anna Politkovskaya** of *Novaya Gazeta*, who was gunned down in her Moscow apartment building on 7 October 2006, never stopped covering the violence to which the population is subjected.



The Russian supreme court today overturned the February acquittal of three men accused of participating in Politkovskaya's murder and ordered a retrial. But absolutely no light has been shed on the identity of those who ordered Politkovskaya's murder. Violence and impunity reign in Russia.

One conclusion is clear. We must help the Chechen, Ingush and Dagestani journalists who are still trying to report the news in the Russian Caucasus, so that its public can be properly informed. Civil society and independent media are in danger of being abandoned to their day-to-day violence with no one taking notice.