



AUSTRIAN RED CROSS

ACCORD

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin
& Asylum Research and Documentation

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Armenia: Persecution of army officers: 1) Officers who disobeyed orders to shoot at protesters during manifestations on 1 March 2008 and have been subjected to disproportionate punishment; 2) Officers who have been sent to Nagorno-Karabakh as a disciplinary sanction and have possibly been killed there under unusual circumstances; 3) Armenian army officers (or officers from other former Soviet states) who have been killed abroad under unusual circumstances

This response was commissioned by the UNHCR Status Determination and Protection Information Section. Views expressed in the response are not necessarily those of UNHCR.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to ACCORD within time constraints and in accordance with ACCORD's methodological standards and the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI)*.

This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status, asylum or other form of international protection.

Please read in full all documents referred to.

Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

1) Officers who disobeyed orders to shoot at protesters during manifestations on 1 March 2008 and have been subjected to disproportionate punishment

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no specific information could be found on the subject of Armenian officers who refused to shoot at protesters during the 1 March 2008 manifestations. The following reports refer to officers who allegedly took a stance differing from that taken by the government leadership in the aftermath of the 2008 presidential elections:

International Crisis Group (ICG) reports in April 2008 about the resignation of Deputy Defence Minister Lieutenant-General and chair of the veterans union "Yerkrapah", Manvel Grigorian. According to ICG, this appears to give credence to allegations made by Ter Petrosian on 21 February 2008 that Grigorian and another deputy defence minister, General Gagik Melkonian, had vowed not to use troops against supporters in Liberty Square:

"The resignation of Deputy Defence Minister Lieutenant-General and chair of the powerful veterans union 'Yerkrapah', Manvel Grigorian, on 2 April appears to give credence to

Ter-Petrosian's claim there was a serious split in the armed forces. Nevertheless, officers and troops obeyed the orders to back up police in central Yerevan after the state of emergency was declared on the night of 1 March." (ICG, 8 April 2008, p. 11)

"Ter-Petrosian claimed on 21 February 2008 that two deputy defence ministers, Lieutenant-General Manvel Grigorian and General Gagik Melkonian, had vowed not to use troops to crack down on supporters in Liberty Square. 'Deputy Minister of Defence Manvel Grigorian Sends in His Resignation at Suggestion of Armenian President', Noyan Tapan, 4 April 2008." (ICG, 8 April 2008, p. 11, footnote 78)

The news website Armenia Liberty reports in April 2008 about the dismissal of army general and deputy defence minister Manvel Grigorian by President Kocharian. It is mentioned that on 14 March 2008, Grigorian was accused by Prime Minister and President-elect Serzh Sarkisian of getting into politics and having attempted to disobey the commander-in-chief. Grigorian is also the chairman of the Yerkrpah Union which unites veterans from the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Most of its members, including its deputy chairman Miasnik Malkhasian, backed Ter-Petrosian's presidential candidature and actively participated in post-election demonstrations organised by the former Armenian president. The report says that Grigorian is believed to have approved of their stance, although he never publicly commented on the presidential race. Ter-Petrosian himself claimed to have secured the backing of Grigorian and another deputy defense minister, Gagik Melkonian, as he began on February 21 a campaign of non-stop rallies contesting official election results:

"President Robert Kocharian dismissed on Wednesday a prominent army general and deputy defense minister who is thought to have tacitly supported opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrosian in Armenia's troubled presidential election.

A short statement by Kocharian's office did not say why Lieutenant-General Manvel Grigorian was relieved of his duties. Victor Soghomonian, the presidential press secretary, told RFE/RL that the reason for the move is 'obvious' but declined to elaborate.

The sacking has been widely anticipated since Prime Minister and President-elect Serzh Sarkisian publicly accused Grigorian on March 14 of refusing to comply with Kocharian's orders. 'I very much regret that for some unknown reason, Manvel Grigorian tried to get into politics and tried to disobey the commander-in-chief,' Sarkisian said in televised remarks. 'I think all circumstances must be clarified and the matter must find a solution.'

Grigorian, who was reportedly forced to take a leave of absence in the wake of the February 19 election, could not be reached for comment.

The mustachioed general is also the chairman of the Yerkrpah Union uniting thousands of Armenian veterans of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Most members of the once powerful group, including its deputy chairman Miasnik Malkhasian, backed Ter-Petrosian's presidential bid and actively participated in post-election demonstrations organized by the former Armenian president. Grigorian is believed to have approved of their stance, even though he has never publicly commented on the presidential race.

Ter-Petrosian claimed to have secured the backing of Grigorian and another deputy defense minister, Gagik Melkonian, as he began on February 21 a campaign of non-stop rallies against the official results of the election. 'Manvel Grigorian and Gagik Melkonian are saying that they will not allow the army to meddle in politics and be used against their people,' Ter-Petrosian told tens of thousands of supporters in Yerevan. 'Manvel Grigorian and Gagik Melkonian consider themselves the guarantors of the security of the Armenian people.' (Armenia Liberty, 2 April 2008)

2) Officers who have been sent to Nagorno-Karabakh as a disciplinary sanction and have possibly been killed there under unusual circumstances

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no specific information could be found on the subject of army officers who were sent to Nagorno-Karabakh as a disciplinary sanction and possibly killed there under unusual circumstances. The following reports refer to a case of a conscientious objector who was forcibly transferred from Yerevan to a military unit in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2004:

- UN Human rights Council: Civil and political rights, including the question of religious intolerance - Addendum: Summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received [E/CN.4/2006/5/Add.1], 27 March 2006 (published on eci.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/vprinz14_report2.pdf
- Forum 18: ARMENIA: Religious conscientious objector forcibly taken to Nagorno-Karabakh, 6 January 2005 (published on eci.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1329_1205935577_armenia484.pdf

3) Armenian army officers (or officers from other former Soviet states) who have been killed abroad under unusual circumstances

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no information could be found on the subject of Armenian army officers who have been killed abroad by agents from their own state. The following reports refer to killings of Russian (Chechen) individuals with links to the army/armed groups which occurred in countries outside the CIS region:

In March 2009 the Daily Telegraph newspaper reports on a number of recent cases of killings of Chechens who are referred to as "warlords" in countries outside the CIS region:

- Daily Telegraph: The Chechen warlords murdered across the world, 31 March 2009
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/5083136/The-Chechen-warlords-murdered-across-the-world.html>

"Gaji Edilsultanov, 54, a Chechen rebel army 'colonel', who was shot dead in Istanbul September 6 2008

Ruslan Yamadayev, 46, the brother of the warlord murdered in Dubai on Saturday and a former Russian MP, who was shot dead outside the British Embassy in Moscow on

September 25 2008 Islam Zhanibekov, 38, a former Chechen rebel field commander, who was shot dead in front of his wife and children in Istanbul on December 9 2008.

Umar Ismailov, 27, a former bodyguard of Russia's client leader in Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov. He was shot dead by two men in Vienna on January 13 2009. Mr Ismailov had publicly accused Mr Kadyrov of ordering torture and murders.

Musa Atayev, 48, also known as Ali Osayev and described as a 'Mujahid for the emirate of the Caucasus', who was shot dead in Istanbul on February 26 2009.

Sulim Yamadayev, 35, a former commander of the Chechen Vostok battalion, who was shot dead by lone assailant in a car park in Dubai on March 28 2009." (Daily Telegraph, 31 March 2009)

In a March 2009 article, Turkish Daily newspaper Today's Zaman reports on the killings of three Chechens in Istanbul over the previous five months as follows:

"The killings of a number of Chechens in İstanbul over the past several months could be the work of Russian intelligence units, sources have said. Three Chechens have been killed over the past five months in İstanbul. In the latest incident, Ali Osaev, 48, was killed in İstanbul's Zeytinburnu district by unknown assailants with three bullets to the head last Thursday. A former Chechen military officer, Gazhi Edilsutanov, was killed in the Başakşehir district in September 2008, and İslam Conibekof was killed in Ümraniye in December. Both were shot in the head.

The similarities in the methods of the killings and in the weapons used in the murders have led the İstanbul Police Department to set up a special unit to investigate. While the special unit was investigating the dossiers for the murder cases, a special team from the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) visited the İstanbul Police Department on Saturday and took a copy of the murder files. Sources said the MİT is investigating whether the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) was involved in the murders.

A senior member of the Caucasus Foundation, Mehdi Nüzhet Çetinbaş, said Osaev, the latest victim, was a close associate of Chechen leader Dokka Umarov, who is involved in the insurgency against the Russian Federation." (Today's Zaman, 2 March 2009)

The Guardian newspaper reports in January 2009 on the killing of Umar Israilov, a critic of Chechnya's president Ramzan Kadyrov, in his exile in Vienna:

"Police in Vienna were today investigating whether Russia's secret service was involved in the murder of a prominent exiled critic of Chechnya's president, who was shot dead in the city on Tuesday.

Umar Israilov, 27, was shot dead in as he left a grocery shop outside his Vienna flat. He was a high-profile opponent of Chechnya's pro-Kremlin president, Ramzan Kadyrov, and had filed a complaint to the European court of human rights in 2006, alleging Kadyrov had tortured him.

Israilov, a former insurgent, was arrested in 2003. During his time in detention, Israilov claimed he was tortured with electric shocks, and said he witnessed fellow detainees being beaten and kicked by Kadyrov and others. After being released under amnesty, he worked briefly as Kadyrov's bodyguard, before fleeing to Austria." (Guardian, 15 January 2009)

Information on the Israilov case can further be found in the following news reports:

- NYT - New York Times: Slain Exile Detailed Cruelty of the Ruler of Chechnya, 31 January 2009
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/world/europe/01torture.html>
- RFE/RL - Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: New Claims That Chechen Leader Ordered Killings Abroad, last update 5 March 2009
http://www.rferl.org/content/New_Claims_That_Chechen_Leader_Ordered_Killings_Abroad_/1504160.html

On April 1 2009, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reports on an attack on Sulim Yamadaev on 28 March 2009 in Dubai. The report states that Yamadaev was a former commander of the Vostok (East) battalion in Chechnya. RFE/RL mentions that at the time of writing, there were contradictory reports as to whether or not Yamadaev died in the attack:

"The uncertainty over whether or not Sulim Yamadayev, former commander of the controversial Vostok (East) battalion, survived the March 28 attempt to kill him in Dubai continues.

While the local authorities and the Russian consul in Dubai have gone on record as saying that Yamadayev died in hospital several days ago and his body has been handed over to his family for burial, the Russian dailies 'Vremya novostei' and 'Gazeta' on March 31 quoted Sulim's brother Isa as saying the previous day that Sulim survived the shootings.

Both papers adduced as circumstantial evidence that Sulim Yamadayev is still alive the fact that the gates of his home in Gudermes remain closed; were he dead, the gates would have been opened to enable mourners to express their condolences to his relatives, assuming that any were brave enough to risk incurring the wrath of Chechen Republic head Ramzan Kadyrov by doing so publicly.

The Vostok battalion was until last summer the sole Chechen armed unit that did not profess unswerving loyalty to Kadyrov. Established in 2003, Vostok and its Zapad (West) counterpart were affiliated with the Russian Defense Ministry's 42nd Motorized Rifle Division that is permanently stationed in Chechnya. At the same time, they were directly subordinate to Russian military intelligence (GRU)." (RFE/RL, 1 April 2009)

In April 2009, the Jamestown Foundation reports on the Sulim Yamadaev case as follows:

"On the evening of March 28, the Chechen community in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—which is approximately 2,000-3,000 strong—was abuzz with the news of the assassination attempt on Sulim Yamadaev [...]. Closer to midnight, the mass media, citing the Reuters news agency, began to talk about the assassination of a Chechen named Madov Suleiman in Dubai, the capital of UAE [...]. By the morning of March 29, few in the

Chechen community of UAE doubted that it was Sulim Yamadaev who was killed. It should be noted that he relocated to the UAE only several months ago under an assumed identity (and with a fake passport) with his entire family (including his wife and children). According to local Chechens, he lived inconspicuously and tried not to attract attention. The very fact of a fake passport indicated that his departure to the Emirates was an operation aimed at protecting him from possible enemies. Yet, the selection of UAE, where several thousand Chechens reside, apparently was not the best option for saving him and his family from revenge. By a confluence of circumstances, the enemies of Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's hand-picked favorite usually do not live long lives, regardless of where they reside or under whose protection. [...] Sulim Yamadaev, the former commander of the Vostok battalion, who was an officer with the rank of lieutenant colonel and a recipient of the Hero of Russia award, was a blood enemy of Kadyrov. This is why few doubted that he would meet the same fate that befell his brothers. The only questions were when and how this was going to happen. [...] Kadyrov reacted with indignation to the accusations by the UAE police suggesting that the chief suspect in the murder was Adam Delimkhanov, Kadyrov's first cousin, who is a vice premier of Chechnya's government and represents it in the State Duma." (Jamestown Foundation, 17 April 2009)

Detailed Information on this case can further be found in the following report by the Russian human rights organisation Memorial (see chapter "The Mysterious Case of Sulim Yamadayev"):

- Memorial: Situation in the North Caucasus conflict zone: analysis from the human rights perspective, Spring 2009
<http://www.memo.ru/eng/news/2009/10/08/0810095.doc>

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- Guardian: Austrian police investigate Kremlin link to Chechen dissident's murder, 15 January 2009
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/15/chechen-murder-austria-russia>
- Jamestown Foundation: The Mysterious Assassination of Sulim Yamadaev. In: North Caucasus Analysis Volume 10 Issue 15, 17 April 2009
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- UN Human rights Council: Civil and political rights, including the question of religious intolerance - Addendum: Summary of cases transmitted to Governments and replies received [E/CN.4/2006/5/Add.1], 27. März 2006 (published on ecoi.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/vprinz14_report2.pdf