

Estemirova's Killer Identified, Bastrykin Says

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Investigators have identified the gunman who killed Natalya Estemirova, the Chechen human rights activist and journalist who was abducted in Grozny in July 2009, Investigative Committee chief Alexander Bastrykin said Tuesday.

Bastrykin gave no details about the identity of the suspect or his motives, but said he was alive and should be apprehended soon because investigators knew which Russian region he was living in, Interfax reported.

He also said the suspect had probably been hired to kill Estemirova but did not say who the mastermind might have been.

Estemirova, who worked at the Chechen branch of the rights watchdog Memorial and was an outspoken critic of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, was kidnapped in Grozny and found shot dead several hours later in Ingushetia. Memorial has implicated Kadyrov in the killing, prompting him to sue the organization.

Memorial co-head Alexander Cherkasov said Tuesday that he could comment on Bastrykin's announcement because the investigator had given no hard information about the case.

“I would, of course, like to hope that Bastrykin's words reflect a real advancement in the case. I know such advancement is possible, but it takes political will,” Cherkasov said, without elaborating, Interfax reported.

Bastrykin also confirmed earlier reports that another high-profile murder case — the January 2009 killing of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov and Novaya Gazeta reporter Anastasia Baburova — would be forwarded to court after the two detained suspects finished examining the materials against them. He gave no time frame but said it would happen “soon.”

Two suspected ultranationalists, Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgenia Khasis, have been accused of carrying out the slayings of Markelov and Baburova, who were shot dead in central Moscow.

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