

Chechen Teen Bride Gripes to Prosecutors Over Media Firestorm

By [Ivan Nechepurenko](#)

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The 17-year-old bride whose marriage to a much older police chief over the weekend sent shockwaves through the Russian media sphere has filed a complaint with Chechen prosecutors against the investigative reporter who first exposed the scandal on a national level, Chechen state television reported on Monday.

Bride Kheda (Luiza) Goylabiyeva and groom Nazhud Guchigov, whom various media reports have pegged as being between his late 40s and mid-50s, were married Saturday following an outpouring of national media coverage.

Novaya Gazeta journalist Yelena Milashina first broke the story on April 30, at which point she reported that Goylabiyeva was being forced to marry a police chief who, in addition to being some three times her age, was already married. Milashina wrote at the time that local villages

turned to her for help, as Guchigov had allegedly launched a campaign of intimidation in the area to prevent the teen's escape.

The article was later updated with comments from Guchigov, who said that he didn't know Goylabiyeva personally, though he was aware she was 17 years old. At the time, he said he had been married to his lovely wife for many years, and had no interest in procuring a second wife.

But as Milashina's report began gathering steam, Chechen strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov quickly grew impatient. First, he dismissed the republic's media and information minister for mishandling the scandal.

He then said in a video statement that he had sent one of his representatives to look into the situation, and assured that there was no evidence that Goylabiyeva had been forced to accept Guchigov's proposal. He urged Russian journalists not to spin an unseemly fantasy out of what was in fact an honest and willful union.

Milashina later reported that the local police authorities in Chechnya had warned her that she may face physical harm in the republic.

Following Goylabiyeva's complaint, Milashina may now also face a court hearing, according to local reports. Goylabiyeva's aim in filing the lawsuit was "to take measures to refute Milashina's publications and to defend the honor and dignity of her family," Shamil Mezhidov, deputy district prosecutor told the Grozny television station.

According to Mezhidov, the prosecutors will examine Goylabiyeva's claims before deciding how to approach the case.

Meanwhile, Kadyrov had foretold of the prospect of a lawsuit via Instagram on Friday.

"I am sure those who unceremoniously interfered for a long time in the private lives of Nazhud and Luiza will answer [for their actions] in court," Kadyrov wrote on Instagram on Friday. "The appropriate actions are already being prepared."

In a video interview with the sensationalist LifeNews television channel last week Goylabiyeva said she would be marrying Guchigov on her own free will and described her future husband as "manly and reliable."

Under Russian law, the general minimum marital age is 18, but the law contains provisions for marriage as young as 16 in certain cases. Since 2008, Chechnya has allowed marriage from the age of 16 on.

Children's rights ombudsman Pavel Astakhov came out in defense of the right of older men to marry teens last week. "Emancipation and sexual maturity come earlier in the Caucasus, let's not be hypocritical. There are places where women are already shriveled by the age of 27, and look about 50 to us," Astakhov told Russian News Service radio on Thursday.

Russian law does not allow for polygamy, though that practice also has its surprising supporters among Russia's political elite. The head of the State Duma's committee on family, women and children, Yelena Mizulina, came out against the criminalization of bigamy in comments carried by state news agency RIA Novosti on Monday.

"To criminalize [bigamy] is ridiculous, because the cause is not connected with an absence of criminal law, but rather the fact that there are not enough men with whom women want to start families and have children," Mizulina said, RIA Novosti reported.

Contact the author at i.nechepurenko@imedia.ru

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