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Austria Won't Seek to Arrest Chechen

By Nikolaus von Twickel

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Austria said Wednesday that it would not seek the extradition of the suspected killer of Chechen refugee Umar Israilov, even after national media reported that he was wounded in a shooting in Chechnya earlier this month.

No request has been sent to Moscow to extradite Lecha Bogatyryov, who is accused of shooting Israilov in Vienna in January 2009, a spokesman for the Austrian Justice Ministry said.

He said the decision was based on the ministry's belief that any request would be futile because of a constitutional ban on the extradition of Russian citizens.

"We principally do not ask Russia for the extradition of its own citizens because we know this is ruled out by the Constitution," the spokesman, Stefan Benner, said by telephone from Vienna.

Four men are currently standing trial in Vienna on accusations of organizing and carrying out

the brazen killing, which took place in broad daylight.

The trial, which resumed Wednesday with testimony from a relative of Israilov, is politically charged because prosecutors have suggested that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov ordered the killing to silence a vocal critic.

According to prosecutors, Israilov, who had lived in Austria since 2005, faced pressure from Kadyrov's emissaries to return home and drop plans to file a suit at the European Court of Human Rights over claims that he was tortured by Kadyrov himself.

The court has asked that Kadyrov be called as a witness, and an official request has been sent to Moscow to hear him "either in person or via video link or through Russian law enforcement organs," said Andreas Schüller, a lawyer representing Israilov's family.

Kadyrov has denied wrongdoing. His spokespeople were not immediately available for comment Wednesday.

Bogatyryov and an accomplice are thought to have chased Israilov through busy streets before killing him with shots at close range. He fled to Russia days later and is believed to be hiding in Chechnya.

On Jan. 9, he was hospitalized with gunshot wounds after an ambush on a special forces commander hostile to Kadyrov, Rosbalt.ru reported this week, citing a source in the security forces.

Unknown gunmen opened fire on commander Bislan Elimkhanov's motorcade outside the Khankala military base, killing his driver and wounding him and five other people, the report said.

Bogatyryov was a member of a local Interior Ministry guard unit, and it was unclear which role he played in the attack, the report said.

But Bogatyryov told investigators that he had not taken part in the shooting and had been at the scene by chance, Kommersant reported Tuesday, citing a source in the Chechen Investigative Committee.

The Chechen Interior Ministry would not confirm whether wounded Bogatyryov was the same person sought in connection with Israilov's death, the report said.

But both Rosbalt and Kommersant said he is 35, which correlates with Austrian court documents that say Bogatyryov was born on March 14, 1975.

Elimkhanov is a former commander of the Zapad military battalion and now commands a special forces company formed after a downgrading of the battalion in 2008.

The Zapad and Vostok battalions, which reported directly to the federal Defense Ministry, were regarded as the major forces in Chechnya not led by Kadyrov loyalists.

Former Vostok commander Sulim Yamadayev was shot dead in Dubai in March 2009. His brother Ruslan was gunned down in Moscow in 2008, and his family has blamed Kadyrov for

leading a vendetta against the Yamadayevs.

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