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'Chechen Rebel's Brother' Held in Italy

By Alexandra Odynova

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A brother of Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov was detained in Italy and faces extradition to Russia, Italian media said — although a mouthpiece for the insurgents claims that police have got the wrong man.

Ruslan Umarov, 35, came to Venice from France on a Eurostar train Saturday, seeking asylum in the country, news reports said.

The man, who carried a French passport, was detained on a tip from French intelligence and placed in a center for illegal immigrants in the town of Gradisca d'Isonzo in northeastern Italy's Gorizia province, Il Piccolo newspaper reported on its web site.

But Kavkazcenter.com, a web site often used by North Caucasus rebels to release their statements, said Monday that the detainee was not Doku Umarov's relative but just shared the same first and last names.

Russian authorities have made no official statements about the reports, though a law

enforcement source told Interfax on Monday that Moscow has asked Italy for more information.

Not much is known about Doku Umarov's brother, but he has never been linked to any terrorist groups, Kommersant said Monday.

Nevertheless, he was detained in the mid-2000s along with other relatives as law enforcement agencies unsuccessfully sought to use them as leverage against Doku Umarov, a popular practice at the time, the report said.

Ruslan Umarov was jailed in Chechnya in 2006 but escaped twice, in 2006 and 2008, Kavkazcenter.com said. It did not state his whereabouts, but said he was not in Chechnya or Europe.

Kommersant said Umarov fled to France and even successfully sued Russia for damages at the European Court for Human Rights. No details of the lawsuit were immediately available.

If the detainee is indeed Doku Umarov's brother, Russia will seek extradition, and Italy is highly likely to agree, considering the amiable relations between the countries, said Alexei Malashenko, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center.

Once in Russia, Ruslan Umarov might be pressured into "giving a statement addressed to the brother," but this is unlikely, Malashenko said by telephone.

Further actions of Russian officials mostly "depend on what sort of a man that brother is," Malashenko added.

Doku Umarov, 46, has claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks, including the Nevsky Express blast in 2009 and the twin suicide bombing in the Moscow metro in March.

He has not spoken about last week's blast at the Domodedovo Airport that killed 35 people. No one has taken responsibility for the attack.

Two of Doku Umarov's brothers, Isa and Musa, died fighting with the insurgents, Newsru.com said in 2007, without elaborating. Another brother, Vakha, is living in Istanbul. He gave an interview to Reuters in January 2010, denying any link to terrorists.

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