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Europe Holds 3 Chechens in Terror Inquiries

By The Moscow Times

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Three Chechen natives have been arrested in Spain and Bulgaria in connection with terrorism investigations, officials said.

Spanish police detained two Russians of Chechen descent and a Turkish national late last week on suspicion of plotting an attack in Spain or elsewhere in Europe, and a judge questioned them separately in hearings conducted behind closed doors Friday.

Spanish Interior Minister Jorge Fernandez Diaz described the Chechens as suspected al-Qaida members and said the Turk was suspected of being a facilitator for the terrorist group.

The judge charged the Turk, who was arrested Thursday in La Linea, a Spanish city next to the British colony of Gibraltar, with possession of explosives and an unspecified device that could be used for terror, said a court official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of court rules.

The Chechens, who were picked up Wednesday as they traveled by bus toward the French border, were ordered held for 48 more hours while authorities continue building their case, the official said.

On Sunday, Judge Pablo Ruz of the National Court charged both men with belonging to a terrorist organization and possessing explosives. He ordered them jailed until a date is decided for court proceedings, a court statement said.

Interfax reported that one of the Chechens had served in the Russian special forces as an expert on explosives and poisons.

Pictures of the suspects were released by Spanish authorities, but they were identified only by their initials: C.Y. for the Turk and A.A.A. and M.A. for the other two. The mug shots showed three men who appeared to be in their 30s, two with crew cuts and one with scraggly hair down to his shoulders.

Authorities said the La Linea house had enough explosives in it to blow up a bus, but they did not reveal how much or what kind. They also said they found evidence at the house suggesting "use" of ultralight planes and remote-control planes, but they did not provide more details.

Separately, Bulgarian officials on Friday arrested a Chechen as he tried to enter the country with his five children, telling border police he was arriving on vacation.

A check showed that the Chechen, identified as Mohmad Gadamouri, 47, was wanted by Interpol for his alleged role in a terrorist group that planned an attack in Ingushetia in 2003, said Nadezhda Miteva, a spokeswoman for the district prosecutor in the northeastern city of Ruse.

Miteva said he was arrested as he tried to enter the Balkan country through a border crossing with Romania.

Gadamouri is believed to have been hiding somewhere in Europe since 2003, and he is also wanted for the alleged illegal trading of arms and toxic substances.

He will remain in custody until authorities receive documents authorizing his extradition to Russia, Miteva said, adding that he held a document issued in Germany certifying his refugee status.

(AP, MT)

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