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BC-Spain-Chechnya

Russian minister warns against independence for Chechnya or Kosovo

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FORMENTOR, Balearic Islands (AP) — Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov compared the breakaway republic Chechnya to Kosovo and warned Saturday that independence for either would set a grave precedent for territorial integrity worldwide.

“You can’t look at the issue without thinking about it in global terms,” Ivanov said. Russia, he said, is fighting in Chechnya over territorial integrity.

Ivanov was speaking at a gathering of European and Mideast policy-makers on the Spanish Mediterranean island of Mallorca as part of a two-day conference on cooperation in the region.

When asked about the Russian military’s missile attack Thursday on the Chechen capital of Grozny, Ivanov played down the casualty reports, saying the figures could be exaggerated.

“There’s an information game going on here — a fight over public opinion,” he said. Some 140 people were reported killed in the attack on a market in the Chechen capital.

Chechnya has had de facto independence since Moscow’s troops pulled out after a bloody three-year war with the southern territory in 1996.

Moscow sent its army in again in September following weeks of air strikes to eliminate Islamic militants who invaded the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan.

The Chechen militants are also blamed for a series of September apartment explosions in Russia that killed some 300 people.

In Spain, Ivanov insisted Russia was ready to discuss settling the conflict “yesterday, today and tomorrow,” as long as negotiations were conducted with genuine representatives of the armed opposition, who had power to enforce any agreement.

He said his government has been seeking a political solution since the beginning, but that the only way to protect Russian security for now was through “war against the terrorists.”

On other issues, Ivanov said broader cooperation was needed in the Mediterranean region. He criticized NATO actions in Kosovo, saying they contributed to regional instability and should have been agreed upon in a broader European context.

He also called for increased regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime.

Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation Shimon Peres, Spanish Foreign Minister Abel Matutes, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and some 70 other politicians and academics also attended the conference.

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BC-Spain-Teletubby Raid

Spanish police raid warehouse of counterfeit dolls

MADRID, Spain (AP) — Spanish police have seized about one million fake Teletubby, Disney and Warner Bros. dolls from a warehouse in southern Madrid, a police spokesman said Friday.

It was not clear where the fake merchandise was manufactured, the spokesman said with customary anonymity, adding that the raid late Thursday followed neighbors' complaints about trucks unloading at the warehouse 'round the clock.

Police uncovered about half a million dolls in a similar bust in September.

Teletubby dolls are based on the characters in a popular children's television series produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The four Teletubbies, Tinky Winky, Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po, speak in a kind of baby-talk that has captivated young children worldwide.

Warner Bros. owns the rights to characters such as Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. Disney's merchandising stable includes such characters as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

(ds/jt)

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BC-Spain-Britons Appeal

British bar owner and two bouncers appeal murder convictions

MADRID, SPAIN (AP) — A British bar owner sentenced to 27 years in jail for hiring two bouncers to kill the man with whom she lived and owned a pub appealed the conviction Wednesday in Spain's Supreme Court.

Jackie Ambler, now 34, was convicted in 1998 for hiring Stanley Stewart and Gary Holmes to kill her partner, Michael O'Hara, who was found dead in their pub on the resort island of Tenerife off the Moroccan coast.

The two bouncers, sentenced to 29 years each, also lodged appeals at the Supreme Court Wednesday.

Ambler, Stewart and Holmes are all serving their sentences in Tenerife jails, and did not attend the appeal hearing, their last legal recourse.

The court is expected to announce its decision in about two weeks, the convicted woman's lawyer Juan Gonzalo said.

The bouncers originally confessed to killing O'Hara, who was found beaten to death in September 1995, but retracted their confessions by the time of last year's trial.

Gonzalo said the Supreme Court should go back to the original confessions, and insisted there was no evidence against his client.

Ambler and O'Hara are originally from Yorkshire in northern England, Stewart from Scotland, and Holmes from the southern county of Sussex.

(ds/jt)