

Socialist: King right to admonish Chavez

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MADRID, Spain --

Spain's king was right to tell Hugo Chavez to "shut up" at a summit because the Venezuelan president had insulted Spain's former prime minister, the governing party said Monday.

Spain wants good relations with Latin American countries but will not tolerate a lack of respect for its citizens, in this case a prominent one like former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, said Diego Lopez Garrido, spokesman in Parliament for the Socialist Party.

"This is a fundamental, democratic principle, one that governs relations between countries," Lopez Garrido told a news conference.

The spat began Saturday at an Ibero-American summit in Santiago, Chile, when Chavez accused Aznar of backing a 2002 coup that briefly removed Chavez from power. Chavez repeatedly called Aznar a "fascist" in an address at the summit of leaders from Latin America, Spain and Portugal.

Spain's current prime minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, asked Chavez to be more diplomatic and show respect for other leaders despite political differences.

"President Hugo Chavez, I think there is an essential principle to dialogue, and that is, to respect and be respected; we should be careful not to fall into insults," Zapatero said.

Chavez continued to interrupt as Zapatero spoke, although his microphone was off.

A frustrated King Juan Carlos, seated next to Zapatero, leaned toward Chavez and loudly asked, "Por que no te callas?" - or "Why don't you shut up?" The monarch then left the chamber.

Aznar later called to thank Zapatero for defending him, Lopez Garrido said.

Chavez fueled the dispute further on Sunday by suggesting the king knew in advance of the 2002 coup. Spanish royal palace officials were not available for comment Monday.