

Little business fallout seen from Spanish king-Chávez spat Venezuela

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MADRID --

(AP) -- The industry minister and one of Spain's top executives said Tuesday that a spat between King Juan Carlos and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez will not harm Spanish companies operating in Venezuela.

The king said, "Why don't you shut up?" to Chávez at an Ibero-American summit Saturday after the Venezuelan president accused former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar of backing a 2002 coup against Chávez and called Aznar a fascist. The king later stormed out of the room.

The next day Chávez suggested the king himself had advance knowledge of that two-day putsch.

The industry minister, Joan Clos, said Spanish companies have a long-standing presence and important role in the Venezuelan economy and neither side wants any more escalation in the dispute.

"It is one thing for people to be worried, but we have to expect that this will not have a real effect on a relationship that has been built over the course of many years and which we all want to continue," Clos told reporters.

Antonio Brufau, chairman of energy giant Repsol-YPF, called the diplomatic dispute a small setback that should have no fallout for Spanish companies working in Venezuela, such as his. Nor will it spread to other countries in the region, where Spain is the top investor after the United States, he said.

He said even the United States' tense relations with Venezuela are not an impediment to doing business.

"In my sector, oil, all the American companies are operating in Venezuela without a problem, and it is clear that relations with the United States are not optimal," Brufau told reporters.

Of the dispute between the king and Chávez, he said: "These small setbacks must be resolved with a lot of dialogue."