

Agca Extradited, Case Enters New Phase



By Nancy Frazier
NC News Service

Rome — The Italian investigation into the shooting of Pope John Paul II entered a crucial phase with the arrival in Rome of Musa Cedar Celebi, a suspected accomplice of convicted assailant Mehmet Ali Agca.

Celebi, a 31-year-old Turk, was flown to Rome Jan. 14 under heavy police guard after extradition from Frankfurt, West Germany, where he had been arrested Oct. 28 on a warrant issued by the chief Italian investigator, Judge Ilario Martella.

Celebi is suspected of having provided weapons and money to Agca, also a Turk, for the attempt on the pope's life May 13, 1981.

Interrogations of Celebi by Martella may play a major role in the fate of the only Bulgarian arrested in the case, Sergei Ivanov Antonov, who has been held since Nov. 25 in a Rome prison.

According to unofficial news leaks, Agca has told Italian authorities that Antonov and several other Bulgarians were involved in the planning of the crime and were present in St. Peter's Square when Agca fired at least two shots at the pope.

Currently pending before Martella is a request by Antonov's lawyers for his release because of a "complete lack of evidence" against him. Seven witnesses have testified that they were with Antonov at the Rome offices of Balkan Airlines, a Bulgarian state company, at the time of the shooting.

Italian press reports have said that if Celebi does not confirm key claims made by Agca in relation to the so-called

"Bulgarian Connection" to the papal shooting, Antonov may be released by the end of this month.

Martella had no comment on the visit.

Antonov's lawyers said that they "are convinced that either before the assassination attempt or when he was already in jail, someone could have given Agca a description" of Antonov's apartment.

Martella made a brief trip to Munich, West Germany, in early January to question Atalay Saral, a Turkish business partner of Bekir Celenk, a Turk living in Sofia who is sought by Italian police as a suspected accomplice in the papal attack.

Celenk has been detained by the Bulgarian government since November, after Martella issued an arrest warrant for him.

In a letter to Martella, a Bulgarian official warned that Celenk would be allowed to leave Bulgaria if the Italian investigator did not come to Bulgaria.

The official made no reference to Antonov or to the two other Bulgarians for whom Martella has issued warrants, Vassiliev Kolev, a military attache at the Bulgarian Embassy in Rome, and Teodorov Ayvazov, a cashier at the embassy. Both are living in Bulgaria and have denied any involvement in the shooting.

Pope Pleads For Condemned

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II has asked clemency for inmates sentenced to death, especially political prisoners.

In 1980, the pope, speaking to the European Court of the Rights of Man, quoted the second article of the European Convention of Human Rights: "The right of every person to life is protected by the law. Death cannot be inflicted on anyone intentionally, except in execution of a capital sentence pronounced by a tribunal in a case in which the crime is punished by that penalty of the law." He made no comment on the article.

"You can understand ... why, in its humanitarian concern, the Holy See is prompted to recommend clemency and mercy for those condemned to death, especially those who have been condemned for political motives," the pope said in his traditional message to diplomats.

This was his only reference to capital punishment made by the pope in his speech.

Father Romeo Panciroli, the Vatican Press Office director, said that it was the first time Pope John Paul has spoken against the death penalty, although several popes in the past, particularly Pope Paul VI, had asked clemency for individuals condemned.

The pope did not morally condemn capital punishment but his remarks affirmed Vatican opposition to the application of the death penalty.

Earlier in 1980, Cardinal Iginio Cardinali told a meeting of European ministers of justice: "The fact that a condemnation of the principle (capital punishment) has not been formulated up to now does not take away any of the urgency of working to abolish, in practice, the death penalty, and to develop the social and moral reasons that can contribute to this."

In 1974, the U.S. bishops approved a one-sentence statement opposing the death penalty. In November 1980, they issued a longer statement which did not totally condemn the death penalty. It opposed what it called the unfair way it is applied in the United States.

Cimino Named Brig. General

Joseph L. Cimino, a member of Mount Carmel Commandery, No. 308, Knights of St. John, has recently been appointed a brigadier general on the staff of the supreme president of the national organization.

Cimino has held civil and military offices in his own commandery and has served as adjutant, major and colonel of the Rochester regiment and is currently regimental inspector.

Instrumental in designing and promoting the new fatigue uniform of cap and sash, approved at the national convention last July, Cimino, a Kodak retiree and active musician, and his wife are parishioners at St. Charles Borromeo parish.

Cystic Fibrosis

A Valentine's Day dance to benefit the Cystic Fibrosis group will be held 8:30 p.m. to midnight, Monday, Feb. 14, at the Genesee Plaza Holiday Inn. Tickets and information are available by contacting 546-6400, ext. 7201.

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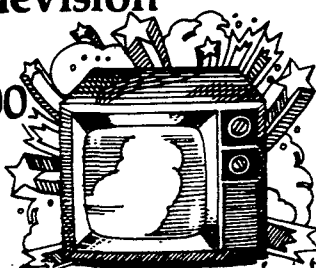
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