

Report from Italy by Umberto Pascali

The Bulgarian plot to kill the Pope

Magistrate Martello's report leaves no doubt that Agca had accomplices in the East bloc secret services.

We are certain that there was an international plot to kill the Pope. It was a monstrous crime against humanity, because it hit the conscience of everybody who, whether or not they subscribe to a religious credo, share the fundamental Christian values of peace, brotherhood, solidarity." So reads the final document issued by Roman magistrate Ilario Martella, who has spent more than three years investigating the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

Despite all the sabotage, attempted blackmail, and diplomatic pressures coming from Moscow and Sofia—and also from unexpected quarters in the West—the final bill of indictment demonstrates conclusively that there was a plot to assassinate the Pope, and that this plot was guided from Bulgaria and Russia. Martella leaves no room for the "lone-assassin" theory: "The attempt against John Paul II was not the result of the ideological delirium of a criminal who did everything by himself, but the fruit of complex machinations organized by occult minds."

Together with the arrested gunman, Mehemet Ali Agca, Martella indicted eight other persons including the head of the Rome offices of the Bulgarian airlines (Balkan Air), Sergei Antonov, believed to be one of the top figures of the Bulgarian secret services. The Bulgarian secret services, as is well known, are the branch of the Soviet KGB in charge of the dirtiest operations. Two other Bulgarian citizens were also indicted: Teodor Ayvazov and Jelio Kolev Vessilev. The

first was the cashier of the Bulgarian embassy in Rome; the second was the secretary to the military attaché at the embassy. Both left Rome immediately after the attempt. Antonov is still in Rome under house arrest.

The other accused individuals are Turkish citizens linked to the terrorist Grey Wolves organization and/or to the related Turkish mafia whose strings are pulled from Sofia: Oral Celik, Omer Bagci, Musar Sedar Celebi, and Bekir Celenk.

Previously unknown details were finally disclosed to the public. The attempt was prepared in a "highly professional" way. Agca was not the only person to shoot; Oral Celik also fired and hit the Pope in the arm. The two were accompanied to St. Peter's Square by Antonov and Ayvazov, who were supposed to throw bombs immediately after the shooting and rescue their accomplices. A car with diplomatic plates was ready to smuggle the killers away. The unforeseen element that made this plan fail was the immediate reaction of the people present in the square. Agca was able to fire only two shots before being vigorously blocked by an anonymous American nun.

Also officially confirmed is that the head of the Turkish mafia, Bekir Celenk, who runs his drug- and weapons-smuggling organization from Sofia, deposited the sum of three million deutschmarks for Agca in the Munich Bayerische Vereinsbank, the privileged partner of the Bulgarian Foreign Trade Bank. The chief name associated with the Bayerische Vereinsbank is Prince Johannes von Thurn

und Taxis of the "Holy Roman Empire," descended from those in charge of intelligence for the Most Serene Republic of Venice.

The Bulgarian and Soviet reaction has been immediate and furious. On Oct. 27, twenty-four hours after the bill of indictment was released, the Italian ambassador in Sofia was summoned to the Bulgarian foreign ministry and given a "firm protest" whose violent tone is unprecedented. "The indictment [of Sergei Antonov] puts relations between our two countries to a hard test and casts a cloud over present and future relationships. The Italian state has become, whether it knows it or not, a collaborator and an instrument of this provocation."

The official Bulgarian press agency, BTA issued an angry release calling the indictment "a premeditated provocation against the People's Republic of Bulgaria and against real socialism, aimed to further worsen East-West relations and the international situation. . . . Antonov and the other Bulgarians are innocent: This is why this shameful provocation must cease immediately and Antonov must be released. . . . There are no doubts that the instigators of this plot are those U.S. and NATO circles whose interest lies in the worsening of East-West relations and in the intensification of international tensions and acceleration of the arms race."

From Moscow, *Izvestia* joined in the attack: "The conclusions of Judge Martella represent one of the most scandalous provocations of our time. The trial will be a farce. The Bulgarian track is an invention of the Italian secret services in collaboration with the CIA."

While Moscow was protesting, the world was informed that the Polish priest Jerzy Popieluszko had been kidnapped and killed.