

Agca Retracted Part of Testimony on Bulgarians

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ROME—The Italian state prosecutors' report implicating Bulgaria in the plot that led Turkish assassin Mehmet Ali Agca to shoot Pope John Paul II discloses that Agca has retracted some of his testimony concerning one of his alleged Bulgarian accomplices.

A study of the secret 76-page report by Judge Antonio Albano, a copy of which was obtained by The Times, has shown that Agca retracted elements of his testimony concerning Sergei Ivanov Antonov, the Bulgarian airline executive who has been held in Rome since November, 1982, for complicity in the plot that resulted in the wounding of the Pope in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

Many of the details of the Albano report, which recommended trial for Antonov and two other alleged Bulgarian secret agents as well as four accused Turkish accomplices, have already been disclosed. But the earlier accounts have not included Albano's report of Agca's retraction during an interrogation by investigating magistrate Ilario Martella on June 28, 1983.

Despite the problems of credibility raised by the Agca retractions, Albano concluded in his report that the bulk of the Turkish assassin's confessions had checked out and the case against the accused Bulgarians and Turks was strong enough, even though based almost entirely on Agca's testimony, to go to trial.

In the Albano account of the case, Agca allegedly was recruited by Bulgarian secret service agents, with help from the "Grey Wolves" Turkish terrorist organization and the Turkish Mafia, to kill the Pope.

To lend credibility to his confessions to Martella, which began in May, 1982, in a Rome prison where Agca is serving a life sentence for his attack on the Pope, the Turkish assassin volunteered numerous personal details about his three alleged Bulgarian accomplices.

Among other things he gave the telephone numbers of the Rome offices of the Bulgarian state airline, Balkan Air, where Antonov was assistant station manager, and said he had visited the offices. He also said he had visited Antonov's apartment on several occasions, including May 10, three days before the assassination attempt, described it in some detail and said he had met Antonov's wife, Rossitza, there.

According to the Albano report, virtually the entire state case against the alleged conspirators rests on Agca's believability, which the prosecutor said was fully supported by Martella's painstaking investigation that confirmed many such intimate details about Antonov and the other two Bulgarians.

But, according to a different section of Albano's report, Agca retracted some of the testimony in June last year, stating that "he had not visited (Antonov's) apartment, either on the evening of May 10 or on other occasions; he had never met Antonov's wife; he knew nothing of her possible presence in Rome on that date; he had never known previous to the photographic recognition (of a picture of Antonov) on Nov. 8, 1982, that (Antonov) was employed by Balkan Air; he had never visited the airline's office in the Villa Gorizia, of which he had memorized the telephone numbers, thanks to a little stratagem."

The report did not delve into the question of how Agca, in view of his retractions, was able to offer details of Antonov's personal and business life.

Without specifically making a connection between the two events, Albano noted in his report that "as coincidence has it, young Emanuela Orlandi disappeared just at this time (of Agca's retraction.)" The 15-year-old Orlandi girl, daughter of a Vatican employee, vanished on June 22, 1983, and subsequent calls and letters from "people who have an interest in the

freedom of Agca" offered to swap her for the Turkish assassin.

Albano's notation implied that Agca began retracting his story about Antonov only when it appeared there might be a chance of gaining his freedom in exchange for the Orlandi girl. However, no exchange was arranged and the girl is still missing.

The prosecutor acknowledged in his report that Agca's retraction was troubling. "Agca—spontaneously and without being urged by anybody, as is his habit during the investigation—altered in a very penetrating manner the structure of proof which had been accumulated up to that time and, in doing so, set new problems for the investigators and above all for himself . . . Here, once more, the single, great, complex problem with Agca re-emerges: his credibility, his reliability in relation with a historic reality, which is confirmed with difficulty."

Albano noted that Agca also retracted another key portion of his testimony in which he had claimed that, in addition to the attack on the Pope, he conspired with the Bulgarians to kill Lech Walesa when the Polish Solidarity union leader visited the Pope in January, 1981.

Reports of the second Agca retraction, for which Martella had sought to indict Agca for "slander and self-slander," had appeared widely in the press before copies of the Albano report itself began to leak out last month.

In an attempt to find a reason for Agca's retractions, Albano wrote,

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