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Papal Plot Trial Hears Testimony in Switzerland

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ROME, Oct. 23 — The court trying seven men accused of conspiring to kill Pope John Paul II traveled to Switzerland this week on the first of several trips through Europe to question defendants and witnesses thought capable of testing the contentions of the court's chief witness, Mehmet Ali Agca.

On the first leg of its travels the court heard an extreme right-wing Turk serving a five-year jail sentence in Switzerland for drug trafficking call Mr. Agca "a big liar" and contest his account of the papal assassination attempt.

The Turk, Mehmet Sener, 29 years old, has been accused by other Turks, including Mr. Agca, of having bought the gun used to shoot the Pope, of accompanying Mr. Agca to Switzerland on his way to Italy, and of knowing in advance of Mr. Agca's intention to kill the Pope.

The testimony the court seeks has assumed added significance since the death in a Turkish jail earlier this month of one of the trial's original eight defendants. Bekir Celenk, a purported Turkish racketeer who Mr. Agca says was his original link with the Bulgarian secret service.

Mr. Celenk, who was on trial in Turkey on charges of drug and arms smuggling when he died of a heart attack Oct. 14, consistently denied complicity in the plot against the Pope. But Italian magistrates hoped Mr. Celenk, who was on trial here in absentia, might help unravel some of Mr. Agca's often-contradictory testimony.

In two days of questioning by Chief Judge Severino Santiapichi, Mr. Sener denied Mr. Celenk had anything to do with the shooting of the Pope.

The public prosecutor, Antonio Marini, said by telephone from Switzerland that Mr. Sener, who is serving a jail

sentence in Burgdorf, near Bern, agreed to come to Rome to face Mr. Agca. Despite Mr. Celenk's death, Mr. Marini said, the court sought to travel to Turkey Nov. 11 to hear Abuzer Ugurlu, another purported Turkish racketeer and associate of Mr. Celenk who operated out of Sofia, the Bulgarian capital. Mr. Agca has said Mr. Ugurlu was one of his contacts when he first traveled to Bulgaria in 1980.

The prosecutor said the court also sought permission to visit Bulgaria Nov. 21 to question Maj. Zhelyo K. Vasilev, the former deputy military attaché at Bulgaria's Rome embassy, and Todor S. Aivasov, a Bulgarian diplomat. Mr. Agca has implicated both men in the purported plot. The men have denied any wrongdoing, and Bulgaria has refused to hand them over to the Italians.

The seven defendants are Sergei I Antonov, the former head of the Rome office of the Bulgarian airline, the only Bulgarian in Italian custody, Mr. Aivasov, Major Vasilev, and four Turks — Mr. Agca, Musa Serdar Celebi, Omar Bagci and Oral Celik.

In testimony that cast the role of Turkish right-wing extremists far larger than the picture that emerged in pretrial investigations, Mr. Agca has said during the trial that he shared an apartment in Vienna with Mr. Sener and several other Turks, and that Mr. Sener helped him buy the pistol there that was later used to shoot the Pope.

Abdullah Catli, another extreme right-wing Turk who, according to Mr. Agca, lived in the apartment, testified in September that Mr. Sener traveled

with Mr. Agca from Vienna to Switzerland in April 1981 and learned there that he planned to shoot the Pope.

According to an official who attended the hearings this week, Mr. Sener denied having helped purchase the gun, and said he knew nothing of Mr. Agca's intentions.

Mr. Sener's testimony departs significantly from the account he gave Judge Ilario Martella, the magistrate whose investigation led to the trial. Questioned by Judge Martella, Mr. Sener denied any contact with Mr. Agca. Indeed, the existence of the Vienna apartment and the extensive contacts of Mr. Agca with other Turks like Mr. Sener and Mr. Catli in Western Europe before the assassination attempt are among the most startling results to emerge from the trial's 50 sessions thus far.