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# Former Spy Says He Warned the Vatican Of Assassination Try

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## Name of Pazienza Crops Up At Trial of the Bulgarians In Attempt to Kill Pope

*By a* WALL STREET JOURNAL *Staff Reporter*

With a propensity for being at the scene of impending scandal, Francesco Pazienza recently popped up in the case of the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II in May 1981.

At the continuing trial of the Bulgarian officials in Rome, the judge attempted to quiet the courtroom June 19 by shouting "Patience!", or, in Italian, *"Pazienza!"* At this point, the star prosecution witness—Mehmet Ali Agca, the one-time Turkish neo-Nazi already convicted of shooting the Pope—interjected, "Yes, Francesco Pazienza!" Asked to explain, Mr. Agca made headlines here and in Italy by saying that in 1982, Mr. Pazienza had come to him in prison offering freedom if he would implicate the Bulgarians in the crime—as he has.

Mr. Pazienza, who had left his job with SISMI, the Italian spy agency, in 1981, says he never met Mr. Agca—but was involved in the case in other ways involving the spreading of information on terrorism. (Ironically, he and other former SISMI officers face charges that they illegally used SISMI to try to blame right-wing terrorism on leftists.)

Mr. Pazienza says that as a terrorism expert for SISMI, he and his close associate Alexandre de Marenches, the now-retired head of French intelligence, warned the Vatican of an impending Soviet attack on the pope six months before Mr. Agca actually pulled the trigger. (Mr. de Marenches has told a British newspaper he issued such a warning; he didn't return telephone messages from The Wall Street Journal.)

Second, Mr. Pazienza says, he helped supply information to the person who besides Mr. Agca is perhaps most associated with the issue: Claire Sterling, who reported the case for Bulgarian responsibility in a book and in the New York Times. Ms. Sterling is a friend and sometime journalistic collaborator of Michael Ledeen, who has been associated with Mr. Pazienza, but she angrily denies she ever met Mr. Pazienza. Asked about a lunch together that Mr. Pazienza describes in detail, she calls his statement "a total, absolute lie."

But she does acknowledge two meetings with Mr. Pazienza's boss at SISMI, the late Gen. Giuseppe Santovito. She angrily hangs up the phone without answering after being asked questions about whether she knew Mr. de Marenches. At any rate, she, Mr. Ledeen, and Arnaud de Borchgrave, who used material Mr. Pazienza helped supply, became in 1981 the three leading journalistic exponents of the theory that the Soviet Union is responsible for Western European terrorism. On April 24, 1981, their testimony on that subject opened the hearings of a new U.S. Senate subcommittee on terrorism.

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