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TERRORISM

New Pieces for the Puzzle

More hints that the Pope's attacker had help

Wiretaps of phone calls in which the Turkish gunman mutters that he received the money and says he will now carry out his assignment. Reports that the gunman met with a suspected Bulgarian agent at a small hotel in Rome to plot the murder of Polish Labor Leader Lech Walesa. Word that a key witness recants her testimony and thus threatens the alibi of the Bulgarian, who issues a denial that he aided the Turk in any way.

Investigating the 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II is like putting together a maddeningly complex jigsaw puzzle. The picture remains far from complete, and there is no proof of the growing suspicion that the Soviet Union,

this trio, Agca said, he made final plans to murder the Pope.

Agca's contention that the Bulgarians conspired with him remains unproven. But intriguing details keep emerging that support Agca's account of his activities before the shooting. In a meeting on March 3, 1981, at the Hotel Rütli in Zurich, Musa Serdar Çelebi, a right-wing Turkish activist with links to Çelenk and Bulgaria, also offered Agca \$1.5 million to kill the Pope. Çelebi reportedly was acting as middleman for Çelenk, and may have been either simply renewing his fellow Turk's offer or actually paying Agca the money. Some time in late April or early May, according to Swiss and German



Turkish Businessman Bekir Çelenk denying that he paid Agca to kill the Pope

What to make of calls from Majorca, a meeting in Zurich, and a man named "Morat."

acting through Bulgaria, was behind Turkish Terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca's effort to kill the Pope, or even aware of the attempt. But the latest fragments make the inquiry more tantalizing than ever.

According to published reports of his confession to Italian Judge Ilario Martella last year, Agca contended that during a seven-week stay in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia in 1980, he was offered \$1.5 million to kill the Pope. The man Agca said made the proposition is Bekir Çelenk, a shadowy Turkish businessman whose dealings often brought him to Bulgaria. Çelenk last week again denied that he had ever met Agca, but he admitted that the two had stayed at the same Sofia hotel at the same time in July 1980.

After leaving Sofia in August 1980, Agca traveled freely throughout Western Europe, stopping several times in Rome. He claimed to have met three Bulgarians during these visits, including Sergei Ivanov Antonov, the head of the local office of Bulgaria's Balkan Airlines. With

wiretaps cited in a television documentary broadcast by NBC last week, Agca, staying in Majorca, telephoned Çelebi in Frankfurt. The gunman reportedly said, "I have received the sum we agreed. I'll go to Rome to carry it out." Agca allegedly then called another Turk, Omer Bagci, a restaurant worker in a Zurich suburb, and instructed him to deposit in a baggage room at the railroad station in Milan the Browning 9-mm semiautomatic pistol used in the papal shooting. On May 9, according to Agca, he arrived in Milan from his Majorca sojourn and picked up the gun. Four days later, he was standing in St. Peter's Square waiting for his victim.

Interrogated by Martella in Frankfurt late last year, Çelebi repeatedly denied ever knowing or having contact with Agca. He changed his story when the Italian judge confronted him with telephone records showing calls between himself and Agca. Çelebi then admitted that he did meet with a Turk named "Morat" in Milan and Zurich, and that he gave the

man \$350, but only because he thought Morat was broke and felt sorry for him. Çelebi says that he asked the stranger if he would like to work for Türk Föderation, a right-wing expatriate group in West Germany, but that was all.

Morat, of course, is the man the world now knows as Agca. Though West German authorities do not contest the phone calls between Agca and Çelebi in Europe, they deny that they tapped Agca's telephone conversations with Çelebi or possess records of Agca's calls from Majorca. According to Turkish intelligence officials, Agca was in touch with other Turks in West Germany as well; shortly before the assassination try, Agca telephoned a Turkish-owned import-export firm in Munich named Varda. Though there is no record of who at the company spoke with Agca, one of its employees is Omer Marsen, a Turkish businessman who knows Çelebi and allegedly supplied Agca with a fake Turkish passport.

Agca apparently had other targets in mind as well. TIME has confirmed that the Turk told Italian authorities that in January 1981 he met with Antonov at the Hotel Archimede in Rome to discuss killing Walesa, who was in the Italian capital visiting Pope John Paul II. The attempt did not take place, and Antonov's lawyer contends that Italian authorities have never brought up the allegation. Antonov remains in jail in Rome while Martella continues his investigation. The Bulgarian has denied ever aiding Agca, but last week his defense showed signs of unraveling. TIME has learned that of the eight witnesses produced by Antonov to provide alibis for the Bulgarian's movements immediately before the papal shooting, only one, a middle-aged Italian woman, is not Bulgarian. She has reportedly told Italian authorities that she can no longer swear with certainty that she spotted Antonov at the times and places she originally mentioned.

Meanwhile, Martella's inquiry goes on. Intelligence agencies in both Western Europe and the U.S. are saying nothing about the case until the Italians complete their investigations. But some officials are contending that the CIA has been notably reluctant to pursue it. The State Department denies the charge, and the CIA will not comment, but others point out that the agency's lack of interest may stem from embarrassment at not detecting a possible Soviet connection in the first place. Says Richard Helms, director of the CIA from 1966 to 1973: "The CIA appears to have been outgunned on this. They're miffed about something." In any event, the agency and its West European counterparts probably should have been more curious about a case that raises the question of whether the Soviets would be willing to countenance the murder of the world's most prominent religious leader. —By James B. Kelly. Reported by Ross H. Munro/Washington and Wilton Wynn/Rome