

# French authorities arrest suspected gunman in shooting at *Libération* newspaper offices

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22 November 2013

Abdelhakim Dekhar, 48, was arrested on Wednesday, suspected of having shot and wounded a photographer at the Paris offices of the centre-left daily *Libération* on Tuesday morning. He is being held on suspicion of attempted murder and kidnapping.

Police reportedly arrested him in a semi-comatose state at 7 p.m. in a car in an underground car park in Bois-Colombes near Paris.

Christian Flaesch, the chief of the Judicial Police, said: “On Wednesday, at about 1.30am, the person putting him up saw Abdelhakim Dekhar in the hall of his flats. He told him that he had recognised him on TV and that he no longer wished to have him stay, and Dekhar admitted that he had fired the shots at *Libération* and had told him of his intention to commit suicide.”

This person apparently only went to the police a few hours later, reporting Dekhar’s confession and informing police of his whereabouts.

Police say that Dekhar, now held in a Paris prison, had taken an overdose of barbiturates in a possible suicide attempt. However, by noon on Thursday, public prosecutor François Molins stated that he was fit to be questioned and to be informed of his rights.

Police say that their DNA analyses have established that Dekhar was involved in three other incidents besides the *Libération* shooting. These included the shots fired at the Société Générale bank in the La Défense business district and the hijacking of a car, both after the *Libération* shooting on Tuesday, and an armed incursion into BFM-TV’s Paris offices on Friday. However, they have been unable to find the gun or any of the changes of clothes the suspect was seen wearing on successive video surveillance cameras.

The preliminary information being released about Dekhar is contradictory, raising further questions about

both Dekhar’s alleged motivations in the shooting and how he managed to evade police.

The authorities claim that “nothing at this stage can justify asserting that the gunman acted with political motivations.” However, this seems to contradict excerpts of a letter reportedly prepared by Dekhar before the shootings, and which has been partially released to the press. A police source dismissed them as “gibberish,” and Molins called them “confused.”

However, Molins reportedly declared, “As well as the letter giving instructions for his burial found beside him in the car, the investigators are in possession of a letter given to them by the man who was putting Dekhar up. In this jumbled-up letter, the suspect mentions ‘a fascist plot’, ‘capitalism’, ‘the administration of the suburban council estates’ which he compares to ‘a business for dehumanising people whom big capital finds undesirable,’ accusing the media of participating in the ‘manipulation of the masses’ with ‘journalists paid to spoon-feed citizens with lies.’”

Dekhar allegedly had ties to petty-bourgeois anarchist circles. Police said they had identified him as involved in a shooting rampage against police in Paris by an anarchist couple—Florence Rey, 19, and her philosophy student boyfriend, 22-year-old Audry Maupin—on October 4, 1994.

Dekhar reportedly worked in anarchist circles with Rey and Maupin, who had been members of the “direct action” anti-fascist SCALP (Completely Anti-Le Pen Section, referring to neo-fascist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen). Being older than them, he was suspected of having had political seniority over the couple.

At his trial, he denied all knowledge of them and claimed to be infiltrating anarchist circles on behalf of Algerian intelligence, in order to identify Islamist terrorists.

French media have largely rejected these claims, however, characterising Dekhar as “subject to delusional fantasies that make him pretend he is a spy, tasked with a political mission for the Algerian cause.”

Dekhar was incarcerated for four years of preventive detention and then tried in 1998. He was cleared of charges of providing the weapon with which Maupin killed three policemen in 1994 and of being an accomplice of the couple. He was convicted of the lesser charge of association with criminals but was immediately released, having already served his four-year sentence.

It also remains unclear how someone with Dekhar’s record could escape police surveillance.

Interior Minister Manuel Valls claimed on Thursday morning that police had lost track of Dekhar after his release in 1998, probably because “he had gone abroad.”

However, Dekhar reportedly has lived most of the time since 1998 in Britain, at a home in Ilford, working in a canteen in London and marrying a student in Redbridge in 2000. He often visited France, staying with friends in Paris, where he had been on extended “holiday” since July.



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