

Four dead after attack on Jewish museum in Brussels

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Four people are dead as the result of an attack on the Jewish Museum of Belgium on Saturday afternoon. Three individuals, two of them Israeli citizens and the other a French woman, died on the spot. The fourth, a Belgian museum worker, died in hospital on Sunday.

According to Belgian interior minister Joëlle Milquet, the shooter double-parked his car before entering the museum, in the Sablon district, where he “fired rather quickly, went outside, and left.” A thirty-second video released by Belgian police shows a man wearing a dark cap and a blue jacket entering the building, taking an assault rifle out of a bag, shooting into a room and then walking away.

The gunman first fired his weapon at the Israeli couple, before shooting a French woman employed by the museum. He also fired his assault rifle at the museum worker, leaving him in critical condition. A museum statement explains that the shooter fired upon the couple in the entrance of the facility before approaching the reception area where he gunned down the attendant.

Deputy prosecutor Ine Van Wymersch told reporters that the gunman shot his victims in the face and throat and that he “probably acted alone, was armed, and prepared.” The prosecutor did not provide any evidence for his claim that the gunman was operating on his own.

Van Wymersch called upon the Belgian public to help identify the suspect, who is still at large. A witness who departed the scene shortly after the shooting was apprehended by law enforcement, but was quickly released. Witnesses at the scene reportedly were able to identify the license plate of the shooter’s car, and Belgian authorities have begun a manhunt for the suspect.

Various Belgian, European and Israeli officials

denounced the attack as a sign of growing anti-Semitism in Europe. Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo said all Belgians were “united and show solidarity in the face of this odious attack on a Jewish cultural site.” José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, denounced the assault as “an attack on European values which we cannot tolerate.” Pope Francis told the media that he was saddened by this “brutal” and “criminal attack of anti-Semitic hatred.” In a statement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed the “act of murder” was “the result of constant incitement against Jews and their state.”

According to the *New York Times*, “Maurice Sosnowski, a leader of Belgium’s Jewish community, described Saturday’s shooting as the first act of anti-Semitic terrorism in the Belgian capital since World War II, and compared it to a 2012 shooting that killed four people at a Jewish school in the French city of Toulouse.”

The shooting took place in the midst of the European elections, during which far-right elements made gains. The US and European powers have recently facilitated the taking of power in Ukraine by a political coalition including fascistic and anti-Semitic elements.

The Brussels shooting may well have been the product of anti-Jewish sentiment. However, rumors have circulated in the media in recent days, including in the Israeli media, that the couple from Tel Aviv who were victims of the shooting, Emmanuel and Mira Riva, were perhaps something more than tourists and that their killing may have been a “targeted assassination.”

CNN reported Tuesday, “There has been media speculation in the past several days in Israel and Belgium that the couple had ties to Israeli intelligence agencies.”

Writing in *Haaretz* May 27, Amir Oren asked in his headline, “Was shooting anti-Semitism or part of spy games?” Oren commented, “[I]t’s possible that the murder in Brussels was not a hate crime or an anti-Semitic attack, but a targeted assault. This possibility is strengthened by the video of the killer’s actions. He was caught by the cameras looking like a professional, as if this was a settling of scores.” The *Guardian* too noted, “Experts in Israel and elsewhere have said the manner of the killings suggested planning and execution by a trained specialist.

The British newspaper reported on Tuesday, “Israeli media reports said the Rivas were accountants formerly in government service. Emmanuel Riva worked for an official agency called Nativ, which dealt with the emigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union. Mira Riva was employed by the prime minister’s office—often a euphemism for the Mossad and Shin Bet secret services. Both had been posted to Israel’s embassy in Berlin.” (Reuters pointed out, “Along with Israel’s foreign intelligence agency, Mossad, and its domestic security equivalent, Shin Bet, the Nativ agency was under the authority of the prime minister’s office.”)

Oren further noted in *Haaretz*, “Israel has double representation in Brussels—its embassy for Belgium, and its embassy to the European Union and NATO. In recent years, Brussels has been one of the most important postings in the foreign service, second only to Washington, and some of Israel’s top diplomats—including Ephraim Halevy (before he was appointed Mossad head)—were posted there.”



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