

Belgium: terror trial begins of Saleh Abdeslam, “Europe’s most wanted man”

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The trial of the sole survivor of the team that carried out the 13 November 2015 attacks in Paris, Saleh Abdeslam, opened Monday in Belgium. Saleh Abdeslam and co-defendant Sofiane Ayari face up to 40 years in jail for shooting at policemen during a search shortly before Abdeslam’s arrest on 18 March 2016 in Brussels. Abdeslam would then face trial in France over the November 13, 2015 attacks, though the date of the trial has not been fixed. Ayari is also a suspect in the attacks, and the French courts have asked for his extradition.

From the outset, these trials are essentially cover-ups, with the guilty parties hiding under the cloak of the accusers. US and European intelligence services provided cover and official protection to the Islamist networks of which Abdeslam was a part, which waged a bloody NATO proxy war in Syria before organizing terror attacks across Europe. But these trials are passing over their role in the attacks. Abdeslam and Ayari are alone in the defendants’ box, but most of the heads of state of Europe deserve to be there as well.

The European Union’s (EU) “war on terror,” with its reactionary security build-up, is an illegitimate policy founded on political lies. The ruling class exploited these attacks to impose states of emergency or large-scale police operations across Europe, repress mass opposition to France’s anti-worker labor law, and carry out mass surveillance of the population—as supposedly the only way to deal with the terror threat.

The issues involved in the Abdeslam trial are explosive, and the trial was organized extremely slowly and under enormous pressure. It began two years after the arrest of Abdeslam, who now suffers from psychological disorders after having been held in solitary confinement in France’s Fleury-Mérogis prison.

On Monday, Abdeslam initially refused to reply to questions. He told the court, “I do not fear you, I do not fear your allies, associates, I place my trust in Allah and that is all, I have nothing to add.” Later, he declared, “My silence does not make me guilty or a criminal. There is tangible and scientific evidence in my file, I would like to be judged on that.”

Given Abdeslam’s silence, the Tuesday session was canceled and the trial may end as early as today, according to Luc Hennart, the president of the lower-level court in Brussels: “It cannot be ruled out that the proceedings will go more quickly than we had planned. Everything will depend on the attitude of the accused; if they decide to exercise their right to silence, clearly the proceedings will go more quickly than if they express themselves.”

Total silence still reigns on the role of the European intelligence services, though it can be extensively documented based on reports in the mass media. A few days after Abdeslam’s arrest, remarkable revelations had already emerged on the inexplicable failures of the Belgian and allied services. They involved both the March 22, 2016 attacks in Brussels that killed 31 and wounded 270, and the role of Abdeslam in the November 13 attacks in Paris.

According to Gilbert Dupont’s article in *La Dernière Heure-Les Sports*, which was cited by other francophone dailies, elements in the Belgian police were aware of where Abdeslam—who the media was then universally calling “Europe’s most wanted man”—was hiding in the Brussels area.

Dupont wrote, “According to our sources, a Malines policeman had cited, since 7 December 2015, in a confidential report to the anti-terror section of the federal judicial police in Brussels, the address of 79, rue des Quatre Vents in Molenbeek, where Saleh

Abdeslam was found on Friday. The confidential report (in official jargon a RIR, *Rapport Informatief Rapport*) was not passed on. It was held and stayed stuck for three months in the Malines police department.”

The *Comité P*, the Belgian police’s oversight committee, was forced to open an investigation of this failure, but it produced nothing. It is still unknown where the report was blocked and how far it went up the chain of command. Malines police have denied having blocked or even seen the report.

As unidentified sections of the Belgian police force were hiding Abdeslam, other policemen arrived on March 15, 2016 to an apartment in the Forest neighborhood in Brussels to carry out searches. They were greeted with gunshots. Police then began tracking the cell phones of two men who had fled the building during the attacks, one of whom turned out to be Abdeslam. Remarkably, Abdeslam did not get rid of either his telephone or his SIM card during or after the encounter with police, thus allowing police to follow and capture him.

For fourth months since the November 15 attacks, however, a large terror network had been allowed to prepare the Brussels attacks of March 22, 2016—three days after Abdeslam’s arrest. Russian, Turkish and Israeli intelligence had identified members of those networks and warned Belgian and allied intelligence agencies that Brussels’ subway and Zaventem airport were targets. Yet the network was still free, shortly after the arrest of “Europe’s most wanted man,” to launch its attack.

The network had benefited from a new series of inexplicable failures by police. Belgian liaison officers in Turkey supposedly failed to check their email to discover that Turkey had expelled Ibrahim El Bakraoui to Europe on suspicion of terrorism in July 2015. Remarkably, when they did in fact notify their superiors in the Brussels judicial police, they received no response and no decision was taken to follow El Bakraoui.

At the time, the WSWS wrote, “It is clear that the individuals who carried out the March 22 bombings and the November 13 and Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris are part of a broader group of people who have been allowed to freely travel to and from the Middle East. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the ease with which these forces permeate national borders

and conduct operations is that there are protocols in place to ease their passage and lower any red flags. They operate under a veil of official protection.”

What little has emerged from official investigations confirmed this analysis. It is now known that, well before the November 13 attacks, Abdeslam was well known to European authorities, who had documented evidence of his links to terrorist networks. Turkish authorities had arrested him in January 2015, preventing him from traveling to Syria and deporting him to Belgium, after which Belgian intelligence identified him as a threat.

The Belgian police committee’s report on intelligence failures claimed that anti-terrorist services lost Abdeslam’s GSM card and failed to look at his USB key after confiscating them from Abdeslam in February 2015, fully nine months before the Paris attacks. According to *La Dernière Heure*, “Indeed, there were on that phone, at that time in February 2015, phone numbers of people known today for being implicated in the Paris and Brussels attacks.”

This underscores that, for many years, the framework on which Paris, Brussels and their European allies based and justified their austerity and law-and-order measures was based on political lies.



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