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Man killed in Belgian raid on suspected far-right extremists

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BRUSSELS (AP) — Anti-terror raids targeting a group of suspected far-right extremists left one person dead in Belgium after police exchanged gunfire with a man at one location Wednesday, justice officials said.

The federal prosecutor's office said a dozen searches were carried out in seven different municipalities, including Antwerp and Ghent, as part of an investigation into "the preparation of a terrorist attack and the violation of the legislation on weapons."

The Antwerp prosecutor's office opened an investigation into the circumstances of the man's death.

The office said in a statement that the shooting occurred when special units of the federal police raided the home of a 36-year-old man, who was hit by a police bullet. Emergency services intervened but the man died of his injuries at the scene.

The office initially told the AP that the man opened fire on police when they tried to enter his home. Prosecutors later said the investigation would determine who shot first.

Federal prosecutors said the searches in the Antwerp region resulted in the seizure of a large number of weapons and ammunition.

According to Belgian broadcaster VRT, the man who was shot dead was a gold and silver trader who collected weapons and military items. Belgian public broadcaster RTBF said he had expressed on social media his interest in far-right theories and opposition to the Belgian government's measures during the coronavirus pandemic.

He also criticized the strategy of the United States, NATO and Europe in dealing with Russia.