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EUROPE

2 Charged With Aiding Brussels Attacks Suspect Appear in London Court

By KIMIKO DE FREYTAS-TAMURA APRIL 29, 2016

LONDON — Two men living in Birmingham, England, appeared on Friday in court after being charged with supplying money to Mohamed Abrini, the “man in the hat” who confessed to having accompanied two suicide bombers to Brussels Airport last month.

The accusations, if confirmed, would represent the first time the authorities have established a connection between Britain and the planners of the recent attacks in Brussels and Paris by Islamic State extremists.

The two men, Mohammed Ali Ahmed, 26, a British citizen, and Zakaria Boufassil, 26, a Belgian, are accused under British antiterrorism laws of meeting Mr. Abrini and handing him 3,000 pounds, or about \$4,370, in cash in a park in Birmingham in July, according to prosecutors.

According to London court documents, the money was withdrawn by Mr. Ahmed from a British bank account belonging to Anwar Haddouchi, a Belgian

associate who prosecutors say is fighting in Syria for the Islamic State.

In addition to his apparent involvement in the Brussels attacks, Mr. Abrini is suspected of providing logistical help for the men who carried out the Nov. 13 attacks in and around Paris, which killed 130 people.

He is thought to have driven at least one of the attackers, Salah Abdeslam, to Paris two days before the assault. Mr. Abdeslam is believed to be the sole surviving participant involved in the attacks, and he is in custody in France after being extradited from Belgium this week.

Mr. Ahmed and Mr. Boufassil were arrested with three other people in Britain two weeks ago, with the cooperation of the Belgian and French authorities.

Soumaya Boufassil, 29, Mr. Boufassil's sister and a mother of two young children, also appeared in court in London on Friday. She is accused of raising money for a terrorist organization and of trying to travel to Syria to join her husband, who is fighting with Islamic State militants.

The two others who were arrested with them on April 15 have been freed on bail.

Mr. Ahmed and Mr. Boufassil are also suspected of speaking by telephone with Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who is believed to have organized the Paris attacks and was killed five days later in a shootout with the police.

According to details of the prosecution's case, citing an interview with the Belgian police, Mr. Abaaoud asked Mr. Abrini in Raqqa, Syria, an Islamic State stronghold, to travel to Birmingham to collect money.

Mr. Abrini then changed the money into an unspecified currency, the prosecution said, and flew to Paris from Birmingham.

He was arrested this month in Brussels after a nearly five-month

manhunt, and he was charged with participation in the activities of a terrorist group and terrorist murder.

While in custody there, he confessed to investigators that he was the third suspect involved in the attacks at Brussels Airport, which killed 15 people and the two bombers.

The latest revelations highlight what appears to be an extensive network of Islamic State operatives in Europe. Mr. Abaaoud, the coordinator of the attacks, had managed to travel to England despite being named in an international arrest warrant in connection with a foiled plot in Belgium in early 2015.

Mr. Ahmed, Mr. Boufassil and Ms. Boufassil will remain in custody at least until they appear at the Central Criminal Court in London on May 13.

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