

## When the Belgian Verviers cell was planning an attack in an airport

THE WORLD | 23/03/2016 at 8:31 • Updated 23.03.2016 at 14h52 | By Soren Seelow (/journaliste/soren-seelow/) (/journaliste/soren-seelow/)



A Verviers 16 January 2015. NICOLAS LAMBERT / AFP

An attack at an airport. Past the shock and horror of mangled bodies, the target of the first attack that hit Brussels, Tuesday, March 22 at 8 am, woke up slumbering a few ghosts in the closets of [terrorism](#) Belgian. January 15, 2015, a cell about to [commit](#) a wave of attacks in [Belgium](#) had been partially dismantled in Verviers, in the province of Liège. According to information gathered by *The World*, this network, led by Abdelhamid Abaaoud, future coordinator of the attacks of [Paris](#), already planning to [hit](#) an airport.

A week after the killing of 7 January 2015 in the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*, Belgium discovers in amazement that a [project](#) terrorist large scale was preparing on its soil. On 15 January, the [Police](#) Federal leads a dozen operations across the country. Two suspects, originating Molenbeek, are killed after [having](#) opened fire on police at a house in Verviers. A third is apprehended. Abdelhamid Abaaoud will boast a few months later, in the columns of propaganda magazine of the [Islamic State](#) *Dabiq*, having escaped the dragnet.

In the following days, sixteen suspects will be arrested. One of them, Omar Damache, an Algerian of 33 years, was arrested on January 17 in an Athens apartment in the company of some Walid Hamam, a French released due to misidentification and which remains to this day found. Omar Damache appears as *"logistical relay Verviers commando and support for Abdelhamid Abaaoud on the supervision and organization of the attack to perpetrate"* according to a note from the Directorate General of Internal Security (RPS).

### The sequence of ideas

In this apartment, investigators seized photographs of Abdelhamid Abaaoud using a computer *"gray"*. This computer will be found in a second apartment Athens, raided a few days later. On his hard drive, the police get hold of handwritten notes representing explosive devices diagrams and plans of attack, *"especially in an airport"*. A [method](#) of operation corresponding in every respect to Tuesday's suicide bombing in Zaventem airport.

Accident of [history](#), the Belgian federal prosecutor requested Monday, March 21, the day before the bombings Brussels, referral to the court of the sixteen people arrested in this case. [Marwan El-Bali](#), the suspect arrested in Verviers on 15 January Souhaib El-Abdi, a Belgian arrested a few days later in [France](#), a Najmi Arshad Mahmoud Omar Damache and Algeria are among the key in question.

The services [survey](#) Belgian might have thought for a time that the cell Verviers belonged to history. The reappearance of Abdelhamid Abaaoud as a major figure of the Paris attacks reminded all European intelligence services that the commandos had El Suite in [ideas](#).

### The network dynamics

It is indeed from [Greece](#) Abdelhamid Abaaoud is suspected of plotting the attacks of 13 November. His death, in the assault against the RAID apartment [Saint-Denis](#) where he had found refuge on November 18, has perhaps not enough to [decapitate](#) the cell Verviers. According to the Flemish newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad*, nine alleged members of the network remain at large: a Dutchman, five French, one Moroccan and two Belgians, against whom an arrest warrant [International](#) issued.

There is no evidence at this stage of the investigation to say that these attacks are linked to the cell Verviers. Countless connections are however emerged between this and the attacks in Paris ten months later, signs of the permanence of the dynamics of this network. *"The investigations are underway , said a source close to the investigation. All the slopes are open. The assumption Verviers is the source folder of Paris bombings and Brussels is one. "*

The Belgian Federal Prosecutor announced that El Bakraoui brothers had been identified through their fingerprints, as two suicide bombers who participated in the Brussels attacks Khalid was at the Maelbeek Metro Station, while Ibrahim was to airport. Both were already sought as part of the investigation into the attacks of Paris and Saint-Denis, from the search of an apartment - in which Salah Abdeslam stayed - which veered to the shooting on March 15 in Forest , a Brussels commune.

Reportedly, investigators are trying to [find out](#) if Laachraoui Najim, a suspected coordinators and a Display the attacks in Paris and Saint-Denis, is also an attacker to Brussels airport.

