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EUROPE

# Ninth Person Is Arrested in Belgium Over Paris Attacks

By **SEWELL CHAN** DEC. 24, 2015

LONDON — The investigation into the extensive involvement of Belgians in the Paris terrorist attacks widened on Thursday with news that a 30-year-old Belgian man had been arrested on terrorism charges.

After hearing weeks of withering criticism of Belgium's government, the king appealed for unity on Thursday, while also warning that there would be "zero tolerance" of extremist preachers. At least 500 Belgians are believed to be fighting alongside Islamic State militants in Iraq or Syria — the most, as a proportion of the population, of any country in the European Union.

The man facing terrorism charges, identified only as Abdoullah C., was detained on Tuesday just outside the Molenbeek neighborhood of Brussels, where many of the attackers lived or had ties.

An investigative judge issued an arrest warrant for involvement with "terrorist murders and participation in the activities of a terrorist organization," according to the federal prosecutor's office in Brussels. Officials said they had not announced the arrest immediately to avoid tipping off

possible accomplices.

Abdoullah C. is the ninth man to face criminal charges in Belgium in connection with the Nov. 13 attacks, which killed 130 people.

In addition, a global manhunt continues for Salah Abdeslam, 26, a Belgian-born Frenchman believed to be the only direct participant in the attack who is still alive, and Mohamed Abrini, 30, who was seen on video driving with Mr. Abdeslam two days before the attacks.

The Paris attacks prompted intense scrutiny of ineffective and convoluted governance in Belgium, where a vast majority of the attackers had ties.

In his annual Christmas message, which was prerecorded but broadcast on Thursday, King Philippe offered exceptionally blunt remarks.

“We continue, unfortunately, to be marked by the dramatic attacks perpetrated in Paris, and realize the dangers that continue to weigh on us,” said the king, who as a constitutional monarch is required to stay above politics but who serves as the symbol of the nation.

Philippe said that the Belgian authorities had “reacted with calm, speed and determination” to the terrorist threats, but he added, “The recent events proved how important it is to invest in justice, the police, the army and intelligence services.”

He also appealed for tolerance, saying that a large majority of Belgians of immigrant backgrounds “share the values of our country,” and that “they are the sons and daughters of this country.”

He continued: “It seems important to me to return to the foundation of our society, to what we most wish to hold on to: our values and the rules of coexistence. This implies that we teach our children to respect different religions and philosophical convictions. What they all share is the desire to give meaning to life, to respect others and to be open toward them. Respecting

these common rules also implies zero tolerance toward hate speech. It means fighting, day after day, all forms of stigmatization and segregation, and helping people who are drawn to fanatical indoctrination to resist.”

Abdoullah C. appears to have been one of them. He is “suspected to have had several contacts” with Hasna Aitboulahcen, a 26-year-old cousin of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, 28, the Belgian believed to have been the chief planner of the attacks, according to the prosecutor’s office.

Ms. Aitboulahcen, Mr. Abaaoud and another man were killed on Nov. 18, when French special police units stormed an apartment in the northern Paris suburb of St.-Denis, not far from the stadium where three attackers blew themselves up on Nov. 13.

Abdoullah C. had contacts with Ms. Aitboulahcen in the period “between the terrorist attacks and the events in St.-Denis,” the prosecutor’s office said.

A pretrial hearing was to be held on Thursday to decide whether to continue Abdoullah C.’s detention, but it was rescheduled for Jan. 7 after his lawyers asked for more time to prepare their case.

The other eight people facing criminal charges in Belgium are:

- Mohamed Amri and Hamza Attou, who are accused of being Mr. Abdeslam’s getaway drivers;

- Abraimi Lazez and Ali Oulkadi, who are accused of helping Mr. Abdeslam after the attacks;

- Abdellah Chouaa, who according to the French newsmagazine Le Point is the son of a well-known radical preacher in Brussels and who is suspected of being an associate of Mr. Abdeslam’s;

- Mohamed Bakkali, who lived at a house in the Belgian town of Auvelais that may have been used as a hide-out;

■ And two men, identified only as Samir Z. and Pierre N., who are believed to have been friends of Bilal Hadfi, one of the attackers.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Charles Michel announced overhauls of the military and the police. The government will spend 9.2 billion euros, about \$10.1 billion, to replace the country's aging F-16 fighter jets and buy two new warships, while the national police force will be restructured to send 2,500 more uniformed officers into the field and to focus their efforts around terrorism and major crimes.

Milan Schreuer contributed reporting from Paris.

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