

TURKISH NATIONALISTS ACCUSED OF KILLING BISHOP

Posted on October 16, 2010 by Keghart



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Vatican City - [The Associated Press](#), 15 October 2010

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Monsignor Luigi Padovese, the Vatican's apostolic vicar in Anatolia, was stabbed to death, allegedly by his driver, outside his home in Iskenderun on June 3, a day before he was to leave for Greek Cyprus to meet Pope Benedict XVI.

The slaying shocked the Turkish church and cast a cloud over Benedict's visit. It was the latest in a string of attacks in recent years on Christians in Turkey, where Christians make up less than 1 percent of the 70 million population.

Turkish officials have insisted the slaying was personal and not religious or politically motivated, and the driver's lawyer has said the suspect had mental problems.

But the head of Turkey's bishops' conference, Monsignor Ruggero Francheschini, told a Vatican meeting Thursday that Padovese was the victim of "premeditated murder" by the same forces that Padovese had denounced for killing a priest in 2006 and three Christians in 2007.

In speech to bishops gathered for a meeting about the plight of Christians in the Middle East, Francheschini said Padovese's killing was part of a "dark plot of complicity between ultra-nationalists and religious fanatics, experts in schemes of tension."

The driver, Murat Altun, was arrested soon after the slaying. His lawyer, Cihan Onal, said Friday that prosecutors in Iskenderun are still investigating the case and that it was not clear when they would issue an indictment.

While some church officials and diplomats have quietly said the murder seemed suspect, Francheschini's comments were unusual in their bluntness. He said he wanted to set the record straight to erase the "intolerable slander circulated by the same organizers of the crime."

