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## Turkey: an attack on a Catholic church in Istanbul leaves one dead. Monsignor Bizzeti: “Anti-Christian attack”

This morning, 28 January, the Santa Maria Church in Sariyer, in the suburb of Büyükdere, in Istanbul, was attacked when two armed men entered during the mass and fired shots. One of the faithful present reacted, protested and was killed. An act of courage that probably cost him his life. The victim, 52 years old, had been attending the church for several months and was known to have mental health problems. The investigation, coordinated by three prosecutors, will shed light on the case. The possibility of an execution has not been ruled out. In a related development, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said 'necessary measures' had been taken to hunt down the killers. Erdogan spoke by telephone with local officials and the priest of the church. In the evening, police announced the arrest of the two alleged killers, a Chechen with a Russian passport and a Tajik. According to Turkey's interior minister, Ali Yerlikaya, both were linked to ISIS.

**Anti-Christian motive.** "I have seen the video of the attack and I think I can say that it is an anti-Christian attack, with a religious matrix," Monsignor **Paolo Bizzeti**, Apostolic Vicar of Anatolia, told Sir. "In order to provide complete clarity, the perpetrators must be brought to justice, otherwise it will be difficult to identify the attack with greater precision". For Msgr. Bizzeti, it is not an attack against "an Italian church. It is Italian because it was made by Italians, like most of the churches in Istanbul. It is a church, specifically, officiated by the Conventual Franciscan fathers. It is not the church of Italians, or at least no more than others. Therefore, more than an attack on an Italian church, underlines the prelate, "it is an attack against the Christian minority, one of the many present in Turkey and the Middle East. In Turkey, Christians have been the number one target for decades. Think, for example, of Father Andrea Santoro, killed in Trebizond on 5 February 2006, while he was praying in church, and of Bishop Luigi Padovese, killed on 3 June 2010, in Iskenderun, by his driver who confessed to the killing'.

“Minorities must find their own spaces of autonomy and protection. They must not be a place where violence is unleashed.”

**Shedding light.** "Our community is literally shocked - Mgr **Massimiliano Palinuro**, Apostolic Vicar of Istanbul, told Vatican News - This is a time of prayer, of solidarity with the Catholic community of Büyükdere, and of course a time of prayer for the person who died. As a Christian community, we ask the authorities for clarity, for truth and for justice for this person who has lost his life. And at the same time," adds Mgr Palinuro,

we ask for greater security, to guarantee the safety of the members of the Christian communities

who persevere in the faith and bravely undertake sometimes very long journeys to participate in the Eucharistic celebration". At the end of the Angelus, the Community of St Mary in Sariyer received the sympathy of Pope Francis. The Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, as well as the EU and the Council of Europe, expressed their strong condemnation: "An attack on a place of worship is unacceptable," said the Secretary General of the Strasbourg-based international organisation, Marija Pejcinovic Buric, expressing her thoughts "to the victims and their families, and to the Turkish authorities who are dealing with the situation".

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**The claim of responsibility.** Isis claimed responsibility for the attack via its Amaq agency in the evening: 'Two Islamic State militants attacked a Christian church while the infidels were performing their rituals'. If confirmed, this would be the first Islamic State attack in Turkey since New Year's Eve 2017.

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