

LONGFORM

Secrets and Crimes

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By Jay Cheshes | April 22, 1999

A twin-engine Aerocommander dipped from the sky above Lantana's municipal airport. Caught in a gust the plane hovered above the tarmac before screeching to earth. Tearing past Pipers and Cessnas, ultralights and helicopters, the six-seater slowed to a halt at the mouth of an overstuffed hangar, propellers whirring. Jean-François Buslik stepped from the cockpit, headphones in hand, his ash gray Bill Clinton pompadour hair spray-fresh. There was a lilt in his stride, a crease in his khaki shorts, a smile beneath his upturned nose. He looked smug and self-satisfied -- like a man who'd gotten away with murder.

A reporter approached him. "You're a nuisance," he said, brushing off an inquiry in a halting French accent. "Get away from me. I don't intend to talk to you." He slammed the glass door leading into Kemper Aviation, where until last year he was the chief flight instructor, and disappeared into a conference room. The reporter, he hoped, would get the message and scam.

This encounter took place in late March, when Buslik, who for the longest time seemed a man beyond the law, was oblivious to legal machinations taking shape. In less than a month, United States Marshals, reacting in part to a New Times investigation begun in February, would swarm his home in North Palm Beach, placing him under arrest for murder and shattering the veneer of respectability he'd spent much of the last decade building in South Florida.

Before his arrest last Thursday, Buslik, whom many at the tiny jetless airport at Lantana describe as the best pilot to scream up and down the tarmac, was a man without a past. An intensely private and enigmatic figure, he had been lurking around the airport since the late '80s, teaching hundreds how to fly and shuttling cargo and wealthy weekenders to and from the Bahamas. As a flight instructor, he was a lure for Europeans looking for a quick and inexpensive route to flight readiness and a valuable resource for young pilots, many of whom described him as a "walking bible on aviation." He was also, according to many at the airport, "cold," "cocky," "unfriendly," and a "real jerk."

Although he earned not much more than pilots 15 to 20 years his junior, the 46-year-old Buslik never really seemed strapped for cash. With his expertise and many hours in the sky, he could easily have qualified for far more lucrative positions flying for the big airlines. He never tried for them, though.

"I just figured his wife had money or he had family funds," says Kathy Kemper, owner of Kemper Aviation, who worked with Buslik for many years but says she knows next to nothing about the man. Neither Kemper nor any of a half-dozen pilots interviewed at the airport ever went for a drink or a meal with Buslik. None of them ever played cards or barbecued steaks at the quarter-million-dollar waterfront home in North Palm Beach that he shared with a former flight student, now his wife, Diane Somerville, and her young daughter. None ever sailed on the 22- or 54-foot sailboats moored behind the house or went for a spin in the \$80,000 Cessna 210 with which he was always tinkering at the airport. "He kept to himself, and I have never been one to be nosy," says Kemper. "He didn't let anybody get close to him," adds Doug Beggs, another pilot. "He was pretty much all business."

There is a very good reason why Buslik, who is licensed in Florida to carry a concealed weapon and often carried one at the airport, was always so reticent to share the details of his life. Tales of murder and grand larceny can be real conversation killers, even if they occurred in a distant place many years ago.

The key to the mystery Jean-François Buslik kept hidden from all who knew him in South Florida lies 5000 miles away in Belgium, in the heart of Europe, where four years ago he was found guilty of a murder committed 13 years earlier and sentenced to death. Buslik was not in court to mount a defense then. Instead he was in South Florida, land of sunshine and second chances, striving for anonymity, trying to disappear. Until last January, when Raf Sauviller, a magazine journalist, found Buslik's name and address on the Internet and published it in Belgium, he seemed to be succeeding in his quest to vanish in South Florida. Before his arrest the Belgian judiciary, which, contrary to press reports, had known of his whereabouts for years, hadn't bothered him in more than a decade, and until recently the Belgian press seemed largely to have forgotten about him.

Buslik was never really hiding, and Belgian authorities never really looked for him. He got married, opened businesses, got a driver's license and a concealed weapons permit, all under his real name. It wasn't until 1997 that the man known for 45 years as Jean-Francois Buslik ceased to exist. Legally adopting his wife's last name, he became Jean-Francois Somerville, although everyone knew him as Gene Buslik. For more than a decade, the fugitive whose name has appeared in more than a dozen books published in Belgium was hiding in plain sight. He should have been extradited long ago but instead found refuge not in some Third World banana republic but right here in the United States of America.

Today, after four years of allowing Buslik to remain free, the Belgian and American governments are engaged in artificial hand-wringing, declaring Buslik's capture a victory of international law-enforcement cooperation. Why, then, did it take so long to arrest him? A source at the American Embassy in Brussels claims that officially the embassy does not know why the Belgian government is seeking Buslik's extradition at this time. The official, however, speculated that the action might have been prompted by the publication of Buslik's U.S. address in a Belgian magazine and subsequent inquiries by a New Times reporter, who discovered that Buslik is suspected of having been involved in more than just one murder in his native country.

Under the extradition treaty between the U.S. and Belgium, Buslik has long been extraditable. Many blame Belgian judicial bungling for his years of freedom. The country's courts and law-enforcement agencies are notoriously disorganized, as was so publicly exposed three years ago when a pedophile murder scandal shook the country and threatened to topple its government. Belgium is home to 589 local police departments, two national police organizations (the judicial police and the Gendarmerie), and an internal security agency (the Surete). None of these groups communicates well with another. (The child-killer, Marc Dutroux, who had two young girls chained up in his basement and four others buried in his yard, slipped through police hands on more than one occasion because of lack of communication.) Add to that widespread corruption and a country intensely divided along French and Flemish language lines, and you have a real recipe for bureaucratic disaster. In the case of Jean-Francois Buslik, even the country's own Ministry of Justice is unable to explain his years of freedom.

"It's very strange, but the attorney general of Brussels never issued an arrest warrant," said Eric Verbert of the extradition division of the Belgian Ministry of Justice weeks before a provisional request for extradition reached that office. Contacted a few days after Buslik's arrest, Attorney General Pierre Morlet, the man who prosecuted Buslik's case four years ago, said the extradition delay was the result of an "administrative error." "We presumed he was in Florida, but we never had precise information about his whereabouts," he said. "We took action after police discovered his address on the Internet." That action, which led to his arrest on April 15, means that a man who nearly got away with a murder going back 17 years will finally return home to face his accusers.

The crime for which Buslik was sentenced to death was set in motion on the afternoon of October 25, 1982, when an invoice arrived by telex from Zurich to the security office of Sabena, the Belgian national airline. The printout listed the contents of a shipment scheduled to arrive at Brussels International Airport the following evening. Included on the list were 950 Krugerrands, 50 Italian gold coins, 50 pounds of gold bullion, 4.5 pounds of industrial diamonds, a large stack of cash, and a dozen Cartier watches. The total value: more than \$4.5 million. Upon arrival the precious Swiss cargo was to be transported to a high-security safe at the edge of the airport. It would never reach its destination.

A 25-year-old security guard and recent first-time father named Frances Zwarts was assigned to accompany the shipment as part of his regular rounds. On the evening of October 26, he dashed to a flight from Moscow to grab a diplomatic pouch from the Belgian Embassy in the Soviet Union, then greeted the plane from Zurich as scheduled. He loaded the valuables from the cargo hold into a blue Sabena Volkswagen and set off across the tarmac toward the secure warehouse at Brucargo.

The route he followed passes under an overpass where two Sabena employees later described seeing a roadblock and three uniformed men with machine guns. The pair of witnesses told investigators they assumed the men, who waved them on, were police officers. So, presumably, did Zwarts. His Volkswagen was found abandoned the following day. It was empty except for his 9 mm handgun and the broken wax seal from the diplomatic pouch. That same day street cleaners found by the side of the road a banged-up black suitcase containing a pistol, a machine gun, and a number of wigs. Zwarts was never seen again. Although his body has never been found, he is presumed to be dead.

Six years later, on December 15, 1988, a trio of Belgian investigators flew into Miami International Airport. Contacted through his lawyer in Belgium, Jean-Francois Buslik had agreed to meet with the men to answer questions about the airport heist. He drove to the hotel where they were staying, the Sheraton Brickell in Miami. "We didn't know where he lived, and he didn't want us to know," recalls Jean-Pierre Doraene, then an investigator with the judicial police. Over the next four days, Doraene and two others grilled Buslik about the jumble of evidence linking him and two associates to the robbery and the murder of Zwarts. They showed him a photo they had recovered during a search of his home in suburban Brussels. It pictured an old girlfriend done up for New Year's Eve festivities. Clearly visible on her wrist was a Cartier watch later identified by an expert as being one of only half a dozen like it in the world. Buslik claimed the watch was a fake he had bought for his girlfriend. "He denied everything," says Doraene. "He said he had nothing to do with the robbery, that he left the country because he was sick of being harassed by the police.... His answers weren't very convincing."

A few months before their trip to South Florida, the investigators had scoured Buslik's home and business in Belgium. They found guns without serial numbers, pictures of jewels, precision machines for jewelry, and computer equipment. In the basement of his house, they found shell casings and what looked like bullet holes in the walls. In the kitchen was a safe-deposit box containing a stamp collection, 13 passports, and Iranian and Israeli money. They contacted Graziella Davilla, the girlfriend in the picture, who said that, a few days before New Year's Eve in 1984, Buslik had pulled from his basement a plastic bag containing four Cartier watches and had told her to choose one. "I thought it strange that he would keep such valuables in the basement when I knew he had a safe in the kitchen," she said.

Also strange was the rash of large purchases that preceded Buslik's hasty departure from Belgium in 1987. The investigators discovered that he had paid cash for a small fixer-upper of a house near London and then sold the property, using the money to buy a 54-foot sailboat through an offshore shell company in the Channel Island of Guernsey. (That boat later wound up docked behind his house in North Palm Beach.) Michele Ergot, another girlfriend, told police she had turned down an invitation from Buslik to sail around the world with him. Years later in South Florida, Buslik would tell a former flight student of his desire to cruise the high seas. "He loved that boat," said the former student, who asked not to be identified. "He said as soon as his father died, he would sell everything

and head to sea for two or three years." Buslik's father, who lived with his son in South Florida in the last years of his life, died in 1994. By that time, though, Buslik had taken on new responsibilities: Diane Somerville and her daughter.

Despite his informal 1988 not-guilty plea from afar, the evidence against Buslik was enough to convince prosecutors to charge him with murder, which in 1995, 13 years after the airport robbery, led a panel of judges to find him guilty and sentence him to death. Until recently the sentence -- he received the maximum penalty because of his absence -- brought with it no arrest warrant and no request for extradition. Robert Beijer and Madani Bouhouche, two former police officers implicated with Buslik in the crime, were in the country to face trial; they received lesser sentences of 14 and 20 years respectively. The death penalty has since been abolished in Belgium, and if he is successfully extradited in the coming months, Buslik will likely receive a reduced sentence after being retried on the same charges.

Although a considerable fortune was snatched at the Brussels airport in 1982, the robbery is not the reason that Buslik and his coconspirators received such public notoriety in Belgium. Their media status, at one time on the level of O.J. Simpson or Timothy McVeigh, resulted from their suspected connection to 28 unsolved murders that took place around Brussels in the mid-'80s.

Belgium, a sleepy, rain-drenched country best known outside its borders for its waffles, French fries, and monk-brewed beer, was once one of the most volatile countries in Western Europe. At the height of the Cold War, Brussels, the seat of NATO and of the European Community, was second only to Berlin as a chessboard of covert activity in Europe. The place was crawling with spooks of all persuasions -- KGB, CIA, Mossad -- and with arms dealers, drug traffickers, terrorist groups (of the extreme right and left), and organized crime figures. In the '80s and early '90s, the country exploded with violence, from attacks on NATO targets and Western diplomats to political assassinations and terrorist assaults on civilians. Between 1982 and 1985, a masked, shotgun-wielding band attacked suburban supermarkets around Brussels, leaving 28 people -- including women and children -- dead.

The attacks, initially attributed to a terrorist organization called the Fighting Communist Cells and later pinned on a gang dubbed the "crazy killers of Brabant" for the province where the incidents occurred, remain unsolved, though a slew of theories has emerged to explain them. The most popular theory tossed around in the press and in parliamentary inquiries postulates that the killings were part of a right-wing plot to destabilize the country, undermine Communism, and strengthen the police state. Many believe, because of the commando tactics used in the assaults, that the killers may be connected to Belgian police or security forces, which is where Buslik and his pals enter the picture. Although they have never been formally charged with any of those murders, they remain the only suspects ever incarcerated for suspicion of being connected to them. The investigation, now comprising more than 300,000 pages of documents, continues. Buslik and former police officers Beijer and Bouhouche remain active suspects. Investigators into those murders are looking to question Buslik and are therefore anxious for his return to Belgium.

Before retiring in scandal in 1983, Bouhouche, whose father was North African, was well known on the police force for his extreme-right, neo-Nazi sympathies and for his affiliation with the Belgian neo-Nazi organizations Westland Newpost (WNP) and the Youth Front. According to Martial Lekeu, a former right-wing police officer who fled to Orlando in the '80s (he died of cancer a few years ago), Bouhouche was the core of an underground law-enforcement organization known as G Group. Lekeu told Belgian magazine reporter Gilbert Dupont that the group, which investigators confirm existed, started planning a right-wing coup d'etat in 1975. The G Group manifesto, published in 1990, calls for an organized struggle against the "red peril." It concludes with this bit of hyperbole: "For all time men of the west have fought against the eastern hordes and they will continue to struggle against them as long as they put our values, customs, and traditions in danger." Along with political organizing, G Group members, according to Lekeu, were fond of thrusting Nazi salutes and goose-stepping while on the job. Bouhouche, in whose house investigators found pictures of Adolf Hitler, never mentioned G Group. He did, however, admit to being involved with the WNP, a group he claimed to have infiltrated in the course of undercover police work.

During the 1988 interrogation in Miami, Buslik blamed his legal trouble in Belgium on his affiliation with Bouhouche. The two have known each other since childhood. In the '50s and '60s they attended the same schools around Brussels where they became fast friends. By the early '80s, though, their childhood pranks had given way to larceny and murder. Buslik, who got a bachelor's degree in electronic engineering in 1974, was a computer whiz and an adventure addict -- pilot, marksman, rock climber, motorcyclist, and sailor. He often accompanied Bouhouche, an avowed gun fanatic, to rural shooting ranges where right-wing, law-enforcement types would fire off high-tech military assault weapons. Bouhouche seemed to accord him absolute trust. Buslik was one of only three people who had a key to Bouhouche's house, and he was godfather to Bouhouche's son David. Buslik, in return, pledged his loyalty to Bouhouche, a man he clearly admired.

"I think Buslik is someone who doesn't have very many friends," says Doraene. "He's reserved; that's his character. Still, he really seemed to respect his friendship with Bouhouche."

That respect drew Buslik into the inner circle of what has become known in the press in Belgium as the "bande a Bouhouche," or the Bouhouche gang.

Bouhouche's criminal organization first took shape in the '70s when he and his partner on the Brussels vice squad of the Gendarmerie, Robert Beijer, began to realize they could exploit their law-enforcement status for substantial monetary gain. Bouhouche, Beijer, and Buslik formed the core of the group, which included at least two other police officers. Investigators believe Buslik was the group's technical troubleshooter, the one who made the bombs, listening devices, and fake license plates. "He had a lot of talents," says Doraene.

Where he acquired all those talents is the question at the core of the Buslik mystery. Of all the members of the Bouhouche gang, Buslik remains the one about whom the least is known. The Belgian press has linked him to everything from the U.S. military to the CIA, DEA, and FBI. He has often been described as a DEA informant and has been closely linked in the press to a DEA agent named Frank Eaton, the top-ranking American drug agent in Brussels in the late '70s. Eaton helped set up the federal antidrug squad in Belgium, a law-enforcement organization that fell into considerable disrepute when its chief, Leon François, and most of his officers were charged with drug trafficking in 1982. Eaton, who was also charged, had already left the country and was protected under diplomatic immunity. Neither Eaton -- now an investigator with the district attorney's office in San Diego -- nor his successor in Brussels, Glenn Cooper, admits he ever worked with Buslik, and Buslik's name does not appear on the DEA's official list of Brussels informants.

Although he may not have been working for the DEA, evidence exists connecting Buslik, through Bouhouche, to the world of illicit drugs in Belgium. In 1981, investigators believe, he helped Bouhouche and Beijer install listening devices in the offices of other police officers, including the office of Maj. Hermann Vernailen, the man in charge of the corruption investigation of Leon François' antidrug squad. Later that same year, a bomb misfired in the trunk of a Peugeot 404 that was meant to be carrying Guy Goffinon, another police investigator active in the corruption investigation. Goffinon was not in the car, and the police who were there were not injured. Buslik, who was picked up for questioning following the blast, admitted to building the detonation device used to set off the bomb but claimed it was merely a garage door opener he had sold to an acquaintance. (Today Belgian authorities say they have collected enough evidence to charge him with that crime.) Two days after the blast, gunmen assaulted Major Vernailen outside his home. He was shot in the back but survived. Guns traced to the attack were later found in a vehicle linked to Buslik's old friend Madani Bouhouche.

Buslik's CIA connection is even more tenuous than his connection to the DEA. His father, Max Buslik, a German from Leipzig, may have worked for the American intelligence agency at the end of World War II, but little evidence exists linking his son to the agency. After the war Max lived briefly with his French wife in New York City, where she gave birth to Jean-François, their only child. In 1949 Max founded Aviation Benelux, a small charter aviation company in Brussels that reporters in Belgium suspect had ties to American intelligence. The family company also operated a military

surplus store called Surplus 13, which Jean-François took over in the late '70s after his father fell ill. Investigators say the junk heap of a store -- crowded with helmets, clothing, and rusty military hardware -- didn't do much business and was most likely a front for the younger Buslik's more lucrative criminal activities. "It wasn't busy," says Pasquale Conedera, an Italian who used to work at the shop stocking shelves and cleaning up. "There was junk piled everywhere. It was nearly impossible to find anything."

In the early '80s, a Belgian military intelligence officer named Andre Moyen investigated Buslik on suspicion he was trying to sell American aviation technology to the Soviet Union. Moyen, who at the height of the Cold War funneled information to a CIA front called the World Anticommunist League, thinks Buslik promoted himself as an American agent as a way to increase his underworld credibility. "He was a fake secret agent," says Moyen, now 84 years old and retired. "At any given time, he would present himself as being part of the CIA, the FBI, and the DEA."

Although the murder in 1982 of Frances Zwarts is the only crime for which he has been convicted, a litany of criminal actions has been ascribed to Jean-François Buslik, either directly or through his connection to Bouhouche.

Along with the bomb attack on Guy Goffinon in 1981, Buslik was also picked up for questioning in connection with the murder five years later of Juan Mendez, an engineer in charge of Latin American sales at Belgium's largest weapons manufacturer. Mendez, a close friend of Bouhouche and a gun fanatic, was found dead in his car on January 7, 1986. He had been killed execution-style -- shot four times in the head and twice in the chest -- by a 9 mm GP Sport Parabellum, a gun later recovered at Bouhouche's home. During their investigation police discovered that Mendez and Bouhouche may have been involved in some sort of criminal enterprise together. They had both been spotted in a stolen Mercedes four-by-four identical to one belonging to a manager at Abelag, a private aviation company where Buslik had learned to fly. The car, with plates matching those on the manager's car, would allow the men to pass freely in and out of secure areas at Brussels International Airport.

Buslik was arrested after police, who had put the car under surveillance, spotted him retrieving the vehicle from its parking space near a Brussels hospital. They later recovered from his answering machine a poorly timed message from Beijer instructing him to "stay away from the Mercedes." He was released after a few days' detention, then picked up again after police received information that he had obtained military documents on making bombs. A few days later, though, he was again set free.

On May 15, 1985, nine months before the killing, Mendez's substantial collection of high-tech guns was swiped from his home by unidentified thieves. The break-in called to mind a similar robbery four years earlier when the arsenal of the antiterrorist brigade of the Belgian federal police was sacked by thieves who made off with dozens of assault rifles. Investigators believe both collections wound up in the hands of Bouhouche, who had opened a gun shop in Brussels after leaving the police force and was suspected of selling guns to right-wing rebel groups in Lebanon and Algeria. Some of the stolen guns have long been suspected of being used in the supermarket attacks. A number of weapons were later discovered in abandoned vehicles and in storage lockers rented by Bouhouche and Beijer under false names. Also discovered in the course of the investigation was a secret tunnel under an abandoned restaurant that Bouhouche and company had planned to use as an escape route in the late '70s in an elaborate plot to extort money from the country's largest supermarket chains.

The plot, detailed by Bouhouche's former police colleague Christian Amory during an interrogation, consisted of setting off explosions near supermarket gas mains in order to create an atmosphere of terror. Fear, it was hoped, would encourage supermarket owners to pay huge sums to protect their stores from attack. This complex plot was never executed, although it bears an eerie resemblance to the brutal attacks later carried out on suburban supermarkets around Brussels. These days Amory, who served six months in prison as a result of his ties to Bouhouche, isn't talking about the events of those tumultuous years.

"If I start talking about this old story, it will create all sorts of new problems," he said by phone from Belgium. "I am sure there are people listening in on my conversations."

Considering the attention these cases have gotten in Belgium, Amory may not be exaggerating. That might explain why Buslik fled that country at the first sign of trouble.

Following the airport heist and 14 weeks of incarceration stemming from the investigation into the bomb blast on Guy Goffinon's Peugeot 404, Buslik hightailed it to Italy, according to police. What he was doing there remains a mystery, though investigators are certain he returned to Belgium by 1985, in time for the murder of Juan Mendez. In that same year, he paid cash for a small home near London. After he was released from custody during the Mendez murder investigation, Buslik settled in London for a short while before taking flight to the United States.

In that same period Bouhouche, Beijer, and a number of former right-wing police officers connected to them were scattering to the far corners of the world. Bouhouche was picked up in southern Spain in 1989 and held in custody until his trial five years later. Beijer was picked up in Thailand. Two others fled to Paraguay. Three, including Buslik, fled to Florida. Christian Pattyn and Martial Lekeu, both former colleagues of Bouhouche, settled in Clearwater and Orlando, respectively. Buslik, upon his arrival in Florida, is believed also to have lived briefly in Orlando before heading south, living in Vero Beach, then Boynton Beach, and for the last few years, North Palm Beach.

In Palm Beach County, in his quiet slice of suburbia, Buslik was always careful not to draw attention to himself. He drove a white Ford Escort station wagon, separated his recyclables, and kept his past, like his revolver, hidden away. His low-key lifestyle, though, would not save him from the U.S. Marshals.

At 4 a.m. last Thursday, Deputy Marshal Lou Vega and four colleagues crept through the predawn shadows along Lagoon Drive in North Palm Beach. The request for a "discreet investigation" had arrived from Interpol in late February, prompting several weeks of surveillance. The Marshals had watched Buslik at his home, trailed him to the airport, and snapped photos using a camera with a long lens. The images were sent via electronic mail to Belgium, where they were shown to Bouhouche and Beijer, who confirmed Buslik's identity. The bureaucratic trail for clearance was a circuitous one. After identification was confirmed by the attorney general of Brussels, the following agencies had to be notified: the Belgian Ministry of Justice; the Belgian Foreign Ministry; the Belgian Embassy in Washington, D.C.; the U.S. State Department; and the U.S. Justice Department. Finally, last week, the go-ahead reached Lou Vega in West Palm Beach.

"We were told to be careful," says Vega. "They said we were dealing with a cop killer."

His squad arrived early on April 15 to scope out the neighborhood and make sure Buslik wasn't waiting for them. After sweeping the perimeter of 728 Lagoon Dr., the Marshals split up. Vega and another deputy stationed themselves in a blind spot along the right side of the house. Two others eyeballed the front door from a hiding place across the street. In the canal behind the house, officers watched the back yard from the deck of a small boat. At about 8 a.m., in shorts and sandals, Buslik opened the front door, walked outside, took a deep breath of fresh air and then strode back up the driveway, pausing in the open doorway in a sleep-encrusted daze. Vega and the others rushed the door, grabbed their fugitive, and slapped on the handcuffs. "We are placing you under arrest for crimes committed in Belgium in 1981 and 1982," Vega told Buslik. His wife and stepdaughter broke into tears.

"I thought there was something strange going on," Diane Somerville told Vega as Marshals searched the house for armed accomplices. "A reporter has been calling here saying all sorts of things about my husband."

In a closet a few feet from the front door, deputies found a Remington semiautomatic rifle. Under Buslik's mattress was a 9 mm Glock semiautomatic handgun. In the garage were hundreds of bullets, two more revolvers, and an olive green military munitions box containing 200 machine-gun rounds.

Buslik was booked into the Palm Beach County Jail awaiting transfer to the Federal Detention Center in Miami. There he will remain until a formal extradition request replaces the provisional request currently on file. The Belgian judiciary has 75 days to file the request along with a translated summary of the charges facing Buslik. In that time Buslik will remain in custody without any possibility of bail. He no doubt will fight extradition through both his American lawyer, Martha Eskuchen, and his Belgian lawyer, Jean-Paul Dumont, who plans to be in Miami within the next few weeks.

Although the Brussels attorney general blames Buslik's years of freedom on a simple "administrative error," before Buslik's arrest many other theories had circulated in Belgium to explain his absence. Some reporters (and a few lawyers) were under the false impression that Buslik was protected because he is an American citizen. In fact Buslik does carry an American passport, which means that, although the Immigration and Naturalization Service could never have deported him, he was always eligible for extradition to Belgium. Although some countries, including France and Belgium, don't extradite their own citizens, the U.S. does.

Another scenario touted in the Belgian press is that Buslik was being protected by either the American or Belgian government. Though no evidence supporting that assertion has so far emerged, even investigators like Jean-Pierre Doraene don't dismiss it out of hand.

Whatever the reason he eluded capture for so long -- bureaucratic bumbling or deliberate sabotage -- in the last few months something prompted the Belgian authorities to take action to quash the embarrassment his freedom was fast becoming.

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