



## Turkish Hijacker Gives Up, Passengers Released (Update1)

By Steve Scherer and Lorenzo Totaro

Oct. 3 (Bloomberg) -- A Turkish citizen who hijacked a Turkish Airlines Boeing 737 surrendered to police and released the 113 passengers on board, Brindisi Airport Police Chief Salvatore De Paolis said. Police initially reported there were two hijackers.

The plane was hijacked after taking off from Albania's capital, Tirana, on a flight to Istanbul. The hijacker, Hasan Ekinci, was to be arrested upon his arrival in Turkey for evading the military draft, Muammer Guler, the governor of the province of Istanbul, said on CNN Turk. Ekinci had written to the pope in August asking for his help to avoid service ``in a Muslim army," declaring that he was a Christian convert, SKYTG24 in Italy said.

The plane was diverted to Italy because the hijacker wanted to deliver a message to Pope Benedict XVI, said Loredana Rosati, a spokesman for Enac, the civil aviation authority. Ekinci asked for political asylum in Italy, De Paolis said.

The passengers were being questioned and allowed to leave the plane one-at-a-time as police sought to confirm the hijacker acted alone, Guler said. The hijacker apologized to the passengers before releasing them, Istanbul's NTV television reported, citing a passenger, Ergun Erkoseoglu, who spoke by cell phone.

### Papal Protest

Ekinci had evaded the draft in May 2006 and was to be arrested upon his arrival in Turkey today, Guler said. The hijacking was first thought to be a protest against the pope's visit to Turkey next month.

Muslims in many countries protested, sometimes violently, Benedict's Sept. 12 address at the University of Regensburg in his native Germany, saying the speech linked Islam to violence. Palestinian churches were firebombed and a Roman Catholic nun was murdered in Somalia.

The plane landed at the Italian city of Brindisi shortly before 6 p.m. local time. It had been escorted down by an Italian F-16, said Roberto Tomsì, a spokesman for the Defense Ministry.

Four Greek fighter jets had earlier escorted the aircraft out of Greek airspace, military spokesman Yiannis Papageorgiou said.

The authorities at the Vatican followed the hijacking closely, said Father Ciro Benedettini, a Vatican spokesman.

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