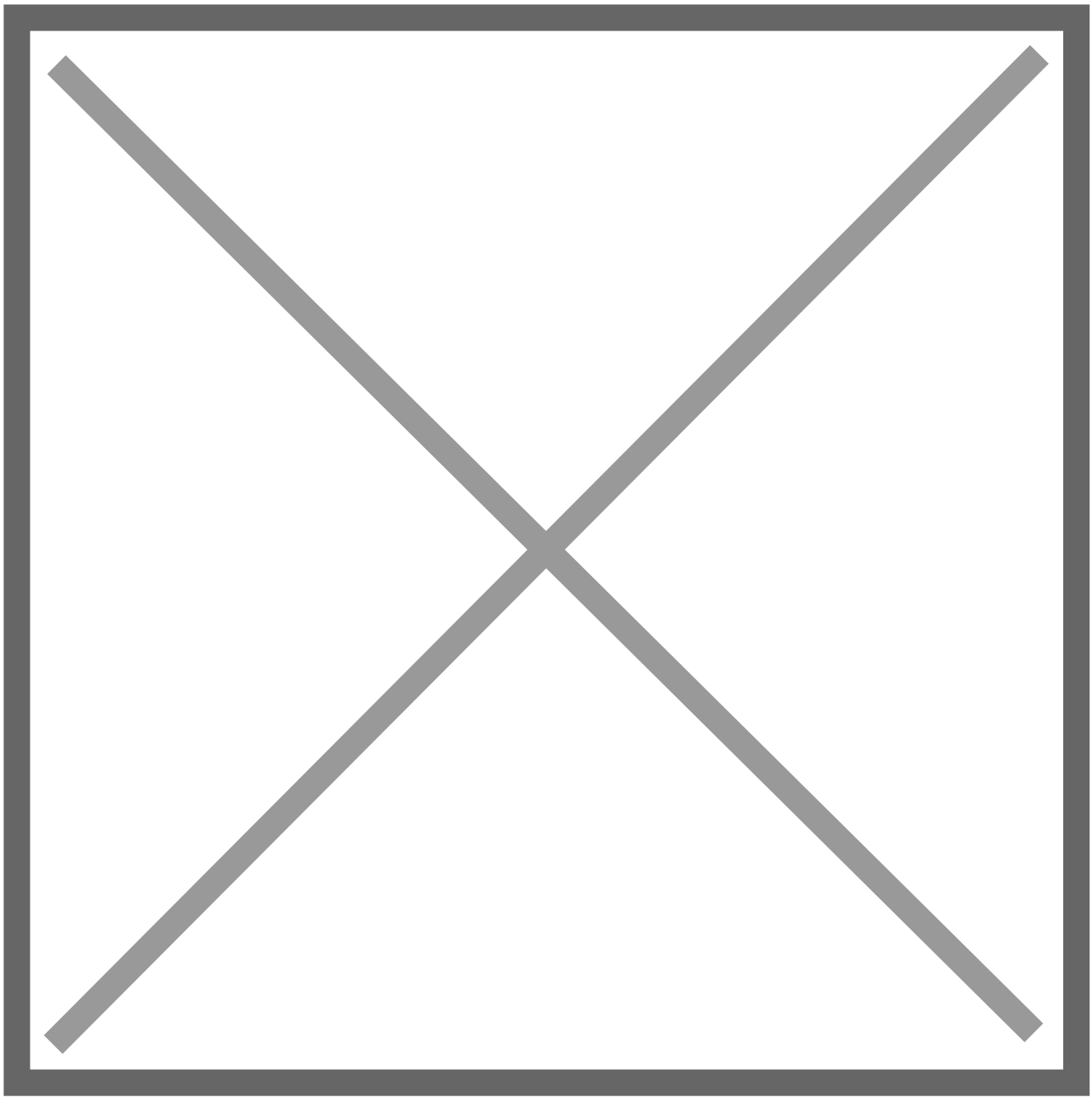
Vatican



Cardinal Angelo Becciu speaks with journalists during a news conference in Rome Sept. 25, 2020, after he was asked by Pope Francis to resign as prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes. The Vatican announced Jan. 18 that it withdrew an arrest and extradition request for Cecilia Marogna, an Italian political analyst, who allegedly was hired as a consultant by Cardinal Becciu, and is now accused of embezzlement. (CNS photo/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)

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The Vatican announced that it withdrew an arrest and extradition request for an Italian political analyst, who allegedly was hired as a consultant by Cardinal Angelo Becciu and is now accused of embezzlement.

Cecilia Marogna was arrested in October on suspicion of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds by the Italian financial police after an international warrant was issued by Interpol at the Vatican's request.

At the time, the Vatican issued no statement on the arrest nor confirmed that it initiated the arrest warrant.

However, in a Jan. 18 statement, Vatican prosecutors said it withdrew the arrest and extradition request for Marogna, saying she will face an "imminent" trial.

While stating that Marogna refused to defend herself by "failing to attend the interrogation" before Italian judicial authorities, the Vatican said withdrawing the arrest request and foregoing extradition would allow her to "to participate in the trial at the Vatican, free from the pending precautionary measure against her."

According to the Associated Press, Marogna was jailed for two weeks until a court of appeals in Milan ordered her release. Furthermore, the Italian Supreme Court

annulled the October arrest warrant against the analyst Dec. 12, saying the extradition request should have been reviewed by a court prior to any decision to arrest her.

Becciu, the former prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, was asked to retire Sept. 24 by Pope Francis. The cardinal said the pope mentioned allegations that he embezzled Vatican funds, diverting them to a charitable organization run by his brother.

Since then, Italian and international media have reported several questionable financial transactions the cardinal allegedly made with Vatican funds during the time he was "sostituto" — a position like chief of staff — in the Vatican Secretariat of State from 2011 to 2018.

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According to several documents anonymously sent to the Italian news program, La Iene, the Vatican Secretariat of State sent an estimated 500,000 euros (US$587,900) over a five-year period to a humanitarian organization in Slovenia run by Marogna who, like Becciu, hails from Sardinia.

Although the funds allegedly sent by Becciu were labeled as "voluntary contribution for humanitarian mission," La Iene reported that the money was instead used for purchases at several high-priced fashion boutiques, including Prada, Louis Vuitton, and Moncler.

In an interview with the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera in October, Marogna denied being a "compulsive shopper" and claimed that the money was used for "diplomatic trips, payments to information sources, mediations and bank transfers to humanitarian foundations."

She also claimed that she was secretly hired by Becciu, unbeknownst to the Vatican and the Secretariat of State, as a diplomatic back channel and that the money sent to her organization was used for humanitarian missions, including the paying of ransoms for kidnapped missionaries.

When asked about the questionable purchases, Marogna said, "Perhaps the purses were for the wife of a Nigerian friend who could talk to the president of Burkina Faso."