



# US secret prisons in Europe: a "law of silence" among governments

Committees: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

**Further evidence is emerging of the possible complicity of some European governments in the CIA's secret detention programme. At a public hearing of experts on Wednesday, Civil Liberties Committee MEPs deplored the lack of cooperation from EU Member States and are preparing a new report.**

Hélène Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR), recalled the "serious breaches of human rights, kidnapping, torture, secret detentions, with the complicity of Member States" on which Parliament had sought to shed light until 2007.

Today, "new information has emerged on secret detention sites in Europe (...) there is a great deal of evidence upon which we can build in our work", said Ms Flautre, who is preparing an own-initiative report. She denounced the "law of silence among governments" on these allegations.

Furthermore, those responsible for national inquiries in Denmark, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, who had been invited to the hearing, "had each explained, meticulously, why it was impossible for them to attend", she said.

## The rampart of state secrecy

"Many new elements have emerged since 2007, and especially in the past two years" said Julia Hall, an Amnesty International counter-terrorism and human rights expert, citing recent developments in Lithuania, Finland, Denmark, Romania, Poland and the UK.

She deplored the refusal of governments to co-operate on the grounds that information was classified as secret, which, she said, was unjustified. "State secrecy should be invoked only to protect a vital national interest, which is not the case here", she said.

## "Collective responsibility" of Member States

For the time being, "there is no pressure from public opinion" on governments, "so they don't care", said Sophie In't Veld (ALDE, NL). Furthermore, "we concentrate on countries, but I maintain that there is a collective responsibility", she added, proposing that all Member States should therefore be covered by the future report.

"There is a clear complicity of the [European] authorities", said Ana Gomes (S&D, PT), adding that in Portugal, the authorities "had either been incompetent and had been derided, or had been in league" with the US authorities. The latter possibility "was the likeliest", she added.

"A follow-up report seems absolutely necessary" in the light of the new evidence, said Michèle Striffler (EPP, FR), adding that "if it is established that Member States cooperated actively, the EU will have to take the necessary measures.

"There have been delays even within our institutions, where there are people who want no progress on the dossier" regretted Carlos Coelho (EPP, PT).

# Press release

Amrit Singh, a lawyer representing the Open Society Justice Initiative, presented the cases of Messrs El-Masri et Al-Nashiri, victims of CIA rendition and secret detention in Europe, implicating the authorities of Poland, Romania, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. She urged MEPs to "take their responsibility" to ensure that the USA does not single out a country for possible reprisal measures.

## **Fighting terrorism "saves lives"**

"Human rights and freedom are important values (...) but does this mean we must consider individual cases and divulge details of our struggle against terrorism, which saves lives?" said Mirosław Piotrowski (ECR, PL).

In Romania, "many inquiries have been made by MPs and independent media. They have contributed no clarifications, only presumptions", said Ioan Enciu (S&D, RO).

## **Background**

In 2005, prompted by press reports of CIA activities on European soil, the European Parliament set up a temporary committee of enquiry. Its report, drafted by Claudio Fava, deplored the passivity of certain Member States in the face of the CIA's illegal operations on their territory and called for an independent inquiry. MEPs pledged to follow up.

*In the chair: Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D, ES)*

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