

EU-USA: Rendition and removing refugees raise the same issue: Censored document reveals increased transit facilities for the USA to use EU airports to move people around the world

There has been an informal agreement between the EU governments and the USA that flights to and from the USA can stop-over in transit at EU airports since around 1998 (see EU docs no: 13554/97 and 6541/1/98). The USA requested these "facilities" into order to send people back to Africa, the Middle East and Asia. No figures have ever been published on the extent to which this agreement has been used.

However, a year after the invasion of Iraq the minutes of a high-level meeting of the "New Transatlantic Agenda: EU-US meeting on Justice and Home Affairs" in Athens on 22 January 2003 record that:

"Both sides agreed on... increased use of European transit facilities to support the return of criminal/inadmissible aliens"

The official minutes of the meeting on the public register of the Council of the European Union (the 25 governments) is only "partially accessible" - that is to say that all the details concerning the USA have been deleted (censored). A spokesperson for the Council said the deletions were a: "*courtesy*" to the USA.

Censored Minutes, full-text: **[New Transatlantic Agenda: EU-US meeting on Justice and Home Affairs" in Athens on 22 January 2003](#)**

Uncensored Minutes, full-text: **[New Transatlantic Agenda: EU-US meeting on Justice and Home Affairs" in Athens on 22 January 2003](#)**

At its regular press briefing on Monday 12 December the European Commission tried to deny that "secret minutes of the meeting exist" and handed out copies of the uncensored version to journalists - however the Council's register still only carries the censored "partially accessible" version. They also claimed that EU transit facilities were only used for failed asylum-seekers and illegal immigrants "not rendition" of CIA suspects. But the minutes of the Athens meeting refer to the return of "*criminal/inadmissible aliens*" - who are the "criminals", are they convicted or suspected? What crimes has they committed or suspected of committing? Who are the inadmissible aliens, where are they being returned to and under what physical conditions?

Tony Bunyan, Statewatch editor, comments:

"Whether these US transit flights are for "criminals", "inadmissible aliens" or for rendition the same questions arise.

Do EU governments know how many times their airports have been used for "transit" by US government flights? Which airports are used? How many people have been moved in this way? How many "criminals" and how many "inadmissible aliens"? If they do then why are the facts and figures not available? And if they do not know, why not?

If EU governments do not know who is being moved and where by foreign agencies using their airports then they are grossly irresponsible. To "aid and abet" the movement of people in an inhuman or degrading way or to be tortured is a crime."

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