

**Question by Sarah Ludford (H-0879/06)**

Subject: External Relations Council meeting of 15 September

Given that transparency is, laudably, a theme of the Finnish Presidency, will the Presidency identify the Member State(s) which at the September 15 2006 meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council blocked a formal conclusion regarding CIA illegal activities in response to President Bush's admission of 6 September that CIA secret prisons existed?

10.10.2006 (en)

**Paula Lehtomäki**, *President of the Council*. (unofficial translation) – Mr President, Members of the Parliament, in its meeting on 15 September, the Council discussed the issue of secret prisoners' centres of the CIA. The Ministers of the Member States repeated that they were committed to prevent terrorism effectively by means of all possible legal measures.

Terrorism itself is a threat to a system of values based on a principle of democracy and the rule of law. It was repeated in the Council that, in the fight against terrorism, the human rights and humanitarian norms are to be respected. Thus, the representatives of the Member States noticed the declaration of the administration of the US that all the prisoners would be treated in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention, and their promises that an international committee of the Red Cross would be able to visit the prisoners.

The existence of secret prisoners' centres, where the prisoners are held in a juridical vacuum, violates the norms of international humanitarian rights and international criminal law. The Ministers of Member States said they will continue the dialogue with the US. The dialogue aims at guaranteeing the respect of the human rights also when it comes to the fight against terrorism. This dialogue continues already. These points highlighted by the Council can be found in the press release concerning the Council meeting.

**Sajjad Karim (ALDE)**, *deputising for the author*. – President-in-Office, I am reassured by some of what you say, but great concern remains about so much that may or may not have actually taken place, and we need to establish the facts.

According to an article in the Italian newspaper *l'Unità*, on 7 December 2005 Condoleezza Rice had frank decisions with EU ministers at a dinner at which the issue of extraordinary renditions was discussed. I should like to know whether this dinner took place. If so, who was there? Were extraordinary renditions discussed? If so, what was said?

**Paula Lehtomäki**, *President of the Council*. (unofficial translation) – Mr President, this kind of dinner has not been organized by the EU Presidency. We ignore what kind of dinners Member States organize as regards their own external relations and we do not have a possibility to comment that.

**Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE).** – Excuse me, it may be a matter of the interpretation but I am quite surprised to hear what you say, because I do not think that you have responded to either of the questions.

You have not responded to the first question that was put to you in writing. You refer to the dinner on 7 December of last year as concerning bilateral relations between Member States and the US. If I understand correctly, that was a meeting where all the Member State governments and the US were represented, and if I am not mistaken Mr Solana and Mr de Vries were there as well. I think, President-in-Office, that a great deal has come out in the meantime about the existence of secret prisons and the rendition flights that took place in Europe.

Can you confirm that the dinner took place and that the matter was discussed? When will the Council start its own investigation and recognise what the rest of the world already knows?

**Paula Lehtomäki, *President of the Council.*** (unofficial translation) – Mr President, I regret but it does not sound familiar to me that this kind of dinner was organized on 7 September during and by the Finnish Presidency. I would again say that this kind of dinner has not been organized by the Presidency. I think you should perhaps precise if you really talk about a dinner which was organized this autumn.

I responded to the first question and to the written question on behalf of the whole Council and on the basis of what has been said and discussed on 15 September 2006 in the General Affairs and External Relations Council and on which an agreement has been reached. I further repeat that the Council cannot take the responsibility of how Member States deal with their bilateral external relations with different countries, and that the Council is not aware of all the activities.