



Brussels, 22/03/06

PRESS RELEASE

CIA committee plans fact-finding mission in Macedonia

The committee investigating alleged CIA involvement in the illegal detention of prisoners in Europe will send a delegation to the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) on 27-29 April. Aiming to gather information in the light of allegations about CIA activity in that country, MEPs plan to hear from government officials, lawmakers, NGO representatives and members of the intelligence service.

Khaled El Masri, a German citizen of Lebanese origin who says CIA agents kidnapped him and held him for five months at a secret prison in Afghanistan, told his story on 14 March to the committee investigating possible illegal activities of the CIA in Europe. He explained he was arrested on the Macedonian border while on vacation in December 2003, taken to a hotel in Skopje and imprisoned there for 23 days by Macedonian agents before being flown to Kabul and put in a prison.

After hearing his testimony, the Committee coordinators from the different political groups decided yesterday to send a delegation to FYROM on 27-29 April, composed of the chairman of the committee Carlos Coelho (EPP-ED, PT), the rapporteur Claudio Fava (PES, IT) and one member representing each EP political group. Among the people the MEPs wish to meet are Slobodan Casule (former Minister of Foreign Affairs), Ljubomir Mihajlovski (Minister for Internal Affairs) and Mirjana Najcevska, president of the Macedonian Helsinki Committee.

First reactions

"I have just learned, to my regret, that the Macedonian Minister of the Interior, Ljubomir Mihajlovski, does not want to meet the delegation of the European Parliament's temporary committee on the CIA, which will shortly be heading to Skopje", said the committee's rapporteur Claudio Fava. "I fear that the minister has not been well informed as to the aim of our mission. Our committee does not want to interrogate or to accuse anyone. On the contrary, our institutional task is to find -- with the aid of the Macedonian authorities and some witnesses -- any useful information relating to the case of Khaled El Masri and his alleged detention in Macedonia."

"I believe," he added, "that to find the truth about this case and about other likely cases of 'extraordinary rendition' is both a political and a moral obligation -- for our committee or for any European country, without exception. The mission to Macedonia will go on; we are still hoping for a high degree of cooperation on the part of the authorities in Skopje".

Press enquiries:

María Andrés Marín - tel. (32-2) 28 44299

Mobile: +32 (0) 498 98 35 90

e-mail: libe-press@europarl.eu.int.

Piotr Zalewski - Tel (32-2) 28 32232

Mobile: +32 (0) 498 98 3257