



Brussels, 21/04/06

PRESS RELEASE

Committee hears further testimonies from alleged CIA activities in Spain and Ireland

Within the series of hearings to be conducted before the publication of their first preliminary conclusions next month, members of the temporary committee investigating the alleged use of EU countries by the CIA for illegal activities heard on Thursday 20 from EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator Gijs de Vries, Spanish journalist Matías Vallés, and UN peacekeeper Edward Horgan.

Gijs de Vries, the EU's counter terrorism coordinator, said terrorism *"must be fought within the boundaries of human rights. The prohibition against [torture] is absolute."* However, he said he could give no information on CIA activities in Europe. *"I am not privy, and nor is Javier Solana,"* to information on cooperation between national services. He said operational cooperation does not take place via the EU: *"Intelligence is not covered by the EU institutions. Sorry if it sounds too formalistic, but I cannot change the treaties,"* he said, responding to José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (EPP-ED, ES). Asked if he or the Council's threat analysis centre had ever processed information that may have come from countries or intelligence service that have participated in renditions or torture, whether he had any knowledge of any detention centres in Europe and whether there was definitive evidence of illegal renditions in Europe, he answered in the negative.

MEPs from all the main political groups were not impressed: Mr Fava said he was not sure this part of the hearing served a useful purpose.

Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, will give evidence to the committee on 2 May.

CIA flights in Spain and Ireland?

Matías Vallés, a journalist from the *Diario de Mallorca* gave MEPs details of his newspaper's investigation of CIA rendition flights through Spain. He said a series of such flights had transited through Palma de Mallorca in 2003-4. He said they could not have gone unnoticed or unauthorised by Spanish officials. It was like having a Ferrari in a car park, but: *"Nobody asked, 'how come we have a Ferrari in our car park?'"* he said. *"There is now no way to check whether there was any criminal activity involving those planes."* He said he had no knowledge of any involvement of the Spanish secret services. Alluding to the forty two suspected CIA operatives believed to have taken part, he said some of them had similar names to those *"involved in the kidnapping of Abu Omar"* (the Egyptian cleric allegedly abducted by CIA agents in Milan in February 2003).

Ignasi Guardans Cambo (ALDE, ES) told Mr Vallés: *"Your investigation does not really confirm that there was a crime in Mallorca."* It does, though, confirm among Spanish officials *"a deeply rooted passivity in the face of facts that do not seem appropriate."*

The last person to give evidence was former UN peacekeeper and ex-Irish Army officer Edward Horgan. He aimed to provide evidence of CIA flights using Shannon airport in Ireland for extraordinary renditions. He said he had traced many CIA-owned plans stopping at Shannon, but it could not be proved whether there were illegal detainees on board.

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