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PRESS RELEASE

German prosecutor tells MEPs he has no evidence contradicting El-Masri abduction claim

Martin Hofmann, the Munich prosecutor investigating Khaled El-Masri's allegation that he was abducted by the CIA, told MEPs on Monday: "In the course of the investigations we haven't obtained any material indicating the reports given by El-Masri are incorrect". Giving evidence to the Temporary Committee on allegations of illegal CIA activity in Europe, he said, however, that there was also no evidence of involvement of the German authorities or secret services in the abduction.

Khaled El Masri, a German citizen of Lebanese origin, says CIA agents kidnapped him in December 2003 and held him for five months at a secret prison in Afghanistan. He told his story to the committee in March, saying he was captured during a trip to the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), detained in a hotel in Skopje for 23 days, interrogated, and later transported "blindfolded and hooded" to a secret prison in Afghanistan, where he was repeatedly tortured. He was finally released without charge.

The Munich prosecutor in charge of investigating this case in Germany, Martin Hofmann, told MEPs that his department has not established so far "anything which contradicts his statements" and that is why the police and public prosecutors consider his content as valid. Although tests had shown no traces of violence, beatings, injections or substances used to force him to sleep, the isotope samples of his hair had indicated a "significant change in living conditions" during the time he claims to have been imprisoned, Mr Hofmann concluded. Gathering all the details and the full description offered by Mr El-Masri of his time in Skopje and Afghanistan, experts had reached the conclusion that "the tests did not contradict the report of El Masri".

Role of European governments

"We have no indication that German authorities, especially from the secret intelligent service, have been involved in the case under investigation," said the prosecutor in answer to questions from the rapporteur, Claudio Fava (PES, IT). Asked by Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE, ES) whether the German government was informed about the abduction, Mr Hofmann said: "As investigating prosecutor I have no information to indicate that German authorities had knowledge of what was going on before or during the abduction of El Masri. Anything else would be mere speculation".

He told Cem Özdemir (Greens/EFA, DE) that the agents who interrogated El-Masri "seemed to be very well informed of him, they really knew his lifestyle. One can only have suspicions about the possible sources of this detailed information... but it is not something [about which] I have any information to offer".

As for the possible involvement of Macedonian authorities in this case, Mr Hofmann said: "What we have been told by the legal authorities in FYROM does not correspond with the information we had obtained [during the investigation] so we will need to look further" into the allegations. Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (GUE-NGL, DE) said that during the visit of an EP delegation to Skopje the version given by the authorities had included clear contradictions.

Mr El-Masri sued the US intelligence agency for wrongful imprisonment and torture. Frieda Brepoels (EPP-ED, BE) said: "I do think it is rather strange that the US Court declared charges inadmissible for secrecy reasons and that the CIA argued in a letter that acceptance of the El-Masri case would damage national security".

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