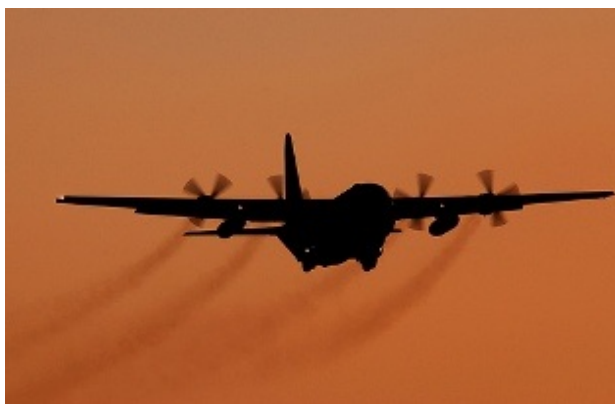


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Albania Stays Silent on Role in US Renditions

A report released on Monday by two international rights organizations says Albania is one of several European countries suppressing evidence of its role in the US rendition programme.

Besar Likmeta | Tirana



US military plane | Photo by : James Gordon/Flickr

Access Info Europe and the law charity Reprive filed freedom of information requests in 28 countries about specific rendition flights carried out between 2002 and 2006.

While six European countries and the US released the requested data, 16 others, including Albania and Romania, have refused or failed to answer questions about their complicity in the CIA's illegal

detention operations.

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The European air traffic management body, Eurocontrol, also refused on the grounds that it has no transparency obligations to the public.

“In Albania we wrote to the general director of civil aviation in September and resubmitted a request in November and we had no response at all,” Helen Darbishire, executive director of Access Info Europe, told Balkan Insight.

Extraordinary renditions, meaning the forced transfer of persons from one place to another without due legal process, became a prominent part of the US counter-terror programme immediately after the 9/11 terror attacks.

According to a 2007 Council of Europe report, Albania was involved in the rendition case of a German citizen of Lebanese decent named Kahled Al Masri.

He contends that the CIA detained him in January 2004 in Macedonia, after which he was drugged, beaten, flown to Afghanistan and held without charge in prison for four months.

After the CIA realized they had the wrong man they took him to Albania, where El-Masri said he was released without an apology.

The CoE report says that El-Masri was flown out of Kabul on 28 May 2004 on board a CIA-chartered Gulfstream aircraft with the tail number N982RK to the military airbase of Kucova in Albania.

According to the same report the CIA's choice of Albania came after Macedonia refused to reverse the rendition.

“Albania was favourable from a geographical point of view since it opened the option to drive Mr El-Masri to the Macedonian border immediately upon arrival and thus set him free in a state of

strength in many parts of the Balkans.

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disorientation that might diminish his credibility if he went public with his story,” the report says.

Another Balkan country where information requests met "administrative silence" was Romania where there have been recent allegations that the CIA operated a secret prison in what is now the headquarters of the National Registry Office of Classified Information, ORNISS.

In response to Access Info Europe’s requests, the US Federal Aviation Authority released 27,128 flight records on 29 November 2011 – a significant addition to resources available to researchers and lawyers working to get to the bottom of human rights abuses committed during the US-led “war on terror”.

“I would say on this particular issue, which has been a very sensitive issue on for European governments, they have been very reluctant to respect the right to access to information,” Darbishire said.

“The US, who are kind of the bad guys in this entire story and have been under more pressure, released this huge database of 27,000 flights, which is a gold mine for our research,” she added.



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