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At a press conference organised by PANA in Dublin today, Independent Euro candidate Patricia McKenna called for the Government to actively respect Ireland's tradition of neutrality by withdrawing support for both the EU and US military endeavours.

She said, "There is no denying the fact that the EU is becoming more militarised and that Ireland is a willing participant. In March this year, the leader of the Green Party, Minister John Gormley, called for Ireland to withdraw from the European Defence Agency (EDA). The public or the elected representatives of this state never officially sanctioned Ireland's participation in this agency, which was established to facilitate EU arms industries.

No mandate was ever given to the Irish government to participate in the EDA. During the last government Fianna Fáil signed up to this controversial agency without any public debate or prior notice to either house of the Oireachtas. Withdrawal from it would send a clear signal that not all member states support the further militarization of the EU and would restore some of Ireland's credibility as a neutral nation. Minister John Gormley's call although dropped like a hot potato when Fianna Fáil said "No", should be seen as a clear acknowledgement by one government party that Ireland's participation in the defence agency is a major problem and draws us even closer to the military and defence aspects of the EU. On the issue of the US and its activities McKenna said "The Programme for Government negotiated between Fianna Fáil and the Green Party provided a written guarantee that "rendition does not occur in this state in any form" and that the "Government will encourage and support An Garda Síochána in the investigation and enforcement" of the laws pertaining to this issue. Despite reports by Amnesty International, the UN and other human rights groups claiming Shannon is being used for Extraordinary Rendition not one single plane has been checked since the current Programme for Government was agreed. Instead ordinary people including members of Minister Gormley's own party have been arrested for asking the Gardai to search these suspect planes." McKenna said this failure to respect the promised agreed with Fianna Fáil was unforgivable. She said that in the last Government before this new guarantee was agreed Minister Gormley was scathing of the Government for its lack of action on this issue. He said "Minister McDowell and his colleague Minister Dermot Ahern have feigned anger at the damning criticism of Ireland contained in yesterday's draft report by a European Parliament committee. They should genuinely be ashamed of their complicity in the serious breaches of human rights that have occurred as a result of Ireland's cooperation with the CIA on their rendition programme. Report after report proves that these planes landed at Shannon with the full permission of the Irish Government." McKenna said, "Amnesty International Ireland recently accused the Government of reneging on their pledge for more vigilant checks of suspected US rendition flights at Shannon airport." She said that if elected to the European Parliament "I will use all means at my disposal to force the Government to keep its promises. The European Parliament carried out an investigation in 2007 which concluded that the CIA conducted 1,245 such flights, many of them destinations where suspects could face torture. The investigation also found many EU member states including Ireland complied with the US programme. The report accused European countries of engaging in a range of obstructive behaviour: refusing to forward prosecutor's extradition requests to the US government, not conducting independent investigations and failing to provide investigators with files in those cases where there were indeed probes." In June last year, Amnesty International issued a report condemning EU institutions and member state governments for taking little or no actions since European participation in rendition came to light. Nicolas Beger, director of Amnesty International's European office, at the same time said, "Seven EU presidencies have passed since European involvement in renditions was first exposed and there has been no action whatsoever; not even an acknowledgement of Europe's complicity." "It is vital that Ireland has MEP independent of the Government and the main political establishment to speak out on this issue at the EU level. The Government is clearly reluctant to take even the smallest measure to help end these illegal activities." McKenna concluded.

Patricia McKenna 2009

<http://www.patriciamckenna.eu>

===Ends=== For further information contact: Patricia McKenna Tel: 087 242 7049 pmmckenna@eircom.net