

NSA, European intelligence agencies work closely together

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The claim by European governments that they were unaware of the extensive wiretapping undertaken by the US National Security Agency (NSA) is simply a lie. In fact, various European intelligence agencies, and in particular Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (BND), work closely with the NSA in the surveillance of electronic communications.

This is clear from an interview with former NSA contractor Edward Snowden published in the latest issue of the news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

To the question: "Are the German authorities and German politicians involved in the monitoring system", Snowden answers: "Yes, of course. They [the NSA] are in cahoots with the Germans, as with most other Western countries."

The interview is based on written questions submitted by encryption specialist Jacob Appelbaum and documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras in mid-May to Snowden, before he went to Hong Kong and began revealing the monitoring activities of the NSA and Britain's GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters).

In the responses from Snowden, now published for the first time, he suggests that such international intelligence cooperation also serves to bypass national legal restrictions and shield political leaders.

Intelligence agencies that exchange information never ask where it originates, he explains. "In this way, they can protect their political leaders from the backlash if it should come out how massively people's privacy is being violated worldwide."

According to Snowden, the NSA has its own department for managing the collaboration with foreign intelligence agencies, the Foreign Affairs Directorate. Among others things, the NSA developed the Stuxnet Internet virus together with Israeli intelligence, which

was then used to sabotage Iranian nuclear facilities.

The NSA collaborates particularly intensively with Germany's BND. *Der Spiegel* lists a variety of already known and new information, exposing claims by the German government that it was surprised and outraged by Snowden's revelations as sheer hypocrisy.

As early as 2001, the European Parliament published a 200-page report on the Echelon surveillance programme, which was jointly run by the US, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The report came to the conclusion that "within Europe, all communications, such as emails, phone and fax traffic, are regularly monitored by the NSA."

As long as the system was used "solely for intelligence purposes," this was not a breach of EU law, the parliamentary committee found at the time. If, however, it was abused for economic espionage and to gain competitive advantages, "this stands in stark contrast to the obligation of member states to loyalty to the concept of free competition in the common market."

In 2004, an important part of the Echelon programme, the wireless monitoring system in the Bavarian town of Bad Aibling, was officially closed down on the recommendation of the parliamentary committee because it was mainly used for industrial espionage.

As *Der Spiegel* now writes, the site where the listening devices were housed was never released for civilian use. Instead, signals traffic was intercepted and routed via a cable to the Mangfall barracks, just a few hundred metres away. There, the BND, "in close cooperation with a handful of NSA wire-tapping specialists" analysed "telephone calls, faxes, and everything else transmitted via satellite."

According to *Der Spiegel*, the banking metropolis of Frankfurt is "something like a nerve centre" for spying

on data that travels via fibre optic cable. It is here that fibre optic cables from Eastern Europe and Central Asia meet the data lines from Western Europe. International providers such as the US company Level 3 and Germany's Deutsche Telekom maintain their digital hubs.

As Snowden has revealed, in Frankfurt and at other German hubs, the NSA captures half a billion communications every month. The BND also eagerly helps itself to data here, working closely with the American secret services. In this way, the BND circumvents the so-called G-10 law, which governs the constitutionally protected privacy of post and telecommunications.

Foreign intelligence agencies, on the other hand, work “largely uncontrolled on German soil”, *Der Spiegel* notes.

The NSA provides the BND with special tools to analyse data from the Middle East, the news magazine reports, asking: “Does the US service receive access to the data in return?”

Given this close collaboration, it is totally implausible that the German secret services and government knew nothing about the NSA's wiretapping activities, as they repeatedly claim.

Just last week, the French newspaper *Le Monde* revealed that the French foreign intelligence service DGSE (General Directorate of External Security) was systematically spying on data traffic.

“The whole of our communications traffic is being spied upon,” the newspaper wrote. The DGSE collects metadata of millions on telephone calls, emails, SMS, faxes and all Internet activities on Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Apple and Yahoo, thus building up a huge database.

When it comes to the protection of privacy and the defence of basic democratic rights, the European governments have no more scruples than their counterpart in the United States. They become nervous only when the collected data is used for industrial espionage or political blackmail against them.

Faced with growing social tensions, European governments regard their respective populations as potential enemies which must be monitored. This is why not a single European government is prepared to grant Edward Snowden asylum, despite their feigned outrage.



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