

NSA wiretapping scandal dominates European Union summit

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The European Union (EU) summit in Brussels on Thursday and Friday was dominated by the National Security Agency (NSA) bugging of the cell phone of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The debate on these revelations was accompanied by plans for new social attacks on the working class across the continent.

Before the summit began, the German chancellor met with French President François Hollande for 15 minutes to discuss the latest reports on the international surveillance activities of the National NSA.

At the summit, all 28 EU leaders agreed that Merkel and Hollande should clarify the issues with US President Barack Obama and prepare a report for the next EU summit in December. A delegation of high-ranking government and intelligence officials will travel to Washington next week.

The purpose of such a delegation is not to expose the criminal activities of US intelligence agencies, but to assist in a cover-up. For months, all EU leaders have worked to suppress the revelations by Edward Snowden of the systematic monitoring of the entire world population.

British, German and French intelligence work closely with US intelligence in their own surveillance activities.

The summit also decided against any sanctions against the US. It rejected demands raised earlier this week by the European Parliament to suspend the Swift agreement on the transfer of bank data to the US, and also turned down calls to postpone negotiations currently taking place between the US and the EU over a free trade agreement. The summit even refused to discuss a revision of the EU Data Protection Regulation, which has been negotiated for over a year.

On the fringes of the summit, however, a number of pointed criticisms were made of the United States. The

President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, declared that the US intelligence establishment was “out of control. ... These are forces we got to know in the era of the Cold War.”

Following similar action by France and Germany, Spain summoned the US ambassador on Friday to clarify allegations of US spying on the Spanish government.

New aspects of the affair came to light during the summit. Documents from whistle-blower Edward Snowden make clear that the United States has bugged the phones of at least 35 heads of state. The released document only briefly details the operation and names no names. It is likely, however, that the number of leading politicians under NSA surveillance is significantly higher.

In the case of the monitoring of Merkel, a likely source is the US Embassy in Berlin. The Snowden documents show that the CIA and NSA set up an intelligence unit called the Special Collection Service (SCS) with a specific remit to bug embassies and consulates. Agents were disguised as diplomats and operated without the knowledge of the governments concerned.

Other documents published on Friday by the Italian newspaper *L'Espresso* reveal that the British GCHQ systematically eavesdropped on the Italian government and companies in cooperation with the NSA, for purposes including the “benefit of the UK economy.” In addition, the GCHQ and NSA are alleged to have intercepted, saved, and evaluated all communications through the international network node in Sicily.

The Snowden revelations have sparked concern in the ruling class of Europe, which fears rising popular disquiet and anger over these revelations. Christian Social Union leader Horst Seehofer declared that he

was “really angry” with the military and industrial espionage by the United States and the fact that such “a large, democratic nation quite obviously commits such violations.”

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the paper’s deputy head for foreign affairs, Hubert Wetzel, wrote a comment titled “Questionable friends”.

“America’s reputation as a credible power for protection and regulation is crumbling”, he wrote. Especially in the Middle East, the United States had “gone astray” and thereby “annoyed its allies”. By cancelling an offensive against Syria, Obama left France “hanging” and it remained to be seen if Merkel would ever trust the US president.

In the daily *Die Welt*, Claus Christian expresses the fear “that the tectonic plates could shift dramatically on both sides of the Atlantic.”

The Snowden revelations have shown that Europe has also built up the foundation of a police state based on the total surveillance of public and private communications. This development throws into question the legitimacy of the actions of the bourgeois state for millions of people. Political leaders, therefore, seek to concentrate attention exclusively on the tapping of government leaders.

All of these leaders, however, are united in their determination to subject their respective populations to surveillance amid rising popular opposition to social cuts, layoffs and war. Already on Thursday evening, discussions took place at the summit to continue the assault on social rights and spending across the continent.

In advance of the summit, Merkel called for an extension of the European fiscal pact, which imposes balanced budgets on all EU members, to other areas of policy. In particular, structural reform of labor markets, spending on state institutions and taxation systems are to fall under EU control, Merkel declared.

The direct dictation of social policy by Brussels—which has already led to a social catastrophe in Ireland, Portugal and Greece—is to be extended to all of Europe.

In return, Merkel indicated that Germany would support moves towards a banking union, which Berlin has so far blocked. No definite decisions were expected on either topic by the summit, but the general direction was clear. In Greece, the EU Commission has just

called for a fresh round of social attacks to plug the budget loopholes caused by the bank bailout.

The reactionary nature of the EU was most clear on the refugee issue. Despite the death of nearly 400 refugees off the Italian island of Lampedusa, summit participants rejected any change in the Dublin II agreement, which gives responsibility for refugees to those European countries they first enter. Instead, the summit agreed to a task force to seal off European borders more effectively.

Italian premier Enrico Letta’s demands that other EU states increase their intake of refugees were summarily rejected.



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