

Edward Snowden ready to provide testimony in Germany

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Former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden says he is ready to provide testimony to the German authorities about the espionage activities of the American intelligence agencies. The prerequisite, however, is that he be allowed to stay in Germany or another country that is prepared to guarantee his security.

Snowden's decision was announced Friday by Green Party parliamentary deputy Hans-Christian Ströbele at a press conference in Berlin.

Ströbele met secretly with Snowden in Moscow on Thursday and the two talked for almost three hours. Also present were journalist John Goetz, from broadcaster ARD's *Panorama* programme and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and former *Spiegel* editor Georg Mascolo. After the meeting, Ströbele explained that Snowden was prepared to help shed light on the NSA spy affair in Germany and could answer many questions.

On Friday, Ströbele presented the press with a letter he had forwarded on behalf of Snowden to the chancellor's office, the Bundestag (parliament) and the attorney general. In the letter, Snowden wrote: "In the course of my service to these organizations [the NSA, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)], I believe I witnessed systemic violations of law by my government that created a moral duty to act."

As a result of his exposures, he faced "a severe and sustained campaign of persecution" that "forced me from my family and home." But the response to his political actions had encouraged him. "Citizens around the world," he wrote, "as well as high officials—including in the United States—have judged the revelation of an unaccountable system of pervasive surveillance to be a public service." He added that the

benefits to society from the knowledge gained would become increasingly clear.

Snowden pointed out that the US government continued to treat his exposures as treason, and was trying to criminalize and prosecute political discourse. "However," he wrote, "speaking the truth is not a crime."

He said he was confident that "with the support of the international community, the government of the United States will abandon this harmful behavior." He was willing to participate in a "responsible finding of fact regarding reports in the media," especially with regard to the truth and authenticity of the documents "as appropriate and in accordance with the law."

At the conclusion of his letter, Snowden spoke directly to the German government, writing: "I look forward to speaking with you in your country when the situation is resolved, and thank you for your efforts in upholding the international laws that protect us all."

Political observers consider it unlikely that the government would offer Snowden free passage or asylum in Germany if he were to give testimony to a committee of the Bundestag or another body. This would dramatically escalate the diplomatic crisis between Germany and the United States. According to the German Ministry of Justice, the US has already sent a request to Germany for Snowden's extradition as a precaution.

However, those advocating such an approach are growing in number in the media and in political circles. The head of the internal affairs department of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is committed to bringing Snowden to Germany.

"Germany needs clarity about US eavesdropping," wrote Heribert Prantl. And Snowden needs protection from extradition to the United States. Both can be

reconciled well: Germany should provide the whistleblower with protection. The law provides the opportunity to assure him safe conduct and protection from deportation.”

Even government sources have given cautious positive signals. German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich said Friday in Berlin: “If the message is, Mr. Snowden will give us information, we willingly accept this.” The interior minister added: “If Mr. Snowden is willing to talk with German officials, we will find ways that this conversation can take place. Any clarification, every sort of information and facts we can obtain, is good.”

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) also expressed the desire that Snowden provide testimony. The SPD’s parliamentary business manager, Thomas Oppermann, said that if there was an opportunity to hear Snowden’s testimony without putting him in danger and without “completely ruining” the relationship between Germany and the US, “we should use it.” In the current talks between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the SPD on forming a new coalition government, Oppermann heads the Working Group on Internal and Legal Affairs, along with Interior Minister Friedrich.

The morning show of broadcaster ZDF requested a comment from the American ambassador to Germany, John B. Emerson, on the meeting between Ströbele and Snowden. The US ambassador replied that it was the right of every citizen, and, of course, the right of members of parliament, to travel wherever they wanted, meet with people, and talk to them.

The day before, Emerson launched a “charm offensive” and invited representatives of several newspapers to his office in the embassy on Pariser Platz in Berlin. Earlier this week, after *Spiegel* had dubbed the US embassy a nest of spies, the ambassador praised the decades of German-American friendship, which, he said, would survive the current crisis.

When asked how the US would respond to Snowden being questioned by a German committee of inquiry, Emerson replied ambiguously, “We will respond if it really comes to that.”

The Scientific Service of the Bundestag has advised that Germany could assure Snowden safe passage. Since the withdrawal of his American passport, Snowden is regarded as stateless and the US authorities have no automatic right to extradition. The Federal

Republic could provide a residence permit based on international law and for humanitarian reasons, the service advised.

Even Federal Data Protection Commissioner Peter Schaar has called on the German authorities to help Snowden. Speaking on *Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk*, Schaar said, “Snowden has done a good thing. We also have a moral responsibility to protect him. Should a committee of inquiry be convened, Snowden should be provided an environment where he can reveal his findings safe from deportation to the United States.”

Snowden’s lawyer, Anatoly Kutscherena, said Friday that the ex-NSA contractor could be questioned by German representatives only in Russia. Snowden would not leave the country, the lawyer told the radio station *Moscow Echo*. He could, however, “provide testimony in Russia within the framework of international agreements,” if the German authorities so desired. Kutscherena pointed out that Snowden would lose his present asylum status if he were to travel abroad.



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