

Snowden's testimony to European Parliament: "Billions of innocents" unlawfully spied upon

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On Friday, the European Parliament's civil liberties committee published the written testimony of US whistleblower and former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden. Snowden agreed to give testimony to the EP's ongoing inquiry into the Electronic Mass Surveillance of EU Citizens.

The European Parliament (EP) took his statement despite the fact that it has already agreed to publish a 60-page report based entirely on the secret documents that Snowden made public, which entirely excises any mention of his name. (See "European Parliament kills call to protect Edward Snowden")

The EP rejected an amendment to the document that would have committed it to offering Snowden protection as a whistleblower.

These decisions were made under pressure from the US government and carried out with the support of the Social Democratic and Conservative groupings in the Parliament.

Snowden's 12-page testimony consists of a two-page statement and a series of answers to questions posed by Members of the European Parliament.

His testimony was an eloquent and wide-ranging summary of what has been revealed so far about the mass spying operations and a rebuttal of the constant and ongoing lies and falsifications aimed at him from the US political and intelligence elite and its supporters internationally.

Snowden refutes claims by US spy chiefs who "once claimed that 54 terrorist attacks had been stopped by mass surveillance." He notes that such claims have never been verified, adding that even the "White House's Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, determined that the mass surveillance program investigated was not only ineffective—they found it had never stopped even a single

imminent terrorist attack—but that it had no basis in law."

The "greatest success the program had ever produced was discovering a taxi driver in the United States transferring \$8,500 dollars to Somalia in 2007," writes Snowden.

While the whole population was under surveillance, this did not prevent the Boston Marathon bombers from carrying out their operation. Snowden wrote, "Despite the Russians specifically warning us about Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the FBI couldn't do more than a cursory investigation—although they did plenty of worthless computer-based searching—and failed to discover the plot. 264 people were injured, and 3 died. The resources that could have paid for a real investigation had been spent on monitoring the call records of everyone in America."

Snowden summarises a number of the revelations of mass state surveillance that have been published in several newspapers, particularly the *Guardian*, stating that the "rights of billions of innocents—and I say billions without exaggeration," are being unlawfully done away with.

Describing the extraordinary means at the disposal of the NSA to spy on anyone it chooses, Snowden explained his role as an intelligence operative:

"The NSA granted me the authority to monitor communications worldwide using its mass surveillance systems, including within the United States. I have personally targeted individuals using these systems under both the President of the United States' Executive Order 12333 and the US Congress' FAA 702."

He added, "I am telling you that without getting out of my chair, I could have read the private communications of any member of this committee, as well as any ordinary citizen. I swear under penalty of perjury that this is true."

Shadow Rapporteur, MEP Sophie Int'Veld, vice-chair

of the Civil Liberties committee, asked Snowden if he thought that procedures for whistleblowing have been improved. He replied, “No. There has not yet been any substantive whistleblower reform in the US, and unfortunately my government has taken a number of disproportionate and persecutory actions against me. US government officials have declared me guilty of crimes in advance of any trial, they’ve called for me to be executed or assassinated in private and openly in the press, they revoked my passport and left me stranded in a foreign transit zone for six weeks, and even used NATO to ground the presidential plane of Evo Morales—the leader of Bolivia—on hearing that I might attempt to seek and enjoy asylum in Latin America.”

In reply to a question by Rapporteur and MEP Claude Moraes, “on the extent of cooperation that exists between the NSA and EU Member States in terms of the transfer and collection of bulk data of EU citizens,” Snowden explained that such collaboration is central to the operation of the NSA.

He said, “One of the foremost activities of the NSA’s FAD, or Foreign Affairs Division, is to pressure or incentivize EU member states to change their laws to enable mass surveillance. Lawyers from the NSA, as well as the UK’s GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters], work very hard to search for loopholes in laws and constitutional protections that they can use to justify indiscriminate, dragnet surveillance operations that were at best unwittingly authorized by lawmakers. These efforts to interpret new powers out of vague laws is an intentional strategy to avoid public opposition and lawmakers’ insistence that legal limits be respected, effects the GCHQ internally described in its own documents as ‘damaging public debate’.”

Giving examples, Snowden wrote, “In recent public memory, we have seen these FAD ‘legal guidance’ operations occur in both Sweden and the Netherlands, and also faraway New Zealand. Germany was pressured to modify its G-10 law to appease the NSA, and it eroded the rights of German citizens under their constitution. Each of these countries received instruction from the NSA, sometimes under the guise of the US Department of Defense and other bodies, on how to degrade the legal protections of their countries’ communications.”

Snowden wrote that he would welcome any offer of safe passage or permanent asylum in Europe, but, “Parliamentarians in the national governments have told me that the US, and I quote, ‘will not allow’ EU partners to offer political asylum to me...”

The news of Snowden’s testimony being published first broke last Friday morning. Yet remarkably the *Guardian* has not commented or even mentioned such important testimony despite the fact that the newspaper played the leading role in publishing Snowden’s revelations from June 2013. Snowden refers to *six* different stories (including supplying URLs) that were published by the *Guardian* on different aspects of mass spying operations.

The *Guardian*’s web site published three articles Friday mentioning Snowden and a further two on Saturday, but without making any reference to his EP testimony.

Is the *Guardian* suppressing the testimony and, if so, why?

The newspaper has recently published a number of articles and editorials supporting the US-sponsored fascist coup in Ukraine and denouncing the regime of Russian President Vladimir Putin. The *Guardian* denied that fascist forces were involved in the US-backed coup, stating that “the world’s media has [not] yet seen or heard from” such forces.

The *Guardian* has used the fact that Snowden is in forced exile in Russia to claim that this undermines his struggle to expose the abuses of democratic and human rights being carried out by the US and other powers. A *Guardian* editorial on July 2, 2013 sought to associate Snowden with human rights abuses carried out by Putin’s government. “As long as he remains in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, however, the real issue remains clouded. This damages Mr. Snowden’s cause,” it wrote.

“He should therefore leave Russia as soon as he practically can,” it added.

Peter Beaumont, foreign affairs editor at the *Guardian*’s sister newspaper, the *Observer*, followed up that Snowden was “providing a public relations coup for [Russian President Vladimir] Putin” and has “provided cover for a gross and serial human rights-violating state.”

Could it be that the *Guardian*’s fulsome support for the installation of an unelected regime in Ukraine, in which a far-right party holds key ministries, and the newspaper’s demands for a more belligerent stance against Russia means that it is no longer considered politic to allow Snowden a voice?



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