

German foreign intelligence service aided NSA spying in Europe

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Over the past week, it has been revealed that Germany's foreign intelligence agency (BND) spied on European targets for the US National Security Agency (NSA) for years. Those targeted include leading French politicians, the European Commission and several top European companies.

According to reports from the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and regional broadcasters NDR and WDR, the BND monitored telephone lines beginning in 2002 and later Internet connections for key phrases given by the NSA and then forwarded on the information. The key phrases were automatically downloaded by a BND server several times per day from an NSA server.

Among the key terms, the so-called selectors, were telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and IP addresses and search terms. Between 2002 and 2013, around 690,000 telephone numbers and 7.8 million IP search terms had been examined, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reports.

The first details about operation "Eikonal" were made public in October last year. According to this, the BND obtained data from a cable that had been laid with the agreement of Deutsche Telekom to run directly from a hub in Frankfurt to the BND's headquarters in Pullach, Bavaria. From there, the information was supplied to the barracks in Bad-Aibling, where the BND established a joint spying unit with the NSA. The information obtained was then passed on to the NSA.

However, the extent of the operation has only now become clear. According to evidence submitted by the Green Party and Left Party representatives on the NSA investigation committee in the German parliament, the selectors were reviewed by the BND once more. The response from the responsible BND working group was that 40,000 selectors had breached German or European interests.

To date, this list has been kept secret by the chancellor's office. However, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that it includes the two arms companies EADS and Eurocopter, the French foreign ministry, and the seat of the French president, as well as the EU commission.

According to *Spiegel Online*, the BND had already reviewed the list of selectors in August 2013, two months after Edward Snowden exposed details about the NSA's spying activities. At the time, the BND came to the conclusion that 2,000 selectors were in conflict with German and European interests. But this had not been reported to the chancellor's office. Instead, a departmental head within the BND had ordered the relevant selectors to be deleted.

According to information in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the BND knew already in 2005 that among the automatically downloaded selectors were some that concerned German and European interests.

The chancellor's office has been aware of this since 2008. According to *Bild am Sonntag*, the BND informed the chancellor's office in 2008 that the NSA was seeking information on EADS and Eurocopter. But despite repeated warnings by the BND, nothing was done by the chancellor's office. Instead, this practice was silently tolerated.

The relevant head of the chancellor's office was Thomas de Maizière, who is today Germany's interior minister. In 2010, de Maizière's successor, Ronald Pofalla, allegedly told US representatives in 2010 that he was aware of their illegal activities, reported television broadcaster N24.

De Maizière has come in for criticism. On April 14, he responded to a question from the Left Party in parliament by saying that no information was available about economic spying by the NSA or other US

agencies.

Several opposition politicians have demanded the resignation of BND head Gerhard Schindler. Green Party parliamentary fraction head Anton Hofreiter stated that the German government had clearly lost control over the BND. The BND had become an appendage of the NSA. The Left Party's representative on the NSA investigation committee, Martina Renner, called for Schindler to step down.

The current head of the chancellor's office and close ally of Chancellor Angela Merkel, Peter Altmeier, has also been criticised. He is also responsible for the oversight of the intelligence agencies. Altmeier only advised the parliamentary control commission (PKGR) the day prior to the scandal being broken last Thursday. The NSA investigation committee was also kept in the dark.

Federal state prosecutor Harald Range has also become involved. His office, which is responsible for the investigation of severe state security crimes, is considering whether there is reason to suspect that a criminal offence has been committed.

Due to the suspicion that it has been spied upon, the airline and space concern Airbus plans to launch criminal proceedings.

It remains unclear who else is implicated in the scandal and whether political heads will roll. However, it is already clear that the BND, like the domestic intelligence agency and other intelligence agencies, conducts its business without any control and that leading politicians have covered this up.

It is becoming increasingly clear why the German government does not want Edward Snowden to testify in Germany or receive asylum. The BND is deeply implicated in the surveillance practices that Snowden exposed. These practices are not only directed against companies and representatives of other states, but also against millions of innocent citizens.

It is significant that not a single politician, whether from the government or the ranks of the opposition, calls for the abolition of the BND, which evades all democratic control, apart from the parliamentary committees that are committed to keep their deliberations secret.

The most despicable role in this regard is played by the Left Party. Left Party fraction head Gregor Gysi called for a restructuring of the BND in Germany's

national interest. In comments to Deutschlandfunk, he accused the intelligence agency of "treason." "This is about intelligence agency activity against German interests, German companies, at least companies with German involvement, against allied politicians," he said.

Gysi accused the German government of being "lily-livered towards the US administration. For decades, they have not dared to engage with them as an equal partner."

With such levels of patriotism from the Left Party, the ruling elite hardly has a need for any right-wing parties.



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