

Germany's Intelligence Service BND "Has Forwarded Massive Amounts of Data to the NSA"

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Germany's BND foreign intelligence service is said to have forwarded massive amounts of data to the NSA - legally, it maintains - because information on German citizens was not included. Opposition parties are outraged.

The NSA saga continues to unfold, even after recent revelations regarding XKeyscore, the surveillance program with which American intelligence officials are reputed to have nearly unlimited access to the activities of Internet users around the world. Now, the news magazine "Der Spiegel" reports that Germany's Federal Intelligence Agency (BND) passed on data to one of its US counterparts, the National Security Agency (NSA).

According to "Spiegel," the NSA gained access in December 2012 alone to 500 million pieces of metadata handed over by German security officials. Metadata includes details about telephone connections and email addresses.

What did Merkel's government know?

Spiegel reports are based on documents that ex-US security contractor Edward Snowden made public, and they allegedly show that the US collected the 500 million pieces of data at two collection sites in Germany, apparently with the BND's approval. The operation is said to have been titled, "Germany - Last 30 days," and one of the two collection sites is very likely the Bavarian BND facility at Bad Aibling (pictured above).



Ströbele claims the German government isn't telling the whole truth

"That requires immediate investigation," said Hans-Christian Ströbele, a Green party politician, who added that it has been claimed up to now that the Americans had abandoned

Bad Aibling years ago and transferred control to Germany.

“Now we are reading that the NSA expanded their facility there, received data on site and also analyzed it there. That is a completely new development; that’s news that we have to follow up on,” he said.

Ströbele is a member of the German parliament’s intelligence oversight committee. He is frustrated that he and his fellow committee members learned of the data transfers through the Spiegel reports. “Why has that not long since come to light in parliament, in the parliamentary control committee, but also to the public at large? The government is playing the wrong game there,” Ströbele said.

Figures in the federal government, like Chancellery Minister Ronald Pofalla, a member of Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU), have given testimony in the weeks following the NSA scandal before Ströbele’s parliamentary committee as well as to parliament’s standing Committee on Internal Affairs. Ströbele and other members of the opposition say they are appalled that the government never mentioned the vast data transfers during such testimony.

‘No German citizens affected’



Bosbach insists that German citizens were not affected by the data transfers

There’s a clear reason for that, said Wolfgang Bosbach, a CDU member of parliament. “Two situations are getting jumbled together here,” said Bosbach, who chairs the Committee on Internal Affairs.

The president of the BND never contested there was cooperation between Germany’s BND and the NSA, Bosbach explained, adding that in the parliamentary hearings on the matter, questions always centered on whether German citizens’ data had been passed on to the US. Bosbach maintains that such data are not involved in the case upon which “Der Spiegel” based its report: “The transfer of data clearly did not involve German citizens but rather data that the BND had collected in accordance with its statutory mission.”

The BND is Germany’s foreign intelligence agency, which explains why it may have been collecting data on foreign telephone calls or email activities.

BND representatives confirmed to DW that, “Before the transfers, data is cleaned in a multi-step procedure of any personal data relating to German citizens.” The BND added that the 500 million pieces of metadata that landed in the NSA’s hands involved only non-Germans.

Long-term cooperation with the NSA

According to its own assertions, the BND's actions were perfectly legal – and its cooperation with US counterparts is nothing new.



Piltz: the opposition has no right to be outraged

“The BND has worked for over 50 years together with the NSA, particularly when it comes to intelligence on the situation in crisis zones,” the agency said. “The cooperation with the NSA in Bad Aibling serves exactly these goals and it has taken place in this form for over ten years, based on an agreement made in the year 2002.”

Since Germany's current governing coalition was not in power in 2002, Free Democrat (FDP) politician, Gisela Piltz, says blame does not rest with Chancellery Minister Pofalla, but rather with his predecessor at the time, Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Piltz says it would have been his responsibility to inform parliament's intelligence oversight committee about the data transfers, and, as such, she maintains that the opposition's outrage is sorely misplaced.

“In my view, the opposition has only itself to blame,” Piltz said. “Pretending to be the firefighter just to be caught as the arsonist – you can't play both of these roles with any credibility.”

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