

German ministers quiz web firms on US surveillance

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German ministers questioned major Internet companies on Friday about U.S. tracking of web activity, days before a visit to Berlin by President Barack Obama.

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Justice Minister Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger said European-based company representatives of Microsoft and Google didn't have information on the tracking program and open questions remain about the broader issue of intelligence access to user data.

Facebook sent a reply to a series of questions and Apple didn't participate in the meeting.

German ministers already are pressing Washington for information following public disclosures by [National Security Agency](#) contractor Edward Snowden of two NSA programs, which collected millions of [telephone records](#) and track foreign Internet activity on U.S. networks.

Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) plans to raise the issue with Obama when he visits Berlin next week.

The meeting was called by the justice minister and Vice Chancellor Philipp Roesler, both members of the Free Democratic Party, the junior partner in Merkel's governing coalition. Civil rights including data protection traditionally have been a key issue for the junior party.

In a statement following the meeting, [Google](#) said it assured the ministers that it provides user data to governments "only in accordance with the law."

"Our legal team reviews each and every request, and frequently pushes back when requests are overly broad or don't follow the correct process," spokesman Kay Overbeck said in an emailed statement. "And we refuse to participate in any program that requires us to provide governments with access to our systems or to install their equipment on our networks."

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