

EU, Germany demand answers on UK surveillance

26 June 2013, by Raf Casert

(AP)—The European Union's justice chief on Wednesday demanded urgent answers from Britain on the nature and extent of an alleged online eavesdropping operation comparable to the U.S. international Internet surveillance effort.

In Germany, lawmakers demanded a Europe-wide debate on Internet privacy following reports about the program.

EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding said she wrote a letter to U.K. Foreign Secretary William Hague asking "for a very urgent reply by the end of this week" on the scope and limits of the program, alleged details of which were published by the Guardian this week.

Reding had already done likewise with the United States when faced with allegations of blanket surveillance carried out by the U.S. National Security Agency. She said she was still waiting for clear answers.

In Berlin, government and opposition lawmakers called for clarity on both countries' wiretapping efforts and a broader discussion of cross-border eavesdropping by [intelligence agencies](#).

Germany's justice minister already wrote to her British counterparts on Monday suggesting the topic be addressed at an EU meeting in July. The European Union has general guidelines on data protection in its 27 member states but cyber snooping by security services is largely regulated at national level even if it concerns international Internet traffic.

Reding said the alleged program shows that there is a need for a set of EU rules "that strikes the right balance between the protection of personal data and the processing of data for security purposes."

Last week, the Guardian cited British intelligence memos leaked by former NSA contractor Edward

Snowden to claim that U.K. spies were tapping into the world's network of [fiber optic cables](#) to deliver the "biggest internet access" of any member of the Five Eyes—the name given to the [espionage](#) alliance composed of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

In her letter, Reding said she asked whether the alleged program went beyond strict national security issues and if it also processed information in bulk. Reding further wanted to know whether the information was transferred outside of Britain and what possibilities for judicial redress citizens had.

The debate has centered on the issue of whether full security for citizens can be guaranteed without any intrusion into data privacy and where the line should be drawn. Much of Europe still has bitter memories of massive surveillance by communist authorities, who maintained that tapping phones, opening mail and bugging homes were steps necessary to guard against Western spies and political dissidents.

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APA citation: EU, Germany demand answers on UK surveillance (2013, June 26) retrieved 15 October 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-eu-germany-demand-uk-surveillance.html>

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