



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on August 29, 2013

NSA Surveillance in Germany May Threaten Merkel Reelection

Believe it or not, there may be one good thing to come out of the global surveillance scheme of the National Security Agency (NSA): It may slow down the rush to integrate the economies of the United States and the European Union.

Peer Steinbrück, leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SDP), is calling for an end to all U.S.-EU trade negotiations pending a further investigation into the NSA's spying activities within Germany.



"I would interrupt the negotiations until the Americans say if German government offices and European institutions are bugged or wiretapped," Steinbrück said during an appearance Sunday night on a German public television program.

Steinbrück is running against current Chancellor Angela Merkel in the federal elections to be held in September. Earlier in his career, he served in the Merkel administration as finance minister and he was the equivalent of governor of Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia.

"We don't know if the Americans may be sitting under our desks with some technical devices," he added.

He's probably right.

A story published in the German magazine [Der Spiegel](#) reported:

Internal NSA statistics indicate that the agency stores data from around half a billion communications connections in Germany each month. This data includes telephone calls, emails, mobile-phone text messages and chat transcripts. The [metadata](#) — or information about which call or data connections were made and when — is then stored at the NSA's headquarters in Fort Meade, near Washington, DC.

And:

The statistics, which SPIEGEL has also seen, show that data is collected from Germany on normal days for up to 20 million telephone calls and 10 million Internet data exchanges. Last Christmas Eve, it collected data on around 13 million phone calls and about half as many online exchanges. On the busiest days, such as January 7 of this year, the information gathered spiked to nearly 60 million communication connections under surveillance.

Taking a shot at his political boss-turned-rival, Steinbrück said, "Merkel is saying one thing about all this: Let's wait." "I don't think a chancellor should wait when civil liberties are at stake."

For her part, Merkel says she has seen no proof that the NSA's surveillance in her country violates German law. To cover the bases, however, Merkel's government is currently hammering out a treaty with the United States that would include a bilateral "no spy" provision.



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[The Guardian reports](#) that Merkel's spin is getting very little traction with the German people.

Earlier this month, her government attempted to reassure voters that US and British intelligence agencies had observed German laws in Germany. But critics remained sceptical, pointing out that would not stop foreign agencies accessing German online communication data transferred to the US-based servers of Google, Facebook or Microsoft.

At a recent rally, the chancellor struggled to make herself heard over chants of "hypocrite" and "liar" and the sound of vuvuzelas [plastic horns] being blown by opponents worried about stories of American snooping.

[Politico reported](#) on the political and public row, saying that the NSA's surveillance in Germany is the "one campaign issue that won't go away." In a story on the electoral effect of the American spy apparatus's operations in Germany, Politico also indicates that the scandal is "unlikely to cost the very popular, two-term chancellor another four years in office."

Citing domestic German poll results, Politico predicts that Merkel will win a third term.

[An article in Der Spiegel](#) on the NSA and the threat it poses to Merkel's political future contains a quote by Steinbrück that applies as much to Angela Merkel as to Barack Obama.

"As chancellor, Ms. Merkel swore to prevent harm to the German people," he said in an interview with the tabloid *Bild am Sonntag*. Despite that oath, he said, the rights of Germans to not be spied upon were violated.

Steinbrück also said that German intelligence agency must have known about the extent of NSA surveillance and noted: "Secret services are coordinated by the Chancellery. If you are sitting at the wheel, you carry the responsibility — whether you have fallen asleep or not."

President Obama is not asleep at the wheel and it is at the Oval Office that the buck stops for the growth and scope of the surveillance state. He is the constitutional head of the executive branch and the NSA is an executive branch agency; therefore, rather than use an executive order for some unconstitutional power grab, he should issue one that shuts down the NSA immediately.

It is true, as the author of [a Der Spiegel article](#) writes, "A monitored human being is not a free one."

Photo of German Chancellor Angela Merkel: AP Images

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