

## American Officials Consider Changes to Spying Policy

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

European officials have traveled to Washington seeking more information about American spying programs.

On Tuesday, the director of the National Security Agency, Army General Keith Alexander, defended the NSA at a hearing in Congress. He denied accusations that the NSA collected the records of millions of French and Spanish telephone calls.

“Those screenshots that show, or at least lead people to believe that we, NSA, or the United States, collected that information is false. And it's false that it was collected on European citizens. It was neither.”

The accusations follow information leaks by Edward Snowden, the former NSA contract worker who has been given asylum in Russia.

General Alexander said the agency has received targeted information from phone calls by some Europeans, through NATO allies.

“The sources of the metadata include data legally collected by NSA under its various authorities, as well as data provided to NSA by foreign partners. To be perfectly clear, this is not information that we collected on European citizens.”

Metadata would include details about a call, but not the contents of the call. But earlier reports said intelligence officials listened to the calls of as many as 35 world leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The European Parliament sent a delegation to Washington to express anger. The delegation met with members of Congress and government officials. Parliament member Jan Philipp Albrecht told VOA that the spying on Chancellor Merkel was simply too much.

“Now people are really concerned. They see that it’s not any longer connected to a terrorist threat, because Angela Merkel is not a terrorist, or not part of a terrorist ring. And they think that there was a red line crossed, which is now spying on everybody about everything.”

Mr. Albrecht called for American legislation to balance national security needs with the responsibility to protect basic civil rights.

On Tuesday, American lawmakers held a hearing on possible changes to NSA spying programs. Mike Rogers is chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. He says it is overly simplistic to think that other countries do not operate their own spying programs. But another Republican Party lawmaker, Senator Susan Collins, took a different position. In her words, "Friends do not spy on friends."

Later in the week, the Washington Post reported that the NSA secretly broke into the communication networks of Google and Yahoo. Both Internet companies said they have not approved the reported actions involving their communication links.

General Alexander has said his agency does not enter Google and Yahoo servers. He said the NSA gains access to data by "court order."

Paul Tiao formerly served as an adviser to the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He says all the publicity has made the NSA's job harder.

"NSA is facing significant challenges, both in terms of its public reputation, the level of trust that the public has in NSA, and then also policy issues, legislation that's pending that the new NSA director is going to have to deal with. That could change the nature of NSA's authority with respect to its intelligence collection mission."

Obama administration officials have promised to examine the NSA's programs. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney says the review will be completed by the end of the year.

And that's In the News from VOA Learning English. I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.