

German Parliament to Inquire into U.S. Surveillance



Berlin, March 21 (RHC) -- German parliament on Thursday agreed on setting up an investigative committee to inquire into U.S. spying activities in Germany, according to media reports.

The panel, comprising of six lawmakers from the ruling coalition and two from the opposition, is scheduled to hold its first meeting in early April.

Unanimously approved by politicians across party lines, the parliamentary inquiry will take a close look at the surveillance activities of the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) and its counterparts like the GCHQ in Britain.

German opposition lawmakers said the committee is also expected to try to find out whether Germany's intelligence agencies were aware of and possibly even benefited from the spying activities. Media reports said the eight-member NSA inquiry has authority to call witnesses from the United States and Britain to testify.

A German newspaper on Thursday reported that the committee was considering ways to involve former NSA contractor Edward Snowden in the process, although the whistleblower might have to testify via Skype.

Leaks by Snowden revealing the NSA's global spying activities began last summer. Revelations of U.S. gathering of online and photo data, especially allegations about its tapping of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile phone, have led to explicit criticism in Germany and strained relations between Germany and the United States

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