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Germany's Greens Say Snowden Should Get Safe Haven in Europe

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A kite flying close to domed antennas of a former NSA listening station on Devil's Mountain in Berlin on Sunday. **Pawel Kopczynski**

BERLIN — The leader of Germany's opposition Greens suggested on Monday that Europe provide a safe haven for former U.S. spy agency contractor Edward Snowden, whose revelations about the extent of U.S. surveillance programs have infuriated America's allies.

JЯrgen Trittin, parliamentary leader and candidate for chancellor from the Greens, Germany's third biggest party, told German television that it was an outrage that the 30-year-old former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor should be seeking asylum in "despotic" countries.

"It's painful for democrats that someone who has served democracy and, in our view, uncovered a massive violation of basic rights, should have to seek refuge with despots who have problems with basic rights themselves," said Trittin.

"Someone like that should be protected," he said. "That counts for Mr. Snowden. He should get safe haven here in Europe because he has done us a service by revealing a massive attack

on European citizens and companies. Germany, as part of Europe, could do that."

Trittin did not specify which "despots" he was referring to.

Snowden flew from the United States to Hong Kong and is now in an international airport in Russia while apparently seeking asylum in Ecuador — the country that has been sheltering WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in its London embassy since last year.

European concern over U.S. spying tactics flared anew over the weekend after German magazine Der Spiegel reported that the NSA had tapped communications at EU offices in Washington, Brussels and at the United Nations.

According to the report, the NSA taps half a billion phone calls, e-mails and text messages in Germany in a typical month, much more than any other European peer. Britain's Guardian newspaper said the United States had also targeted non-European allies.

The revelations have enraged America's foreign partners and sparked a debate over the balance between the protection of privacy and national security. The Germans are particularly sensitive about this, having experienced the Stasi secret police in communist East Germany and the Gestapo under the Nazis.

"This used to happen in the Eastern bloc, but you were aware of it. You knew everything was bugged, so you didn't talk to each other. You just went for a walk in the forest," Martin Schulz, the German president of the European Parliament, told German radio. "It is no way to treat your closest partners."

Chancellor Angela Merkel has not commented on the latest report. She said during a visit by U.S. President Barack Obama earlier this month that some questions about the U.S. program, codenamed Prism, still needed to be cleared up. Obama tried to reassure Germany that the program was well within the law and that the e-mails of ordinary citizens were not being monitored.

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