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Top German Spy Says Berlin Suffers Cyber Attack From Russia 'Every Day'

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German government and business computers are coming under increasing cyber attack every day from other states' spy agencies, especially those of Russia and China, Germany's domestic intelligence chief has warned.

Addressing a cybersecurity conference in Berlin, Hans Georg Maassen said that of an estimated 3,000 daily attacks by hackers or criminals on German government systems, about five were the handiwork of intelligence services. The latter are so sophisticated that they can easily be overlooked, he added.

"We have seen that there are ever more frequent attacks by foreign intelligence agencies on the German government IT infrastructure," he said.

These occur most frequently, Maassen said, before major international meetings such as a G20 conference, where government advisers might receive a virus e-mail purporting to be from another country's negotiators.

He described Berlin as the capital of "political espionage," saying Germany's economic, defense, foreign and arms policies were all targets for hackers, as well as major firms for their cutting-edge high technology.

Germany is Europe's economic powerhouse, a major United States and NATO ally, and many of its manufacturers are industry leaders. Maassen said companies sometimes struggle to protect their most valuable technology and products.

Disclosures by former U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden that Washington had monitored Chancellor Angela Merkel's mobile phone and conducted mass surveillance in Germany caused public outrage last year.

Germany is acutely sensitive about surveillance because of abuses under the Stasi secret police of former East Germany as well as under the Nazis.

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