

ANGELA MERKEL

OVER HAVING HER PHONE MONITORED



How will Barack Obama and Angela Merkel communicate in the future? Should the Chancellor try to boost the mood with a little joke? For example, when talking to the U.S. president about the new ideas to stabilize the Eurozone, she might want to add this: "but then, you are aware about it, aren't you?" Will Obama find such a joke funny?

Meanwhile, the situation is far from being funny. The alleged monitoring of Merkel's phone by U.S. secret services which began back in 2002 and came into the light in the course of investigation by the magazine Der Spiegel, is likely to have a long-lasting impact U.S.-German relations. It is not that important if Obama knew about wire-tapping or not. Confidence underlies any partnership. It is gone now. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle of the Free Democratic Party said that eavesdropping on friends was very politically damaging and that the U.S. action threatened bilateral ties.

Back in 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama knew that German Chan-

German media are analyzing various aspects of the scandal over alleged monitoring of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's telephone by American secret services. The story caused indignation in

the German political arena, threatening the transatlantic trade deal. The minister of the interior warned of criminal prosecution, but what would be the implications?

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cellor Angela Merkel's phone was being monitored and asked secret services for a detailed report on her activity. This was in full contradiction to the assurances Obama personally delivered to Merkel on this account. In 2010, National Security Agency head Keith Alexander personally briefed the U.S. leader on German chancellor's negotiations and instructions.

U.S. secret services tapped into text messages and calls from Merkel's mobile phone, though they had no access to the secure line of the government's fixed-line phone.

According to German journalists, the history of spying on the German leadership is rooted deep in the past. It began during Gerhard Schroeder's term, following his flat refusal to let Germany participate in the Iraq war. George Bush ordered secret services to get a grip on the issue. Also, the USA was very much worried about the friendly ties Schroeder had developed with Russian President Vladimir Putin...

The German press said Berlin's indignation over wire-tapping was indeed great, and that the U.S. coyness had everybody worried. Yet everybody knows that Germany needs America and that it depends on NSA and CIA agents' assistance in fighting terrorist threats and in crisis areas. The calls we hear nowadays are a sign of helplessness in the first place. The indignation of all German parties is as profound and their inability to act on it.

Some believe the wire-tapping spat will provide leverage for Germany in the US-EU transatlantic trade deal. Bavarian Minister of Economic Affairs Ilse Aigner (CSU), in a story carried by Der Spiegel, demands putting the

agreement on ice until accusations against the NSA have been clarified. Just what does "clarifying" mean? The wire-tapping fact cannot be doubted. When will the negotiations continue? Also, there are numerous restrictions to putting the trade talks on hold, which is not surprising, because the trade agreement is in Berlin's interests. A recent study showed that Germany would be the first to benefit from free trade as it would be able to create dozens of thousands of new jobs.

Germany and France seek to regulate their secret services' cooperation with the USA in a "no spying" agreement as early as this year. Merkel's chief of staff Ronald Pofalla (CDU) noted several weeks ago "This offer could have never been made if the Americans' assurances that they will stick to German law in Germany wasn't actually true." Pofalla erred: the NSA assurances were not worth much, so what price is the "no-spying" deal? What possible sanctions can there be if guarantees are violated again?

Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) told the newspaper Bild am Sonntag that wiretapping was a crime for which those responsible must be held accountable. However, his remarks seem somewhat out of place, because Friedrich, in the NSA spat story is among the key peacemakers. In a practical sense, he sounds more desperate than threatening. How is he going to accomplish it? Should German investigators come to the U.S. Embassy to conduct a probe, search premises and lead out the suspects? It is not the letter of law that would thwart such a decision, but the

reality of diplomatic relations. At one point, German prosecutors wanted to find the U.S. agents who had captured an extremist Islamist cleric in Milan in 2003 and smuggled him to the Cyprus through Germany, but the investigators were unable to make any headway.

Germany's Investigation Committee is increasingly viewed as a body to lead part of the domestic probe. The SPD, now in coalition talks with the CSU, is supportive of the idea. The practicalities are unclear though: President Obama will certainly not report to answer German investigators' questions.

investigation could restore the severely shaken confidence but though it would be a worthy objective, this investigation committee might be not up to the task.

Rebuilding confidence is what matters now. It might take much time, possibly years, to cope with this task. Agreements, committees and fine words will not remove cracks in U.S.-German relations, especially because there is another sensitive aspect to this topic, namely U.S. spy agency contractor Edward Snowden's wish to secure

The Snowden asylum issue became a test of independence for the German government. It is about the German-U.S. friendship to which top value is assigned, and about how



much along the old lines until that day in the spring, when Snowden's name made newspaper headlines. But no matter how outrageous the revelations were, the inviolability of Ger-

many insults from the best friend can be tolerated.

There was a time when the world was divided into the East and the West, having an "axle of evil" and an "axle of good." Germany pursued a simple and convenient policy then. It always sided with the USA. It would say "yes", occasionally abstaining or trying to keep silent. The German-U.S. relations of that period were based on the memory of war crimes and post-war assistance in rebuilding the country. The Cold War world was dangerous, yet Germany's living under the U.S. wing exempted it from responsibility in foreign policy.

Today, Germany is a sovereign state. Its role in Europe has increased.

Despite the crisis, the German economy is stable, and the state debt is not off limits. Conversely, the U.S. economy is feverish. Germans no longer regard America as a dream that came alive. Yet it had continued to shape its foreign policy

man-US friendship was more important. It was only the news that Angela Merkel's mobile phone had been monitored for a decade that changed the German sentiment, while Snowden's wish to be granted political asylum in German drove Berlin into a "friendly" trap.

There is one issue devoid of arguments. Germany regards Snowden not as a traitor but as a whistleblower, or at least a person walking a razor's edge; he is either a criminal or a hero. But the German government is not yet ready to grant him asylum.

Perhaps, everything will end up in a decision worthy of Solomon: to question Snowden in Russia, his temporary shelter. Germany will have to set up a special commission for the purpose. The information obtained might become a new test of strength for German-US relations. Russians have a proverb for this particular case: "the wolves are full and the sheep are whole."

Moris Trunov,
for Amber Bridge.



But since the CDU, the CSU and Social Democrats have formed coalitions, they are unlikely to blame themselves. SPD faction leader Thomas Oppermann said only an

political asylum in Germany (at present, Russia has granted him temporary asylum). Should Germany grant Snowden's wish? This would show Germany's true independence from the USA.