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## Germany and U.S. to exchange data to fight terrorism

By Kerstin Gehmlich

Reuters

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BERLIN (Reuters) - Germany and the United States pledged on Tuesday to allow each other access to DNA and

fingerprint databases to try to strengthen the exchange of information on suspected terrorists.

The agreement, initialed by German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaueble and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, allows Washington and Berlin to exchange personal data on suspects believed to be planning or to have committed terrorist acts.

The sharing of DNA files will not come into force immediately as the legal framework is lacking in the United States.

"This is an important step in fighting serious crime efficiently, especially international terrorism," Schaueble said at the signing of the agreement, also attended by the German justice minister and the U.S. attorney general.

The agreement, which will need to be approved by the German parliament, calls for the countries to exchange fingerprint and DNA data under a "hit/no hit" procedure.

This means that a country can send a DNA trace found at the scene of an attack to the partner state so it can check its database. In case of a hit, that state then provides information on the DNA holder, although only after formal legal proceedings.

U.S. and German officials said they hoped the bilateral agreement would open the door to similar deals between Washington and other European Union states.

## RIGHTS CONCERNS

"This is a wonderful model," said U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey. "I hope others will follow shortly.

The bilateral agreement is modeled on the Pruem treaty of European Union states, which gives police from all signatory countries access to DNA and fingerprint data, and which has triggered some data privacy concerns.

Speaking on German radio, Germany's independent privacy commissioner Peter Schaar said the new deal carried a risk that data on asylum seekers or protesters would be laid open.

"If I have participated in ... a rally and ... my identity was checked and my fingerprints taken, then this may be important to German police," Schaar told Deutschlandfunk.

"But does that give the right to the United States, when I travel there and maybe have the wrong stamp in my passport, to get access to these data? I would say no."

Unlike European partners Britain and Spain, Germany has not suffered a major attack in recent years, but the government has said the threat of one is high.

Last year, Germany arrested three men it said were planning bomb attacks against U.S. installations.

Media have reported that German police availed themselves of U.S. intelligence services to monitor the suspects on the Internet because they had no power to do so under German privacy and data protection laws.

(Reporting by Kerstin Gehmlich; Editing by Ralph Boulton)

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