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Intelligence scholars have been struggling to find the conditions under which international intelligence cooperation occurs. Most focus on transactional motives and guaranteed returns, the so called 'Quid pro Quo'. At the same time, trust is often mentioned as one of the foremost conditions, yet it has seldom been critically examined in this context. This study fills this gap. Based on a conceptual framework derived from sociology and interorganizational relations, it scrutinizes how social relations and trust influence cooperation practices in the EU intelligence system. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with senior intelligence professionals from national services and EU intelligence organizations. It concludes that social relations play a far bigger role in international intelligence cooperation than is often assumed by scholars and practitioners. From a sociological perspective, intelligence services resemble many other organizations in the public and private domains, requiring a de-exceptionalization of their cooperation practices. In the setting of EU intelligence, it is not so much transaction, but interaction that fosters cooperative behavior. Contrary to the common view that there are no friends in intelligence, likeability and personal relations downplay feelings of rivalry. Despite low prominence and poor reputation in the European intelligence network, shared institutions and collective identities in the intelligence community provide the EU with a simple and efficient basis for trust-based cooperation. This triggers the question how social relations and trust play out in other arrangements for intelligence cooperation.

The Social Ties That Bind: The role of social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation

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