The social ties that bind: the role of social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation

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Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

Relevance, Aim, Topic and Paradigm of this Research

1.1. Relevance

1.1.1. The Importance of International Intelligence Cooperation

> *'I believe there has been too little public explanation of the depth and quality of intelligence and security cooperation within Europe. [...] I've heard our European partnerships characterized dismissively in terms of 'simple' intelligence sharing [...]. But this totally misrepresents the advanced arrangements, systems and structures that European security services have together built, and that we need to continue to build on to keep pace with shifting threats and technologies.'*[1]

In may 2018 Sir Andrew Parker, Director-General of the UK Security Service MI5, spoke at the yearly conference organized by the German Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV). He did so in the presence of key officials from the international intelligence community, amongst others Arndt Freiherr Freytag von Loringhoven, NATO's Assistant Secretary-General for Intelligence, and Sir Julian King, the EU's Commissioner for the Security Union. It might thus come as no surprise that Parker spoke warmly about intelligence cooperation between intelligence services from across Europe. Likewise, it could be dismissed as mere professional courtesy that he spoke of his German host Dr. Hans-Georg Maaßen as his 'close colleague and friend'. Nevertheless, his statement is clear. He asserts that there is too little public explanation of the depth and quality of intelligence cooperation within Europe. For him, the relevance of cooperation for intelligence work is beyond doubt. His words carry strong indication that times have changed since his predecessor Sir Stephen Lander described international intelligence cooperation as 'something of an oxymoron' in a lecture fifteen years earlier.[2]

While international cooperation between intelligence services has been a common feature of intelligence practices in the last century, now its prevalence is rising.[3] Without exploring the effects of globalization in detail, it is safe to acknowledge that the current security environment qualifies as highly complex, meaning that it forms a diverse, interconnected,

1 Parker, 'Speech to BfV Symposium', May 2018, Berlin.

2 Lander, 'International Intelligence Cooperation', 481.

3 Alexander, Knowing Your Friends, 1–17; Aldrich, 'Global Intelligence Co-Operation versus Accountability', 27; Rathmell, 'Towards Postmodern Intelligence', 92; Svendsen, 'Connecting Intelligence and Theory', 700; Herman, Intelligence Power in Peace and War, 200.

interdependent and adaptive system.[4] To cope with this highly demanding reality, intelligence services turn to cooperation to increase their capabilities.[5] Multiple examples exist. A month before Sir Andrew Parker made his speech at the BfV, multilateral intelligence cooperation had a significant role in bringing down five Russian spies in a counterintelligence operation by the Netherlands' Defence Intelligence and Security Service, the Militaire Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (MIVD).[6] A month after the speech cooperation between the Netherlands' General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst; AIVD) and various international partners resulted in the arrest of three suspected terrorists planning an attack in France.[7] On their public websites and in their annual reports intelligence services themselves underline the importance of international cooperation in terms like 'significant', 'vital', 'crucial', 'irreplaceable' and as 'a mandatory condition for the success of their specific missions'.[8]

Studying international intelligence cooperation is relevant for two reasons. First, it will complement theoretical understanding of intelligence as a function of government.[9] As such, examining international intelligence cooperation between intelligence services could, for example, provide insight in state behavior in the complexity of the current international security environment. Second, studying current-day international intelligence cooperation has a practical value. It offers insight in how intelligence cooperation can best support decision advantage for policymakers. Theory could, as Treverton puts it, help practitioners 'do better'.[10] For this PhD thesis the scientific relevance is pivotal, but that does not exclude practical considerations. As far as this research is concerned, studies *on* intelligence can go hand in hand with studies *for* intelligence. A better understanding of intelligence will undoubtedly help practice as well. However, notwithstanding its scholarly and operational relevance, international intelligence cooperation has long been a neglected topic within Intelligence Studies (IS). In 2012 it was still 'substantially under-theorized'.[11] Chapter 2 demonstrates that this picture has changed significantly since then, but it will also show that there are still important conceptual blind spots in the study of intelligence cooperation. These blind spots blur our understanding.

4 See for example: Tucker, The End of Intelligence; Lahneman, 'Is a Revolution in Intelligence Affairs Occurring?'; Denécé, 'The Revolution in Intelligence Affairs'; Treverton and Wolf, Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information; Barger, 'Toward a Revolution in Intelligence Affairs'.

5 Clough, 'Quid Pro Quo', 608–9.

6 Bijleveld, 'Russian Cyber Operation, Remarks Minister of Defence, 4 October in The Hague'.

7 Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD, NL), "Annual Report 2018", 12.

8 Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija (SOA, HR), "Public Report 2022," 36; Bezpečnostní informační služba (BIS, CZ), "Annual Report 2022," 34; Veiligheid van de Staat (VSSE, BE), "Intelligence Report 2021-2022," 4; BIS, "International Cooperation"; Serviciul Român de Informații (SRI, RO), "Cooperation and Partnership."

9 Marrin, 'Improving Intelligence Studies as an Academic Discipline', 266.

10 Treverton, 'Theory and Practice', 473.

11 Svendsen, The Professionalization of Intelligence Cooperation, 68.

1.1.2. Research Puzzle

International intelligence cooperation poses a dilemma that puts intelligence services 'in something of a mental split'.[12] On the one hand, cooperation is a risky business. Intelligence services deal in secrets and disclosing these could diminish the competitive advantage they bring. There is no guarantee that partners will return the help given in kind. In addition, by opening up intelligence services show what they are capable of and allow partners to come close. It makes them vulnerable to exploitation, manipulation or even subversion. On the other hand, cooperation is an essential activity that increases capabilities in a time that no intelligence service can do its job alone. The number and diversity of threats these organizations are facing is growing. Moreover, the threats are increasingly transnational and non-state.[13] Instead of being in total competition, national intelligence services now often are strongly interdependent for their task accomplishment. It challenges the predominance of simple and direct partnerships and redirects attention to more strategic and normative arrangements; partnerships in which cooperation is broader and more long-term.[14]

Scholars struggle to understand the conditions under which intelligence services cooperate despite the vulnerability and uncertainty involved. Traditionally, explanations in IS focus on the importance of egoistic self-interest and geopolitical rivalry by states. Contrary to the (new) institutionalist and constructivist turns in International Relations (IR) and Security Studies, these publications still hold a predominantly neorealist presumption. In this setting, intelligence services seem to have no other choice than to shirk away from full cooperation, holding back and achieving no more than suboptimal results.[15] Yet, this perspective is unable to fully explain what is happening in international intelligence cooperation 'against all odds'[16], especially in multilateral arrangements. For this reason, an increasing number of intelligence scholars advocates a more sociological approach to international intelligence cooperation; focusing on the interaction between institutions and individuals and examining the way their relations construct preferences in (cooperative) behavior.[17] They depart from a purely rational approach based on control measures and the mitigation of risk. The breadth and depth of current-day intelligence cooperation cannot be explained based on these considerations alone. As General Jan Swillens, former director

12 Swillens, Former Director of Netherlands Defence Intelligence Service, 'Introduction to Lecture on Intelligence Cooperation in the EU', December 2022.

13 See for example: Bigo, "Shared Secrecy in a Digital Age and a Transnational World"; Shiraz, "Globalisation and Intelligence"; Degaut, "Spies and Policymakers."

14 Røseth, "How to Classify Intelligence Relations," 57; Sims, "Foreign Intelligence Liaison," 196–200.

15 See for example: Walsh, "Defection and Hierarchy in International Intelligence Sharing"; Sims, "Foreign Intelligence Liaison"; Richelson, "The Calculus of Intelligence Cooperation."

16 Davis Cross, *International Cooperation Against All Odds*.

17 See for example: Hoffmann, Chalati, and Dogan, "Rethinking Intelligence Practices and Processes"; Nolan, "A Sociological Approach to Intelligence Studies"; Bigo, "Sociology of Transnational Guilds."

of the MIVD, put it when still in office: 'intelligence cooperation is not just about Quid pro Quo'.[18]

Trust is often mentioned as one of the most important facilitators for international intelligence cooperation.[19] Yet, at present we know little about the underlying conditions shaping trust among intelligence services and personnel. Despite its presumed importance, trust has hardly been conceptualized in this context, let alone operationalized for use in empirical research. It hampers a nuanced understanding of this activity and runs the risk of getting stuck in oversimplified dichotomies like 'friend or foe'. When turning to publications outside the field of intelligence, trust is generally accepted as a central belief that enables the acceptance of uncertainty and vulnerability. An in-between for effective social relations in cooperation. Interorganizational relations are seen to rely heavily on trust, especially in diffuse multilateral settings and among organizations operating in secret. Trust enables these organizations to suspend their vulnerability, not because they are not aware of being vulnerable, but because they believe that their partner will not (overly) exploit this situation.[20] Reasonable expectations based on trust are seen to lead to a situation in which organizations are in 'coopetition', being competitors and co-operators at the same time.

By addressing this research puzzle on a very important topic, this study provides a valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge. It offers a strong conceptual and empirical basis. Contrary to many studies on international intelligence cooperation, the research works from a conceptual framework that systematically unravels trust in conditions and factors of influence. It uses this frame to critically examine the beliefs and perceptions of intelligence practitioners working in national intelligence services and EU intelligence organizations. This inside perspective is absent from most research in IS. It enables this study to include relations and interaction on the organizational and personal levels, providing a more nuanced insight in the dynamics of international intelligence cooperation than so far has been achieved.

18 Swillens, "Director of the MIVD General Swillens Visits ISGA to Talk about Intelligence Cooperation."

19 See for example: Omand, *How Spies Think; 10 Lessons in Intelligence*; Ballast, "Merging Pillars, Changing Cultures"; Fägersten, *For EU Eyes Only?*; Bures, "Informal Counterterrorism Arrangements in Europe"; Aldrich, "US-European Intelligence Co-Operation on Counter-Terrorism."

20 See for example: Lewicka and Zakrzewska-Bielawska, "Interorganizational Trust in Business Relations: Cooperation and Coopetition"; Raza-Ullah and Kostis, "Do Trust and Distrust in Coopetition Matter to Performance?"; Kollock, "The Emergence of Exchange Structures: An Experimental Study of Uncertainty, Commitment, and Trust"; Todeva and Knoke, "Strategic Alliances And Corporate Social Capital."

1.2. Research Aim and Questions

The primary aim of this research is to contribute to an empirically informed understanding of the conditions for international intelligence cooperation. Examining this activity through the lens of social relations and trust will produce a more nuanced understanding and one that has so far been largely absent from the debate. It will do so following the avenues for closing the research gap that will be further elaborated on in chapter 2; including the organizational and personal levels, looking at the interaction once a cooperation arrangement is decided upon, and applying a sociological approach. It will take EU intelligence cooperation as its subject of study. This brings in a type of arrangement in which these three avenues are thought to come together and which traditional approaches have the hardest time explaining. The EU will provide a deviant case of intelligence cooperation; a context of structural and repeated interaction in which it is expected that - if present - trust issues will appear at multiple levels and beyond the initial phase of cooperation formation. As such it will offer fertile soil for studying cooperative behavior from a relational point of view. The argument for using this particular case will be discussed in-depth in chapter 4.

Unravelling trust in the context of EU intelligence will introduce sociological notions into the debate on intelligence cooperation, complementing the now prevailing rational perspectives. The core assumption is that social relations and trust play an important role in determining cooperative behavior in intelligence. Yet, it is unclear how. Therefore, the main question that this thesis will answer is:

How do social relations and trust influence EU intelligence cooperation?

The first sub-question this raises is how this mechanism of social relations and trust relates to the mechanism of rational calculations mostly used in explanations of international intelligence cooperation. How does it work? Is it a totally different way of achieving cooperative behavior or can an overlap with the traditional mechanism be distinguished? A second and related sub-question is about the exact role of trust in this mechanism. What is trust exactly and what function does it have in achieving cooperative behavior in a relational setting? The third sub-question then is about what trust is made of. What are the conditions on which trust is built and maintained? It is interesting to evaluate how these conditions play out on the different levels identified. To see what adding the interorganizational and interpersonal levels does for our potential understanding of international intelligence cooperation. The fourth sub-question then is how the conditions for trust materialize in the context of EU intelligence cooperation. It requires an understanding of the contextual setting of the EU intelligence system and a thorough examination of the beliefs and perceptions of practitioners in that particular setting. A last sub-question is what the insights produced mean for international intelligence cooperation in general. This study will be wary of

extrapolating its findings into general theory, but it does provide general notions. Although strictly outside the scope of the main research question, it will answer how the empirical results contribute to conceptual understanding on international intelligence cooperation. It will produce a more refined substantive theory that can be applied to other cases in future research.

1.3. Demarcating the Topic

1.3.1. Defining Intelligence

A solid definitional foundation is a prerequisite for any conceptual study of intelligence and the start of any delineation of the topic. The term intelligence holds an important place in the research question. Yet, among scholars in IS there is no agreed definition of intelligence to go with. It is telling that 'virtually every book written on the subject of intelligence begins with what intelligence means, or at least how the author intends to use the term'.[21] Apart from the traditional distinction between intelligence as a product, process or organization, two debates stand out. First, there is a difference of opinion about the place secrecy holds within intelligence. Although secrecy is agreed to be central to many kinds of intelligence work, it is disputed whether or not it is essential.[22] Second, there is a debate over the inclusion of covert action in intelligence. Although direct action aimed at collecting information or countering an adversarial service is at the heart of intelligence, it is disputed whether this means that intelligence also encompasses clandestine operations or other controversial activities that governments would like to keep secret or at least plausibly deny. Whereas the first is supportive to knowledge building or safeguarding it, the latter is a separate task.[23] In the absence of consensus about what intelligence is, many scholars have tried to clarify the topic by adding a wide variety of adjectives to the word. Nevertheless, instead of simplifying what we mean with intelligence, these adjectives often complicate the discussion further and '[diminish] explanatory power across a number of case studies at the outset of the twenty-first century'.[24] In the face of this unclarity, a workable definition for intelligence needs to seek the middle ground. It must find a frame that is specific enough to be discriminate,

21 Lowenthal, *Intelligence*; Phythian, "Intelligence Theory and Theorie of International Relations," 55; Wheaton and Beerbower, "Towards a New Definition of Intelligence"; Warner, "Wanted: A Definition of 'Intelligence.'"

22 Breakspear, "A New Definition of Intelligence," 685–87; Phythian, "Intelligence Theory and Theories of International Relations: Shared World or Separate Worlds?," 57; Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence, 3rd ed., rev:171; Warner, "Wanted: A Definition of 'Intelligence.'"

23 Stout and Warner, "Intelligence Is as Intelligence Does," 518; Gentry, "Toward a Theory of Non-State Actors' Intelligence," 469; Hulnick, "The Future of the Intelligence Process: The End of the Intelligence Cycle?," 54; Tucker, *The End of Intelligence*, 31; Wheaton and Beerbower, "Towards a New Definition of Intelligence," 327.

24 Rogg, "'Quo Vadis?," 544, 546.

while avoiding to become so detailed that it diminishes its explanatory value in comparative cases.[25]

For the case of the EU, this research defines intelligence as 'a competitive knowledge advantage for decision-makers deliberately brought about by a range of partially secret activities concerning the collection and enhancing of data and information'. This definition combines elements from a number of leading publications.[26] First, it places knowledge building at the heart of intelligence. In general, scholars agree that intelligence has something to do with the acquisition and use of information.[27] Nevertheless, most also think that 'information alone does not constitute intelligence'.[28] These scholars see intelligence as a form of knowledge for its purpose of understanding and its attributes of validity and plausibility.[29] Addressing intelligence as a specific form of knowledge transforms it from a mere product to include the processes and organizations leading to this product. In similar fashion Sherman Kent understood intelligence to be useful knowledge that for him was intrinsically linked to the originating activity and the enabling organization.[30] Second and related, the definition used emphasizes the deliberate nature of intelligence. Intelligence is not just any kind of knowledge.[31] It is 'targeted, actionable and predictive knowledge for specific consumers'.[32] Intelligence does not just happen by accident and not for any purpose. It is an organized attempt by dedicated organizations to reduce levels of uncertainty by a range of planned activities, from planning and information collection to analysis and dissemination. In addition, intelligence is supposed to generate action. It excludes knowing for the sake of knowing or for just being informative or educative as can be the case with for example journalism and science. Even when not acted upon, intelligence provides consumers with 'competitive' or 'decision' advantage.[33] Third, it states that intelligence is at least partially secret. The exclusivity of intelligence leads to a business model that involves keeping secrets in achieving relative gain. That is not to say that all steps of the intelligence cycle are - or need to be - secret. The increasing importance of open-source intelligence (OSINT) and the

25 Rønn and Høffding, "The Epistemic Status of Intelligence," 700; Sims, "Defending Adaptive Realism: Intelligence Theory Becomes of Age," 159, 161.

26 Derived from, among others, Warner, 'Wanted: A Definition of "Intelligence"'; Wheaton and Beerbower, 'Towards a New Definition of Intelligence'; Breakspear, 'A New Definition of Intelligence'; Warner, 'Theories of Intelligence'; Lowenthal, Intelligence, 10; Gill and Phythian, Intelligence in an Insecure World, 7, 29; Walsh, The International Politics of Intelligence Sharing, 5–8; Svendsen, Understanding the Globalization of Intelligence, 10–16.

27 Rønn and Høffding, "The Epistemic Status of Intelligence," 697.

28 Wheaton and Beerbower, "Towards a New Definition of Intelligence," 321, 329; Lowenthal, *Intelligence*, 2; Breakspear, "A New Definition of Intelligence," 679–80.

29 Gill and Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World*, 34.

30 Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*, vii, 3, 69, 151.

31 Lowenthal, *Intelligence*, 2; Breakspear, "A New Definition of Intelligence," 679–80; Rønn and Høffding, "The Epistemic Status of Intelligence," 709–11; Wheaton and Beerbower, "Towards a New Definition of Intelligence," 321, 329; Agrell, "When Everything Is Intelligence - Nothing Is Intelligence," 702–9.

32 Rathmell, "Towards Postmodern Intelligence," 88–89.

33 Omand, *Securing the State*, 23; Warner, "Intelligence as Risk Shifting," 17; Wheaton and Beerbower, "Towards a New Definition of Intelligence," 329; Sims, "Defending Adaptive Realism: Intelligence Theory Becomes of Age," 154.

use of external knowledge shows that it is perfectly feasible for intelligence organizations to be open or outreaching in certain steps of the process.[34] Yet, even when doing so, the mechanism for processing, analyzing or dissemination will be at least partially secret. An opponent, once aware of the intelligence you have, will be able to change his stance and thus deprive intelligence of its actionability, degrading it to general knowledge.[35]

1.3.2. Defining Social Relations, Trust and Cooperation

The remaining concepts mentioned in the research question will be explicated in detail when constructing the conceptual framework for this study. Yet, at this point a brief introduction is helpful. First, there is 'social relations'. Two words often used in general speak, but like 'intelligence' hardly defined as a concept. The term serves a wide range of related concepts, all describing some form of social connection and interaction. This research defines a social relation as 'a relatively durable match of mutual expectations between a set of interconnected actors'.[36] Social relations require a succession of interactions between two (or more) individuals.[37] They are often described in terms of their effects, for example social support and social cohesion, two terms that will return in chapter 8. Social relations can be classified at different levels, ranging from the micro-level of relations between individuals, to the meso-level of communities and the macro-level of states.[38] These levels will play an important role in this study.

The second concept mentioned in the research question is trust. It is the key concept in this study and will be covered in detail in chapter 3. Schilke et al. see trust as essential in understanding the dynamics of social relations. They define trust as 'the willingness of an entity (i.e., the trustor) to become vulnerable to another entity (i.e., the trustee) [under the presumption] that the trustee will act in a way that is conducive to the trustor's welfare despite the trustee's actions being outside the trustor's control'.[39] In doing so, they are consistent with many authoritative publications on this topic.[40] Trust stands at the forefront of sociology and is seen to influence various relational outcomes, like collective action and

34 Wheaton and Beerbower, "Towards a New Definition of Intelligence," 326; Sims, "Defending Adaptive Realism: Intelligence Theory Becomes of Age," 161–62.

35 Shulsky and Schmitt, Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence; Warner, "Wanted: A Definition of 'Intelligence'"; Gill and Phythian, Intelligence in an Insecure World, 4–5.

36 Azarian, "Social Ties," 325–27.

37 Hinde, "Interactions, Relationships and Social Structure," 3, 5–6.

38 Vonneilich, "Social Relations, Social Capital, and Social Networks: A Conceptual Classification," 24.

39 Schilke, Reimann, and Cook, "Trust in Social Relations," 240–41.

40 See for example: Oomsels and Bouckaert, "Studying Interorganizational Trust in Public Administration," 578–84; Hardin, *Trust and Trustworthiness*, 1–27; Nooteboom, *Trust; Forms, Foundations, Functions, Failures and Figures*, 36–61; Rousseau et al., "Not So Different After All," 394–95; Ring and van de Ven, "Developmental Processes of Cooperative Interorganizational Relations," 93; Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," 712–14.

solidarity. Cooperation is also one of these relational outcomes, often seen as a behavioral manifestation of trust.[41]

Cooperation is a well-covered academic topic outside the field of IS and it would be preposterous to try to sum up the entire debate here. Like trust, the concept of cooperation will be addressed in more detail when constructing the conceptual framework for this study. For now, it is sufficient to bring forward a simple working definition; cooperation is the practice of people or entities working together for mutual benefit, with commonly agreed-upon goals and possibly methods.[42] First, cooperation is for a common goal. This means that the parties involved all benefit in some way, albeit perhaps not in the same manner or degree. There is always some reciprocity involved in the activity. Simply giving someone what he wants out of fear does not qualify as cooperation, because it does not involve a mutual benefit (except from avoiding punishment). Second, it involves actions by more than one participant. This research will focus on collective action for collective gain; cooperation by all for all. It helps delineating EU intelligence cooperation.

1.3.3. Delineating EU Intelligence Cooperation

Intelligence cooperation is a complex multidimensional phenomenon. It occurs in all phases of the intelligence process, encompasses a range of activities at multiple levels and is done by a variety of actors. First, although the focus will be on joint analysis, this research will include other parts of the intelligence process as well. Cooperation can be advantageous in collection, processing as well as in dissemination. For example, in the case of dissemination, issuing a joint threat analysis can bolster its eloquence with decisionmakers and possibly ease an intergovernmental response. Second, although the emphasis will be on information-exchange, this research will include position alignment and co-creation as well. The latter two are often associated with coordination and collaboration, but these concepts are closely related and are often used intermingled with cooperation.[43] Cooperation can produce mutual benefit through a range of activities. For example, in the case of coordination, an orchestrated division of labor can produce both efficiency and bring in fresh perspectives. Third, and already mentioned, cooperation plays out at multiple (interrelated) levels; the international, the organizational and the interpersonal. They cannot be seen in isolation.[44] For example, the political stance of a Member State with regard to EU integration will have

41 See for example: Molm, Collett, and Schaefer, "Building Solidarity through Generalized Exchange"; Ostrom, "A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action."

42 Khamis, Kamel, and Salichs, "Cooperation."

43 Castañer and Oliveira, "Collaboration, Coordination, and Cooperation Among Organizations."

44 Koops, "Inter-Organizationalism in International Relations: A Multilevel Framework of Analysis," 207.

its effect on the directives given to its bureaucracies and possibly the attitudes of Brussels-based personnel. This research will include all these levels.

The complex reality of EU intelligence cooperation obliges to keep an open mind, but before starting the study it is important to further delineate this subject of study. The discussion on what 'real intelligence' means lies at the heart of this research into trust, as will be shown mainly in chapter 8. Therefore, the broad definition of intelligence presented above holds few restrictions in itself. The same goes for social relations, trust and cooperation. Their meaning in the context of the EU intelligence system will take center stage in the remainder of this thesis. As for intelligence in the setting of the EU, this research will focus on intelligence aimed at supporting strategic and operational decision-making in the realm of defence and external security issues; the fields of 'war, diplomacy and security'.[45] The study will therefore include counterterrorism only in as far as external (outside EU borders) action is involved. Domestic intelligence and criminal intelligence are excluded, although in practice connections exist with the research topic. In sum, for this research EU intelligence cooperation is reduced to 'collective action by EU intelligence organizations and Member State intelligence services aimed at establishing a competitive knowledge advantage for EU decision-makers in the realm of Defence and External Security'.

In terms of product, intelligence in this case provides a knowledge advantage for the formulation and execution of EU policies aimed at enhancing external security or exploiting opportunities in foreign relations. In the case of the EU intelligence system, cooperation must directly or indirectly help the relevant decision-makers within the European Union, specifically the European External Action Service (EEAS). In terms of organizations, this research will be limited to those organizations dedicated to produce this kind of intelligence for the EU. This means that it will focus on the intelligence services of EU Member States and the EU intelligence organizations EUMS INT and INTCEN. The latter organizations will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. Other (non-EU) arrangements and organizations like the Counter Terrorism Group (CTG) and NATO will only be included by comparison and when mentioned by the respondents. In terms of process, there will be no limitation upfront on the exact intelligence activity concerned. Nevertheless, as will also be explained in chapter 5, the nature of the EU intelligence system dictates that in practice this research is primarily about analysis and dissemination. Covert and clandestine action hold no place in this research at all. Although intelligence services are certainly engaged in these activities, either in service of their own process or as part of foreign policy, actionable intelligence in the context of the EU is (for now) limited to providing useful knowledge based on earlier collection.[46]

45 Stout and Warner, "Intelligence Is as Intelligence Does," 519.

46 Degaut, "Spies and Policymakers," 516; Omand, "The Future of Intelligence: What Are the Threats, the Challenges and the Opportunities?," 14; Shiraz and Aldrich, "Globalisation and Borders," 268, 271; Lahneman, "Is a Revolution in Intelligence Affairs Occurring?," 14; Sims, "Defending Adaptive Realism: Intelligence Theory Becomes of Age," 519, 521; Warner, "Intelligence as Risk Shifting," 24; Scott, "Secret Intelligence, Covert Action and Clandestine Diplomacy," 322–25.

1.4. Research Paradigm: Ontology and Epistemology

1.4.1. A Post-positivist Stance to Finding 'Truth'

This research takes a post-positivist stance towards scientific progress. This stance is important as it determines what is actually meant when aiming - as this research does - for a 'more comprehensive understanding'. The most fundamental questions to be answered are what the study considers to be reality and to what extent this reality can be objectively measured. Whereas the first involves the ontological issue of 'truth' (what is true), the second concerns the epistemological issue of 'knowledge' (what can be known). Of course, the two are intimately linked. Together they constitute the research paradigm, defined by Kuhn as 'a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted'.[47] This paradigm forms the basis for the research design and - ultimately - the methods used. In the social sciences the prevailing paradigm varies, depending on the discipline at hand. In general, a dichotomy exists between positivists on the one side, and post-positivists[48] on the other. The former group believes in the existence of an objective, static and lawlike reality, whereas the latter believes that reality is a subjective construct built by people who attach meaning to events. For post-positivists, multiple, even conflicting, truths may exist that together shape reality and can vary over time depending on context and antecedents.

Intelligence Studies harbors a predominantly positivist tradition that is linked to its neorealist presumption, one that will be explored in depth in chapters 2 and 3.[49] Intelligence scholars in this tradition object to stating value over facts, as this would make all knowledge relative. This, in in their opinion, makes any attempt for scientific progress irrelevant.[50] Some of these scholars simply question the added value of post-positivist approaches, like Lillbacka who claims that 'non-realist-perspectives have hitherto been unable to present anything that would benefit IS'.[51] Few go as far as to outright denounce post-positivists as dangerous to the field. Instead, they argue that gaining knowledge is about finding intelligence theories that can objectively explain reality and enhance the intelligence trade. This emphasis on general theory might stem from the practical origins of IS where a debate by and for practitioners

47 Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

48 Several paradigms are distinguished that criticize positivist belief in empiricism and objectivity, for example, 'postmodern' and 'critical' or even 'anti-positivist' or 'interpretivist'. Although they go by different names and vary in their precise methods of inquiry, they all adhere to a value-based view of truth (ontology) and non-linear approach to knowledge (epistemology). For these essential differences with positivism, they are labeled here as being 'post-positivist'.

49 Gill and Phythian, Intelligence in an Insecure World, 27.

50 Davies, "Theory and Intelligence Reconsidered", 199.

51 Lillbacka, "Realism, Constructivism, and Intelligence Analysis," 305.

was to retain and further professional standards and tradecraft.[52] A trade in which 'speaking truth to power' has been paramount for a long time.[53]

The view that research can be conducted completely free of values and subjective meaning is losing ground in the social sciences, for example in IR and Security Studies.[54] By comparison, for quite some time there has existed only a 'small, mostly undifferentiated group of constructivists, critical, and post-structuralist theories' in the margins of IS.[55] Yet, in recent years their numbers seem to be growing. Instead of searching for a grand theory of intelligence, these scholars advocate the use of theories in understanding multiple and overlapping narratives, address the complex nature of intelligence, acknowledge fluid boundaries and knowledge networks and recognize the effect of challenged identities.[56] For example, Davies states that 'while one might benefit from making use of selected tools of theory, one is always best-off avoiding schools of theory'.[57] In similar fashion, Spoor and Rothman claim that a 'positivist monoculture' stands in the way of 'diversity of theory [...] necessary to explore alternative explanations to engage with modern intelligence complexities'.[58]

It is important not to over-emphasize the scientific-philosophical entrenchment within the intelligence debate, let alone exclude one or the other approach from the academic debate. De Werd convincingly argues that this would deny the progress that has been made by several authors and would probably hamper advancement.[59] Moreover, it distracts attention from the reason why these differences are important in the first place. Lacking a common paradigm, theory and definition of intelligence risks scholars talking past each other rather than to each other. It hampers a cumulative build-up of knowledge. Already in the early days of IS Kent insisted that discussions needed to cumulate within the terms of a common conceptual frame and common terminology.[60] More recently Marrin considered the failure to adequately aggregate knowledge and make it cumulative the primary problem within

52 Kent, "The Need for an Intelligence Literature."

53 Spoor and Rothman, "On the Critical Utility of Complexity Theory in Intelligence Studies," 4–5.

54 Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 34.

55 Bean, "Intelligence Theory from the Margins," 528; Johnson, "The Development of Intelligence Studies," 10; Spoor and Rothman, "On the Critical Utility of Complexity Theory in Intelligence Studies," 9.

56 Johnson, "Sketches for a Theory of Strategic Intelligence," 51–52; Davies, "Theory and Intelligence Reconsidered," 188; Rogg, "'Quo Vadis?," 547; "Toward a Theory of Intelligence. Workshop Report," 10; Phythian, "Intelligence Theory and Theories of International Relations: Shared World or Separate Worlds?," 54–72; Davies, "Theory and Intelligence Reconsidered," 186–88; Gaspard, "Intelligence without Essence," 558–60; Gill, "Theories of Intelligence," 212; Marrin, "Evaluating Intelligence Theories," 479; Warner, "Intelligence and Reflexivity," 169; Rathmell, "Towards Postmodern Intelligence," 97–98; Gill and Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World*, 29.

57 Davies, "Theory and Intelligence Reconsidered," 196.

58 Spoor and Rothman, "On the Critical Utility of Complexity Theory in Intelligence Studies," 23.

59 de Werd, "Critical Intelligence: Analysis by Contrasting Narratives: Identifying and Analyzing the Most Relevant Truths," 50–52.

60 Kent, "The Need for an Intelligence Literature."

IS.[61] For all their differences of opinion, all intelligence scholars make assumptions that are based on some theory of the world.[62] Rather than fight each other's dogmas, it is important that authors make clear their position to enable others to evaluate and challenge their presumptions, methods and findings.[63] Therefore, the following subsection will explicate the approach adopted in this study.

1.4.2. A Critical Realist Approach to Intelligence Practices

This research will turn to the approach of critical realism and the adjoining 'practices' to achieve its aim; a more comprehensive understanding of international intelligence cooperation. In doing so, it takes scientific middle ground. Critical realism, initially introduced by Bhaskar, is a dualistic approach. It starts from a realist ontology, but advocates a relativist (critical) epistemology.[64] Because of this, it adheres to a stratified perspective on social reality. Moreover, it acknowledges the notion of a transcendental social reality, more than the sum of its participants and their actions. Systems of durable dispositions and 'generative mechanisms' govern human behavior, consciously and unconsciously.[65] From this viewpoint, when looking at intelligence and intelligence cooperation, there will be recurring patterns in what intelligence services and personnel do (and do not do). These patterns can be observed in the real world and are practical manifestations of the more abstract realities of intelligence.[66] It is possible to gain insight and understanding of the broader phenomenon by studying these manifestations. Nevertheless, critical realists also acknowledge that social systems, contrary to natural ones, are open systems by definition. They 'do not exist independently of the activities of people'.[67] Therefore, the empirical effects of generative mechanisms are constantly being intermediated by subjective belief systems, meaning attribution and knowledgeable perception as well as context and circumstances.[68] We can only hope to uncover portions of this reality by using as many perspectives or lenses as possible.

61 Marrin, "Improving Intelligence Studies as an Academic Discipline," 269.

62 Gill, "Theories of Intelligence," 209.

63 Marrin, "Evaluating Intelligence Theories," 481; O'Mahoney and Vincent, "Critical Realism as an Empirical Project," 19.

64 Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 2–3.

65 O'Mahoney and Vincent, "Critical Realism as an Empirical Project," 11; Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: An Introduction to Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, 186.

66 Stout and Warner, "Intelligence Is as Intelligence Does," 517.

67 Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, xxi, 20, 38.

68 O'Mahoney and Vincent, "Critical Realism as an Empirical Project," 9; Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 2–4.

Critical realism is well suited for studying the workings of cooperation as a complex social phenomenon.[69] Due to its conception of a stratified reality, it meets two avenues of approach that will be advocated in chapter 2; viewing it as a process and on multiple levels. First, the existence of multiple levels of reality defies simple (linear) explanations. Instead of horizontal and linear explanations relating one independent variable to one dependent other, the introduction of structural - and therefore conditional - intermediates necessitates vertical explanations linking different levels of understanding.[70] Trust will be presented as such an intermediate belief system. Second, as all levels of social reality are indeed social, this means they are not immutable. Even the most 'real' or objective level is subject to change. Generative mechanisms have 'the capacity of changing [their] shape or form' over time as the result of repeated social activity. They are only relatively enduring and current processes and outcomes will influence future mechanisms for behavior.[71] It opens the floor to dispositions on intelligence cooperation that have been considered non-existent or marginal for a long time or that have been overlooked. Moreover, from this perspective human behavior can only be studied in practices; the result of an interplay between generative mechanism, individual action and specific circumstances.[72]

In a critical realist approach, practices offer a fitting window to study cooperation as a form of collective action.[73] Practices are composed of a group of people's shared skills, competences and practical understanding.[74] The members of the group display meaningful behavior based upon them. Bourdieu, one of the most well-known practice theorists, positions them as part of what he terms 'habitus':

> *'Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends'*[75]

As such, practices commute to the lower levels of a stratified social reality; the vanguard of generative mechanisms so to say. They are 'a conception of human action or practice that can account for its regularity, coherence, and order without ignoring its negotiated

69 Archer, "Morphogenesis versus Structuration; on Combining Structure and Action," 104–5, 113–14; Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: An Introduction to Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, 181.

70 Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 29.

71 Crossley, "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction," 87–91; Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: An Introduction to Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, 186.

72 Archer, "Morphogenesis versus Structuration; on Combining Structure and Action," 112; Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: An Introduction to Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, 180–81; Archer, "Realism in the Social Sciences," 195–96; Schatzki, "Practice Theory," 14.

73 Barnes, "Practice as Collective Action," 27–31.

74 Schatzki, "Practice Theory," 18.

75 Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 2019, 53.

and strategic nature'.[76] Through practices it is possible to critically examine the complex 'interconnections and distinctions between systematic forces and individual judgment and decision making' of international intelligence cooperation.[77] A turn to practices therefore transcends the 'rigid action-structure opposition', or 'theory-practice' divide, associated with the dichotomy between positivists and post-positivists.[78]

Turning to practices in this study will generate shades of grey, providing nuanced insight in the way trust influences cooperative behavior in EU intelligence. First, practices offer room to the intangible or abstract. They enable to study trust - and its deeper layers or conditions - as an intermediate, or empowering effect for the social relations there. Preferences for (cooperative) behavior are constituted by underlying 'motives, reasons and meanings, ideas, rules, norms and discourses [for activities], and the way these are influenced by the social context'.[79] The way people consciously and unconsciously understand and value the world, influences perceptions about how goals can be achieved in specific circumstances. Second, practices are field specific. They enable to study the meaning of trust in the specific context of intelligence. Social actors are like 'players in a game, actively pursuing their ends with skill and competence, but always doing so within the bounds of the game'. Nevertheless, 'as in games, these [rules] only matter to or have meaning for those involved, those who know how to read the game and have a stake in it. Outsiders can see these practices as peculiar of even meaningless'.[80] Third, practices acknowledge the importance of specific circumstances. They enable to study trust beliefs and perceptions where they meet practical considerations.[81] Actual events in EU intelligence cooperation are the result of an interplay between social structure and individual action in a very specific context and circumstance. In this, social actors negotiate their position and action on an ongoing basis. The analytical dualism inherently present in critical realism and the study of practices shapes the design and methods of this study. Both will be presented in chapter 4. The multifaceted nature of intelligence, the social fabric of meaning, as well as its changing and complex environment render understanding trust in this context a matter of interpretation and sensemaking.

76 Crossley, "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction," 83, 107; Herepath, "In the Loop," 858; Barnes, "Practice as Collective Action," 25–26.

77 Bean, "Organizational Culture and US Intelligence Affairs," 492; Gill and Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World*, 31; Svendsen, "Connecting Intelligence and Theory," 709, 729; Svendsen, "Contemporary Intelligence Innovation in Practice," 108.

78 Schatzki, "Practice Theory," 10.

79 de Werd, "Critical Intelligence: Analysis by Contrasting Narratives: Identifying and Analyzing the Most Relevant Truths," 62.

80 Crossley, "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction," 84, 86; Coulter, "Human Practices and the Observability of the 'Macro-Social,'" 46–47; Archer, "Addressing the Cultural System," 511.

81 Danermark et al., *Explaining Society: An Introduction to Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, 18, 158–59; Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism*, 40–41; Crossley, "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction," 88; Archer, "Realism in the Social Sciences," 200.

1.5. Thesis Structure

There are several building blocks that will help us answer how social relations and trust influence EU intelligence cooperation. This study is roughly divided in a conceptual and an empirical part. The conceptual part will provide the framework for studying the empirics, but is valuable in its own right as well. It ranges from chapters 2 to 4. Chapter 2 identifies the research gap. It answers what the current state of the debate on international intelligence cooperation is, an endeavor that has not been done with the same profundity since the excellent encyclopedic overview by Timothy Crawford in 2010.[82] By doing a systematic literature review on leading publications in the period between 1990 to 2019, this research shows that the debate has evolved considerably both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Yet, it also makes clear that there still is a research gap stemming from a neorealist presumption. A gap that can be closed by researching intelligence cooperation at multiple levels, in the interaction phase, and by using a sociological perspective. Chapter 3 provides such a sociological perspective by unravelling the role of social relations and trust in intelligence cooperation, using theories from sociology and interorganizational relations. It shows how the mechanism of social relations in cooperation is empowered by trust and what conditions determine the degree of trust. In doing so, this chapter provides a viable conceptual framework for studying social relations and trust in international intelligence cooperation. A conceptual approach that has not been applied with the same rigor since - and is a next step to - the outstanding work by Fägersten, also done in 2010.[83] The theoretical section ends with chapter 4, in which the research design and methods are discussed. It substantiates the choices made in strategy, methods for data collection and data analysis, as well as clarifying the quality indicators used. It answers how this research comes from A to B; the logic guiding it from questions to conclusions.

The empirical section will zoom in on the case of EU intelligence cooperation, based on the concepts and methods introduced earlier. It ranges from chapters 5 to 8. Chapter 5 answers what the EU intelligence system is, where it came from and what the current ideas for its future are. Primarily based on desk research, it will scrutinize the setting in which EU intelligence cooperation takes place. Beliefs and perceptions of intelligence practitioners in this system cannot be properly understood outside this context. It influences the way their preferences are shaped and the manner in which these preferences can play out. The following chapters will then critically examine the role of social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation. Based on in-depth interviews with 47 senior intelligence professionals from national services and EU intelligence organizations, as well as numerous conversations and focus groups, these chapters uncover how relational perceptions of trust influence cooperation practices.

82 Crawford, "Intelligence Cooperation."

83 Fägersten, *Sharing Secrets*.

Chapter 6 answers how perceptions of ability influence EU intelligence cooperation. This first condition for trust is the most cognitive of the three, depicting how well partners in the network know each other and what reputation does for their cooperative behavior. Chapter 7 answers how perceptions of integrity influence EU intelligence cooperation. This second condition for trust is the more normative of the three, depicting how partners recognize each other's institutions and what acceptable principles do for their cooperative behavior. Chapter 8 answers how perceptions of benevolence influence EU intelligence cooperation. This third condition for trust is predominantly affective, depicting to what extent partners can identify with one another and adjust their cooperative behavior based on attachment.

Chapter 9 concludes this research, answering its main question and inferring its broader meaning. From a conceptual point of view, this research concludes that social relations play a far bigger role in international intelligence cooperation than is often assumed. The mechanism of social relations and trust provides a valuable complement to traditional explanations of rational calculations and control. From an empirical point of view, the research concludes that social relations and trust positively influence EU intelligence cooperation through benevolence and on a personal level. They provide reasonable expectations about outcome and vulnerability, compensating for the absence of direct organizational gains and a formal obligation to share. In addition, this last chapter identifies the contribution of these conclusions for the study of EU intelligence practice, patterns of cooperation in European intelligence, the concept of trust in intelligence cooperation, and theories of social relations in intelligence. In addition, it reflects on the research process, poses recommendations for future research and holds considerations for practice. The structured outline for this thesis is summed up in figure 1.

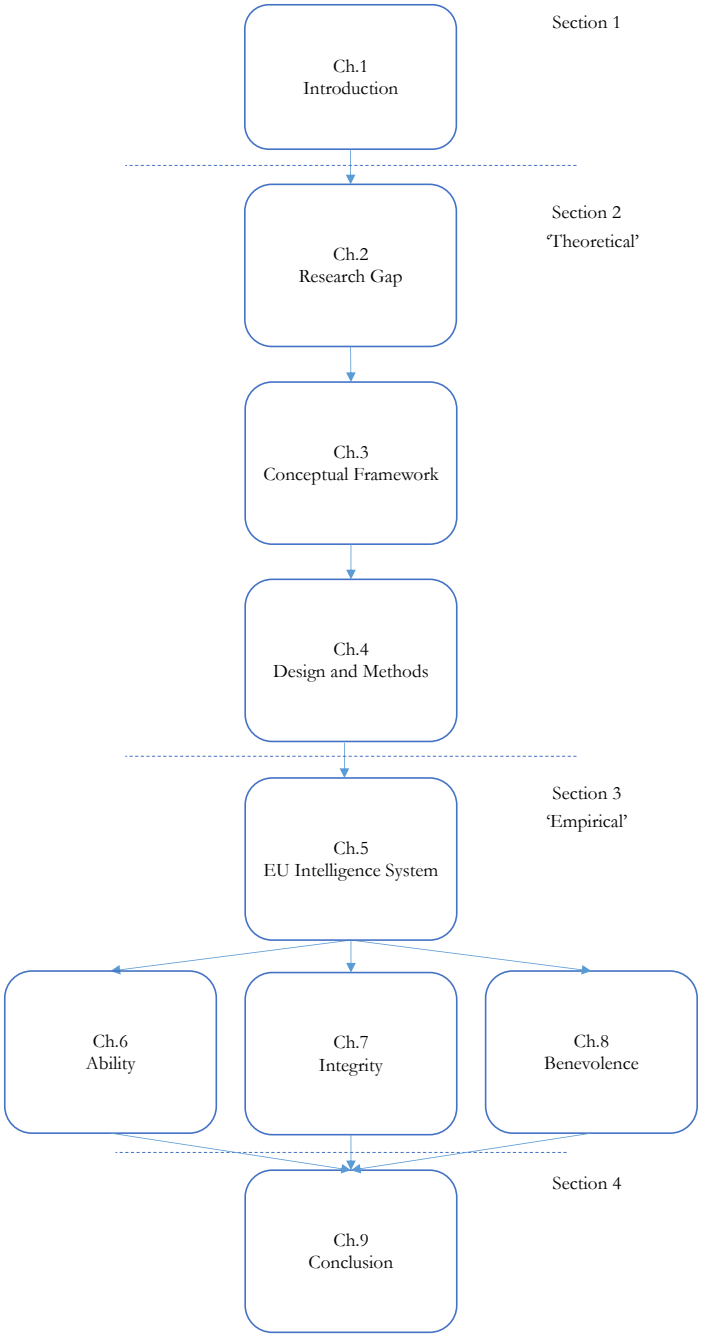

Figure 1; Thesis Structure