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

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Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Ability in EU Intelligence Cooperation

Crippled Connections

6.1. Introduction

> *'The mechanism for European intelligence cooperation is already there. It has been there all along. The EU institutions only were [never] really part of it. [...] A customer that [now] wants to take a stronger role, but is not capable of establishing stronger links between the national services and the EU decision makers."*[1]

The first condition for trust is for partners to have a favorable perception of each other's ability to perform. In their original framework, Mayer et al. simply define ability as a 'group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence in a specific domain'.[2] Yet, they say little about how these perceptions are built between people or groups. The conceptual framework in chapter 3 filled this void by turning to interorganizational relations and trust literature. It identified that perceptions of ability are built within networks through the entity of reputations and a process of familiarization. Networks are collective structures for building and maintaining (favorable) perceptions of ability. They also have an informative function. In a network, the reputation of a partner depicts its standing, its niche in the functional environment, and its interrelationships with other organizations. Familiarization is the process of directly or indirectly communicating these reputations. This research uses concepts from qualitative social network analysis to evaluate the role of reputations and familiarization in EU intelligence cooperation.[3] The smaller and the more tight-knit a network is, the better suited for building strong social relations and trust.

Networks, familiarization and reputations are expected to play a role in EU intelligence cooperation. The ability of EU intelligence organizations is based not so much on their own material assets, but on mobilizing the assets of others. They are necessarily part of a wider European intelligence network. This network provides the SIAC[4] with muscle, enabling them to support EU decision making in external action. Strong positions and connections in this network are associated with high quality, high support in cooperation and social influence. They can provide a form of (social) capital that indirectly grants access to more traditional

1 Interview 5

2 Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," 717.

3 Schepis, "Social Network Analysis from a Qualitative Perspective."

4 As noted in the previous chapter, this study will use the term 'SIAC' alternately with 'EU intelligence organizations' when pointing at the combination of INTCEN and EUMS INT.

resources in cooperation like information, manpower and money.[5] In addition, the European intelligence network can be the scene of repeated interaction and a place where people can learn about others. In turn, knowing each other will bolster reasonable expectations and possibly trust. In the European network intelligence organizations are thought to generally connect for functional reasons, but these connections would enable social relations and trust to develop. The European intelligence network and the place the EU organizations are seen to hold within it, determine the limits of trust-based cooperation there.

This chapter examines perceptions of ability in the EU intelligence system based on the empirical data obtained from interviews and desk research. Starting from the substantive theory provided by the conceptual framework, it scrutinizes how these perceptions shape cooperation in practice. The chapter provides a thick analysis that combines a rich narrative of practitioners' views on this topic with insights from social network analysis. First, it addresses the network as a whole. Section 6.2 looks at the macro- or system level; the role and position of the EU in the broader European Intelligence network. Who are the key players? And how does its size and diversity influence cooperation? Second, section 6.3 examines the meso- or group level by addressing the intelligence organizations in the EU. What is the perceived place of SIAC in the system and how do familiarity and reputations influence cooperation there? Third, section 6.4 scrutinizes the micro- or individual level; zooming in on the every-day practice of intelligence officers in the EU intelligence organizations. What roles do they have? And how do their (inter)actions influence cooperation? Section 6.5 concludes this chapter and evaluates how aggregate perceptions of ability, and the way these are formed and transmitted in networks, influence cooperative behavior in the European intelligence system. Conceptually, it shows that perceptions of ability are well suited for scrutinizing the role of social relations and trust in cooperative behavior. It explicates the framework introduced in chapter 3 by adding the underlying concepts of network complexity and actor centrality. In addition, it shows the interplay between reputations and familiarization at different levels. Empirically, it highlights the negative effect of poor reputations and low familiarity in the context of EU intelligence cooperation, somewhat softened by the boundary spanning role of individuals. To clarify these conclusions, it uses textual explanation, schematic visualization and a metaphor.

5 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (Greenwood, 1986), 21.

6.2. The Macro-Level: A Small World?

6.2.1. The Complexity of the European Intelligence Network

When evaluating perceptions of ability in EU intelligence cooperation, beginning at a system level is helpful. Scrutinizing ideas about the role and position of the EU in the European intelligence network will tell a great deal about the role of social relations and trust there. Following the general frame of social network theory, a first element in this examination is the complexity of the network. The smaller the size and the higher the density of a network, the larger the chances for reputations to travel along its ties, allowing perceptions of ability to build reasonable expectations about partner behavior. Starting with size, a social network can be considered a small world 'if, roughly speaking, any two [actors] in the network are likely to be connected through a short sequence of intermediate acquaintances'.[6] Chapter 3 observed that the intelligence network holds many possibilities to get to know each other and build realistic expectations about ability, but that size and diversity can hamper this process. The case of EU intelligence clearly underlines this difficulty and explicates its origins.

At first sight, the composition of the European intelligence network appears rather manageable. In essence, most participants sketch just two relevant types of organizations; the national intelligence services and the intelligence structures of NATO and the EU. It seems to provide a clear and measured board for social relations to play out. Yet, this does not mean that all actors are well - or equally well - known. Several EU intelligence officers describe their EU colleagues as passers-by, estimating the chances of ever seeing them again after their joint posting in Brussels as slim. They consider it a 'matter of probabilities', as the sheer size of the European intelligence network can make their peers disappear.[7] Apparently, repeated interaction between the same (set of) organizations and people is not a given rule. No matter what mechanism is at work, absence of repeated contact would be detrimental for cooperative behavior. Chapter 3 has shown that - for different reasons - high chances of seeing a partner again help both the mechanism of social relations and rational calculations. Without it, cooperative behavior based on trust is difficult for sure.

The question is whether the European intelligence network is indeed as large as presumed by these intelligence officers, or at least sizable enough to hinder repeated interaction. A quick calculation confirms that it is. Although there are no official reports on the total number of people working for intelligence services in Europe, a (very) rough estimate can be made. Based on the numbers mentioned in interviews and the official numbers known from some national services, there are at least 50.000 people working for intelligence services in the

6 Kleinberg, "The Small-World Phenomenon," 163; Hanneman and Riddle, "Concepts and Measures for Basic Network Analysis," 2011, 341–42.

7 Interview 22, 6, 8, 10, 44

EU.[8] Although modest by comparison to the US intelligence community (reported to number almost 100.000 personnel in 2011[9]), the European intelligence workforce is by no means negligible. In addition, it must be noted that the European network consists of countries' services that are not part of the EU altogether. Considering the size of this community, the chances of meeting indeed seem slim. The chances of meeting the same persons twice seem even slimmer. Let alone getting acquainted with them. Yet, this is not only about the size of the workforce. It is about organizational diversity as well.

The European intelligence network holds many services. One very experienced intelligence officer illustrates this by describing the Intelligence College Europe (ICE), a pan-European initiative to bring together and strengthen the various intelligence communities in Europe. At its conception in march 2019 ICE brought together 66 intelligence services from 30 European countries. That number has grown since.[10] He compares that with SIAC, which is linked to even more services (approximately 86 in total).[11] In both cases it does not involve all European intelligence services. Given their respective (general) aims, ICE and SIAC will both be predominately linked to those services that exploit all-source intelligence. For example, out of the six official French services, normally only three (DGSE, DGSI and DRM) are counted as prime stakeholders in EU and NATO. When taking into account specialized services on - amongst others - HUMINT and SIGINT, the European community is larger and more diversified.[12] That is certainly the case when including security services and counterintelligence services as well, raising not only the total number significantly, but also adding to the variety of operational dynamics. A future broadening of intelligence tasks, like in countering disinformation or addressing environmental threats to security, would readily increase the number and types of organizations involved. Whereas the general classification of 'intelligence service' might be relatively simple and clear-cut, there are many types of these services. Classifying them into strict categories is not simple at all. Although the smaller brother in absolute numbers, the European intelligence community might already exceed its American equivalent in terms of diversity.

The diversity of the European intelligence network is overwhelming. Services differ in task, focus, governance structure, legal basis and workforce composition. To name only a few divides. As indicated in chapter 5, services seldomly match a partner entirely. For example, the largest German intelligence service incorporates many functional divides that

8 Based on the presumption that few Member State intelligence communities have 10.000 people, some have 4.000 and most have up to 500. The ambiguity of the intelligence network obliges a caveat, e.g., on the question what can be considered 'intelligence' or a 'service'. This estimate is only meant to illustrate the challenge to connectivity and familiarity posed by the sheer size and scale of the community.

9 National Research Council, Intelligence Analysis for Tomorrow: Advances from the Behavioral and Social Sciences. Washington, DC, The National Academies Press, 2011

10 Intelligence College Europe, "The College."

11 Interview 36

12 Interview 11

are separated in almost all other European countries apart from Austria and Sweden. BND combines civilian and military intelligence and is the most prominent German partner in external intelligence cooperation in Europe. Nevertheless, for historical and functional reasons they have a strongly fragmented domestic intelligence architecture, including one service at the federal level (BfV), 16 at regional (state) level, and a separate one for military counterintelligence (BAMAD). Like BND, the national services all cooperate with other European services and participate in NATO and EU. Other countries like Belgium and the Netherlands have divided civilian and military intelligence functions between two services, but each incorporates counterintelligence. Italy's main service for external intelligence (AISE) is positioned within their Ministry of Defence. Spain has a central intelligence service (CNI), but combines this with a military service positioned at the level of army headquarters (CIFAS). These are only a few of the many constellations for intelligence services used in the European network.[13] All of these services have their own history, background and mix of operational and technical skillsets. On the one hand, this is considered the strong point of the European network, delivering different perspectives and approaches. One intelligence officer even thinks that 'sameness would destroy [its] strength'.[14] Correct as this view might be when looking at potential outcomes, it does not seem to help trust.

The huge diversity of partners in the broader European intelligence network hampers network connectivity and makes communications difficult. Compatibility becomes an issue as national particularities make it harder to connect internationally.[15] As a national intelligence officer observes:

> *'Blurry distinctions mean that you seldom know who is the, in that case, correct counterpart to address. [In addition] the parameters in which they operate are different, holding back exchange and interaction.'*[16]

Especially on a multilateral level, relations are complicated. Participating countries bring a multitude of legal and functional caveats - as well as many (bureaucratic) interests - to the table. On a bilateral level, especially between smaller countries, it is a bit easier. There are fewer services involved and their ties are closer and often less formalized. There is always 'some entrance to be found for cooperation'.[17] Still, discovering appropriate partners for specific topics and maintaining relations with them is often challenging. As most of the potential partners are very closed to the outside, it is hard to find a match with the right partner. This costly and difficult task generally lies with the external relations branches of

13 For a more extensive insight in these constellations, see for example: Graaff and Nyce, *Handbook of European Intelligence Cultures*.

14 Interview 18

15 Interview 3, 4, 9, 18, 22, 35, 38, 44

16 Interview 1

17 Interview 12, 33

the services. One external relations officer remarks that few other practitioners have 'the insight in what to expect' in the network.[18] External relation branches and liaisons uphold a collective memory for past interactions, mainly by monitoring and recording the cost and benefit. But they are also seen to have an important role in building and maintaining trusted relations. Yet, in practice cooperation does not always need this support. Interestingly, in more established operational exchange relations the role of external relations branches seems less prominent. Social ties in these - often plurilateral - arrangements prove strong. Participants generally sit together structurally, or at least more frequently than is the case in bilateral relations and build trust. Moreover, in these successful arrangements cooperation is upheld by specialists, meeting 'time and time again, allowing them to bypass cultural bull-shit relatively quickly, coming to business'.[19] The most famous of these arrangements is probably the Five Eyes intelligence community, but operational clusters of cooperation play an important role in the European intelligence network as well.

6.2.2. Clusters of Cooperation

The size and diversity of the European intelligence network do not facilitate interaction. The positions of the actors are too far apart to reach out and connect easily. Nevertheless, several intelligence officers, from different operational backgrounds, characterize European intelligence as a small world. They recall being reunited with former counterparts from other services when assuming a position in the EU and refer to informal networks of alumni that are still functional years after an international assignment.[20] Among these practitioners there is a strong perception that the limited size of the network invokes repeated interaction, bolstering cooperative behavior. One of them tries picturing this:

> *'The intelligence world is only a small environment. It is like a box with let's say 100 figures inside. No matter how hard you shake, eventually you will end up meeting the same people and organizations.'*[21]

Another adds [smiling] that it is unescapable to encounter the same people as:

> *'There are a lot of dinosaurs in this field. National services tend to hold on to their personnel. [...] It resembles the dynamics in other small professional communities.'*[22]

18 Interview 20
19 Interview 19, 27
20 Interview 8, 16, 17, 36, 44
21 Interview 18
22 Interview 31

This seems like a paradox. The European intelligence community might be large and diverse on paper, but in some cases appears relatively small in terms of cooperation practice nevertheless. Apparently, a simple count or categorization of organizations in the network does not fully capture its complexity. The contrasting perceptions on this topic and their relevance for cooperative behavior make it worthwhile to scrutinize this 'smallness' of the European network a bit further.

The European intelligence network is a 'sparse network'. Sparse networks have a low density of actors with nonredundant contacts. The structural holes in such a network provide a separation between actors that form a buffer for familiarization.[23] Instead of an evenly distributed network with many strong ties, the European intelligence network contains operational clusters of cooperation who vary in size, composition and connections.[24] Not all intelligence services in the network cooperate with all others, on all topics, or with the same intensity. Instead, they tailor cooperative arrangements to their specific needs. For example, when looking for a specific expertise it is well feasible that services prefer relations with a small (set of) knowledgeable partner(s) above that with one partner that is far larger. In practice, there are many differing needs and therefore many differing arrangements that bring together the able and willing services on a certain topic. It creates operational clusters of cooperation based on 'bilateral connections, special clubs and [...] multilateral arrangements'.[25]

These clusters have different origins and aims. Some are geographically oriented, based on a common nearby security threat, shared national culture, or simply for speaking the same language. These regional cliques exist for example between services from countries in Central-Europe, Southern-Europe and between the Nordics. Other clusters are based on operational or technical commonalities. A well-known example is the CTG for services working in counterterrorism, but a less well-known club exists for external services as well. Also, there are clubs for expert cooperation between technical intelligence specialties. An example of such a cluster is the MAXIMATOR[26] arrangement on SIGINT mentioned in chapter 3, but again there are many others. Multilateral organizations like the EU can be seen as clusters in their own right. When people refer to intelligence being a small world, they mainly do so in their own cluster, to a point that it almost becomes 'something of a reunion'.[27]

The operational clusters in the European intelligence network differ substantially in their internal dynamics, as well as in their connections with other clusters. Yet, what they all

23 Burt, *Structural Holes*, 18.

24 Interview 1, 4, 8, 12, 17, 25, 29, 36, 44

25 Interview 12

26 Jacobs, "Maximator: European Signals Intelligence Cooperation, from a Dutch Perspective."

27 Interview 35

have in common is that they offer an environment for cooperation that is more exclusive than the network as a whole. They serve to include some, while excluding others.[28] This a notorious dynamic in sparse networks. Networks with these clusters generally have strong local cohesion, but lack cohesion as a whole.[29] As a result, the chances for familiarization and reputation building are significantly higher in the operational clusters than in the network as a whole. This is not only because they are small, as that is not always the case. For example, the CTG mentioned above comprises of 30 European intelligence services. It is because they are perceived highly functional. For this reason, the intensity of cooperation is high. It is these intense and established patterns of interaction that are the most important for trust-based cooperation in secretive networks. Personal familiarity among analysts in operational clusters is much more common and connections are much more tight-knit. For example, one military intelligence officer emphasizes the extraordinary context of NATO. He depicts the intelligence officers in this cluster as 'overworked', knowing 'each other from different missions, repeatedly meeting [...] and working together. This forges an extra bond'.[30] They are policy networks in themselves; based on a common context and formed for actively pursuing a specific goal. Therefore, a higher level of trust would be expected within them.[31] They typically consist of formal organizations.[32] It must be noted that many of the operational clusters are informal, but fairly established nevertheless.[33] They are based on a Memorandum of Understanding or at least on some Terms of Reference and have permanent working groups.

Inevitably, operational clusters bring in additional sensitivities and complicate trust relations in the broader European intelligence network.[34] By definition, the exclusivity of clusters means that some services are members of the one arrangement, but not the other. It is not well accepted for a service from outside a cluster to bluntly intrude into another. Doing so:

> *'Would be perceived as an insult to [that] community and harm your national service that is in [that] community. [...] It would diminish your professional image and the respect you possess.'*[35]

Yet, it is not always clear which service is the appropriate (national) partner in or for a cluster, because of the diversity noted. For example, whereas in one country it would be the military service that is tasked for foreign intelligence, in another it could well be the civilian service.

28 Interview 1, 6, 26, 33, 38

29 Granovetter, *The Strength of Weak Ties*, 1981, 1378.

30 Interview 16

31 Knoke, "Policy Networks," 212; Hanneman and Riddle, "Concepts and Measures for Basic Network Analysis," 2011, 346–49.

32 Knoke, "Policy Networks," 210–11.

33 Interview 18, 35, 36

34 Interview 15, 18, 44

35 Interview 7

This can fuel tension between services, even those from the same country, as it matters very much who is in a specific 'club' and who is not.[36] To complicate things further, there is a significant degree of overlap between the clusters. For example, some but not all of the NATO members are part of the EU, while CTG includes members of both as well as an external partner to both organizations. Of course, there are many other clusters and bilateral connections as well. As one official illustrates:

> *'It is like playing a game of chess, but worse. [...] it is not only about who is at the table, but about which players are in the entire tournament and how they relate to one another.'*[37]

This means that an exclusive partner in one operational cluster, could well be talking to a member of another cluster in a different setting or on a different topic. The same intelligence officer quoted above acknowledges that 'where [the] circles meet, where they overlap, that is the place where the tension comes in'.[38] The EU is exactly such a place.

Perceptions differ on what the exclusive dynamics of clustered cooperation mean for an inclusive (multilateral) organization like the EU. Some perceive the existence of clubs and cliques detrimental for multilateral intelligence cooperation. One intelligence officer even considers them to be 'the poison for multilateral formats as they bolster mistrust in the wider community'.[39] Yet, most of them take a more pragmatic stance. They acknowledge that the existence of clusters makes it hard for cooperation to be 'genuinely multilateral', but add that this is 'something that in intelligence is hard to begin with'.[40] They prefer to focus on the practicality of it. First, these intelligence officers, national as well as EU-based, see the clusters as an effective way of simplifying the diverse network. One of them even states that he[41] 'cannot imagine that cooperation [...] would be as successful as it is, without these formats'.[42] Second, they point at the habit for intelligence of evolving slowly from small to larger clubs. From this perspective, clusters can be considered building blocks towards inclusion and multilateral arrangements. Third, some respondents think that the European intelligence network is still a dense one, despite the clusters being present. They describe the European intelligence network as a set of 'interlocking' or 'confluencing circles, [...] holistic, [...] a dynamic enterprise'.[43] For them, the clusters do not seem to stand very far

36 Interview 38

37 Interview 18

38 Ibidem

39 Interview 3

40 Interview 17, 3, 5, 8, 9, 31, 42

41 In the whole of this study, where a quote is attributed to a male respondent (he/him) it could have also been a female respondent (she/her). As there are relatively few female respondents in this research, revealing gender would possibly jeopardize anonymity.

42 Interview 19

43 Interview 17, 26, 36, 38

apart. Moreover, their composition can overlap and change over time. In this situation it is highly unlikely that the EU is not connected to the broader network in one way or another. Yet, these connections are not self-evident. From the dynamics in the European intelligence network, it becomes clear that it is not one small world; it is many small worlds. And the EU is just one of these worlds. A cluster among many other clusters. Evaluating its position, role and connections in the broader network will show how much it is trusted as a partner based on its perceived ability.

6.2.3. The EU's Lack of Centrality

EU intelligence holds little centrality in the European intelligence network. It is connected to most other actors, but does not hold a central position between them, and stands at quite a distance from them. Centrality is the degree to which an actor is connected to others in the network. It is often equated with prominence; being influential in the network.[44] Attempts of the EU organization to gain prominence in intelligence are generally greeted with wariness and resistance by the European intelligence community. Some national intelligence officers even depict the EU organization as a potential spoiler, interfering with what they perceive is essentially their job.[45] Most intelligence officers interviewed feel that European intelligence cooperation is first and foremost an activity for and by national intelligence services. Cooperation is all about task accomplishment and the task they feel closest at heart is safeguarding national and European security. Although some would claim that supporting EU decision makers serves exactly that purpose, especially for national practitioners it is at best a valuable by-product of their main effort. For them, the EU is not on top of mind. To some extent it is fair to say that it is not on their mind at all. When thinking about their own task performance, they expect little of the EU organizations. These organizations are, as one intelligence officer puts it mildly, 'not the operational glue in the European intelligence community'.[46] Another is more explicit when asked what the European intelligence community means to him:

> *'It is easier to say what it is not. It has little to do with the EU.'*[47]

Perceptions of ability in this research contradict the existence and growing centrality of EU intelligence that Davis-Cross observed, one that would 'encourage both formal and informal intelligence sharing between Member States'.[48]

44 Schulze and Ries, "Social Network Analysis," 115–19.

45 Interview 1, 5, 6, 7, 19, 31, 32

46 Interview 3

47 Interview 31

48 Davis Cross, "The Merits of Informality: The European Transgovernmental Intelligence Network," 240.

In the perception of the intelligence officers interviewed, intelligence for the EU is mainly being done outside the EU. Services appear to 'have their own reality, their own world. They perceive that they do not need EU cooperation'.[49] As a result, the EU to a large extent appears to be excluded from European intelligence practice. Respondents indicate that the EU organizations are only part of European intelligence by the grace of the national services. They see SIAC as 'in-between' for intelligence reaching the EU policy level and not even an indispensable one.[50] Notwithstanding the articulated role of EU intelligence organizations as a 'single gateway' for intelligence reaching the EU decision makers, some respondents point out that national intelligence services have, and should have, other more direct ways to inform them as well. This leads to an inequal relation. Whereas national intelligence services are perfectly capable of working without EU intelligence organizations, the opposite is impossible. The EU intelligence organizations are highly dependent on their connections with the national services and their willingness to contribute Yet, there is some confusion about the goal at hand.

The aim of intelligence cooperation in the European Union is ambiguous and accordingly so is the role of SIAC itself. Respondents state that 'there is no such thing as supranational intelligence', to have 'never experienced a real EU intelligence cooperation'. They dismiss participation in it as mainly 'political'.[51] From this perspective it is hard to see the relevance of EU intelligence cooperation. One policy officer even asserts that some services 'are not that willing to seek cooperation in the setting of the European Union, but are pushed in that direction [by their political masters].'[52] For them it feels as being a goal in itself regardless of its output or outcome. This perception does not change by virtue of a political statement or an outspoken EU ambition. A respondent illustrates the problem:

> *'The fact that at the political level they say that EU intelligence [cooperation] is important, does not mean that the next day it actually works. The framework is missing.'*[53]

Yet, when evaluating this frame more closely, intelligence practitioners struggle to define where their dislike comes from. In this matter, respondents are seen to make little distinction between the intelligence function *in* the EU cluster, and the one *for* the EU organization. Although this seems merely an issue of definition, trivial even, it matters greatly for the dynamics of cooperation and the role of the EU intelligence organizations. In the first frame the interests of the national services are dominant. In this context, the EU is seen to be dysfunctional or redundant, as it competes for resources with other European clusters

49 Interview 24, 4, 30, 43
50 Interview 34
51 Interview 34, 12, 44
52 Interview 13
53 Interview 12

for intelligence cooperation. In the second frame the interests of EU decision makers are dominant. The EU is seen as burdensome or even intrusive, as its intelligence organizations and their needs are sometimes perceived to compete with the national services themselves.

National intelligence services expect little from EU intelligence cooperation. It holds little centrality that could provide standing; a favorable status compared to other arrangements for cooperation.[54] As a cluster for cooperation the EU is seen as troublesome. Clusters are marketplaces for intelligence exchange and the EU simply is not a very attractive marketplace to do business. Or rather, intelligence officers indicate they feel that there are more attractive marketplaces to be found when supporting European security through cooperation.[55] This mainly comes down to the EU being too multilateral for their liking. The difficulties of multilateral cooperation were already addressed in chapters 3 and 5. An intelligence officer notes the effect:

> *'It just does not produce the same effect as cooperation in a bilateral setting. The breadth of EU cooperation is more limited and accordingly, so is the effort."*[56]

Even when choosing multilateral cooperation as the format of choice, for most services NATO comes first. It makes EU intelligence cooperation feel redundant.[57] An intelligence officer underlines this by saying that 'for the EU, we rely on NATO'.[58] As an organization for cooperation the EU is seen as burdensome. Services are seen to be 'torn between their national duties, which always come first and cooperating in the multilateral setting of the EU'.[59] Yet, from the interviews it appears this view is losing some of its explanatory worth. The underlying reasons for this unexpected change will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8. Some national intelligence officers feel it as their task to provide the EU organization with intelligence and they wonder whether 'EU decision makers are happy as customers of intelligence'.[60] In addition, some are less troubled by the lack of intelligence returns from the EU than by its ambition to transform its intelligence organizations into service-like organizations. An experienced intelligence officer reflects that for him it is no problem that there is no intelligence return coming from the EU, but that he is:

54 Rindova and Martins, "Show Me the Money: A Multidimensional Perspective on Reputation as an Intangible Asset," 24; Barron and Rolfe, "It Ain't What You Do, It's Who You Do It With: Distinguishing Reputation and Status," 175–76.

55 Interview 34, 36

56 Interview 25

57 Interview 2, 11, 22, 24, 28, 40, 43

58 Interview 28

59 Interview 16

60 Interview 24

'Somewhat allergic to all kinds of initiatives by various institutions [there], who start doing intelligence by themselves all of a sudden. [...] That is something you should avoid at any cost'.[61]

6.3. The Meso-Level: From Low Centrality to Low Reputation

6.3.1. SIAC not the Central Actor

The EU is dependent on the network surrounding it for its ability to provide intelligence support. It derives most, if not all, of its resources from the community. Yet, it is not all that clear what organizations are part of it. The European intelligence network has no clearly demarcated limits. Objectively determining them is a challenge. When asked about the 'European intelligence community', many respondents fell silent for a moment and then qualified it 'difficult' to depict[62], the question itself 'philosophical' even.[63] For them, it seems hard to pinpoint what they understand exactly as 'intelligence' and what 'European' means to them. Nevertheless, after a small pause, they sketched a remarkably clear and largely congruent picture of the organizations that they perceive as part of the network. This allows to follow a more subjective route in depicting the European intelligence network, simply putting the limits where the participants themselves consciously experience them. It is a practice-based method for interpretation not uncommon to other qualitative network analysis in the policy domain. Moreover, it is a fitting method for a qualitative strategy that seeks to scrutinize beliefs and perceptions.[64] Like commonplace in many of these qualitative studies, respondents portray the European intelligence network as made up of concentric circles of organizations; an 'onion with multiple layers'.[65] In the core of the 'onion', the innermost circle, are the organizations considered most important. In the context of supporting EU policy, it was expected that this would be INTCEN and EUMS INT. After all, they are the only organizations whose resources are directly and fully dedicated to EU intelligence support. Yet, they are not considered the most important, although many respondents mention them first, especially those working in the EU.

The core of the intelligence network serving the EU consists of the Member States' intelligence services. Although mostly not involved directly in EU decision-making support and operating independently from the EU organization, in practice most interviewees place them at the inner circle. They were unanimous in this perception, regardless of their position in Brussels or in the national capitals. This is because formal positions do not matter most to

61 Interview 35

62 Interview 16, 17, 22, 24, 30, 31, 36

63 Interview 37

64 Knoke and Yang, *Social Network Analysis*, 21; Heath, Fuller, and Johnston, "Chasing Shadows," 650.

65 Interview 2, 6, 42

them. Formal positions are neither necessary nor sufficient ground for a central place in the network. The reasoning is resource-based; the national intelligence services are simply the most critical part of EU intelligence support. Without them there would be none of it, as they effectively provide the bulk of the intelligence used. As already seen in chapter 5, for legal and functional reasons SIAC institutions lack sufficient analytical capacity and collection capabilities. In the opinion of most interviewees, the EU intelligence organizations cannot - and may not - do the full spectrum of intelligence support. EU intelligence organizations are even seen to derive their legitimacy as intelligence actors from the link to the national services. As one EU intelligence officer remarked: 'INTCEN is intelligence by virtue of the national services'.[66]

The second layer is made up of those organizations that have an important, yet derivative role. The first part consists of the EU intelligence organizations themselves, first and foremost INTCEN and EUMS INT. They are the only ones in the EU considered to be doing analysis on security matters with specific decision maker support in mind, and based on information that is unavailable in the open domain. Moreover, their position in SIAC is anchored in the Intelligence Support Architecture (ISA), although few interviewees use this term. Remarkably, the EU Satellite Centre is relatively absent from the responses despite being the third organization in SIAC, and despite being effectively the only exclusive collection capability in the EU. Few people mention this organization without being asked directly, or do so only briefly. Although it is an integral part of the ISA and has a long history within EU intelligence, SATCEN is not immediately perceived part of the intelligence network. One respondee underlines this by saying 'SATCEN is not really part of the family, it is a bit outside'.[67] Others indicate that the broadening of its services and customers, most notably through the Copernicus program for Earth observation, is increasing the organizational distance to its intelligence peers. From this perception the graduality of the network becomes apparent. Likewise, they depict the geospatial branch within EUMSINT as 'not exactly in either'.[68] The second part of this layer consists of NATO. There exists little doubt that it has a prominent place in European security in general, and in the European intelligence network in particular. For many, the alliance's intelligence organizations serve as a benchmark for doing multilateral cooperation, especially after the intelligence reforms of the last decade. In addition, many associate it with the United States' prominent role in building a common European understanding of how intelligence and intelligence cooperation works, a point further elaborated on in the next chapter. Nevertheless, for NATO's broader membership respondents struggle with ascribing its organizations to the 'European' intelligence network proper.[69]

66 Interview 37

67 Interview 24

68 Interview 14, 22, 25, 36

69 Interview 36

At the outer 'layer' of the network are those organizations that respondents depict as potentially 'valuable', but that are literally and figuratively perceived of as peripheral. Partners being 'very much on the functional outside'.[70] Many respondents do not even mention these organizations to begin with. They elaborate only when asked about them directly. Moreover, respondents differ on their importance. The first type of organizations mentioned here is the EU institutions that are not part of SIAC. This mainly concerns the regional directorates within EEAS itself, but also headquarters staff, representatives, missions and embassies. For example, the Early Warning Early Action unit was only mentioned once. This despite the fact that this institutions' conflict prediction models are very close to, or even overlapping the intelligence function, and that it holds a prominent place in the Strategic Compass when addressing the strengthening of intelligence. Although these institutions are thought to hold valuable expertise and information, and use this to support EU policy makers, they do not enrich this information by analysis or cannot directly incorporate secret information. A deficiency that most intelligence practitioners consider enough reason to push them to the margins of the network. Many reject the idea of them being part of intelligence at all.[71] As one official states:

> *'The other EU institutions are definitely not part of the first two cycles. [...] merely including information in your products does not make you intelligence. And by saying that, I do not disregard their importance.'*[72]

A similar but alternative logic for exclusion applies to perceptions of the second type of organizations in the outer layer; the think-tanks and academia in the EU and Member States. They are considered even further off than the EU institutions. Although these knowledge centers do analysis and go beyond mere information gathering, they mostly do so without the specific purpose of (EU) policy support. From the interviews it appears that although their products are valued, they are not part of the social network and kept at a distance. Interestingly, this also seems to apply to actors closer to home, being more government related and presumably more aligned with the goals of policy support. For example, the EUISS is seldomly mentioned by EU intelligence practitioners, not even as part of 'layer three'. This despite it being an autonomous agency under the operational direction of the HR designed to do policy-oriented analysis in support of the CFSP and CSDP.[73] One experienced EU intelligence officer was quite surprised when he encountered an insightful report from EUISS on his topic of interest, after having been working in the EU for two years already. He admitted to have never met people from outside the intelligence organizations [in the EU]'

70 Interview 27

71 Interview 23, 15, 16, 25, 30, 37

72 Interview 42

73 Council of the European Union, "2014/75/CFSP Council Decision on the European Union Institute for Security Studies," 13–14.

and underlined this ignorance by apparently not knowing the name of EUISS and broadly depicting it as 'a kind of open-source division'.[74] It appears that these knowledge partners - including their purpose and products - are not commonly known. In this respect, some point out at that in the EU there is little tradition in tying these organizations into the intelligence community. Respondents that do include academia and think tanks in the network think of themselves as forward leaning and progressive.

6.3.2. Weak Connectivity causes Low Familiarity

In the European intelligence network familiarity with the EU is low. This goes for the EU as a whole, but for its intelligence organizations as well.[75] Although the latter number only two (or three when SATCEN is included), many national practitioners cannot name them or are not known with their function. Part of this has to do with the lack of centrality the EU holds in the network and that was discussed above. One experienced EU intelligence officer acknowledges that until his current posting the organization meant little to him, as 'the EU was never really part of my life. I was not in the community, nor did I do business with them.'[76] The same applies to other national intelligence officers, including those close to the EU. As one national policy officer on multilateral cooperation remarks:

> *'Only few people [in the services] know INTCEN and EUMS INT, but most do not. Let alone the Intelligence Steering Board and the Intelligence Support Architecture. I have not even heard of those.' [After mentioning the latter by the researcher]*[77]

Another experienced intelligence officer in a similar position admits 'a bit ashamed' that 'I still have no clue as to how it functions.'[78] Contacts are generally sparse and infrequent. Few conferences or workshops are being organized; little institutionalized exchange of ideas exists. When referring to known examples of such exchange, respondents fall back on what they know from NATO. The EU to them seems far away. Although - even from the most far-away capitals in the EU - Brussels can be reached within days by car, and within hours by plane, most analysts have never been there, not even for a visit. And if they have, it is 'not as part of a routine, [but] always driven by incidents. And not as part of an [EU] effort.'[79] In practice, the intensity of contacts between national intelligence officers and EU institutions is too low to make a difference for social relations and trust-building.

74 Interview 29
75 Interview 6, 36, 39, 43, 44
76 Interview 27
77 Interview 17
78 Interview 27
79 Interview 31, 34

Unfamiliarity extends into the EU itself. From the interviews it emerges that many of the people working in EU intelligence organizations know relatively little about the EU institutions they serve, nor about those institutions that can be of service.[80] As one EU intelligence officer describes:

> *'I sometimes encounter people from other institutions by coincidence [...] and they appear to be [...] working on related topics. I didn't know them and they didn't know me beforehand. That is a weakness.'*[81]

A lack of physical proximity is hardly an argument here, although some EU intelligence officers note that already the smallest amount of distance can create the feeling of being far apart. They describe cooperation within their own branch and team as powerful, while it is perceived already more difficult to relate with their counterparts in other branches, or with members of the organization on another floor of the same building. In this, there is a cultural element as well that will be discussed in the next chapter. Outside the walls of the EU intelligence organizations, the unfamiliarity is mainly due to the bureaucratic complexity of the EU organization as a whole. Even to the intelligence officers working in SIAC, the EU is considered something of a black box despite courses given on the system. Knowing the many others that are preoccupied with security issues and policy maker support in the organization remains troublesome. Two experienced EU intelligence officers estimate the number of possible clients of SIAC at more than 500, a 'chaotic conglomerate' they regrouped in some 50 'families of clients' for reasons of comprehension.[82] Many respondents refer to the complexity and the challenges this brings. One EU intelligence officer depicts the structure and its institutions as 'confusing'.[83] Another jokes:

> *'Are you aware of how many civil servants are working for the EU in almost as many buildings? It is huge. Every analyst is being confronted each week with an extra [previously unknown] person who is occupied with his topic. And who is legitimately so.'*[84]

On a more serious note, he adds the difficulties this complexity brings for social relations and trust:

> *'It is already hard to identify which relations are necessary or helpful, let alone maintain them.'*[85]

80 Interview 18, 22, 23
81 Interview 15
82 Interview 15, 36
83 Interview 23
84 Interview 40
85 Ibidem

Weak connectivity is an issue for EU intelligence organizations, both on the inside and with the outside. Connections between SIAC, national services, and EU institutions surely exist, but their strength is limited.[86] From the interviews two themes emerge; lacking technical connections and inadequate procedures and routines for exchange. First, many note a lack of secure and adequate communication systems between national services and the EU, but especially in the EU itself when communicating 'outside the inner-circle of intelligence.'[87] One EU intelligence officer gives an insight:

> *'When we look at the EU, to start with there is a clear lack in compatible communication systems. I find this shocking. Even if you would want to share information, actually doing so is an effort. Here, within our own organization, it is already hard to share between different buildings or floors. In the case of sharing with the [wider] EU, you encounter more hurdles like the need to register these products separately and finding the right technical means to send them.'*[88]

It is a known issue that is also addressed in the Strategic Compass and mentioned in chapter 5.[89] Yet, weak connectivity is about more than technical connections alone.

A second concern voiced by respondents is that of inadequate procedures and routines. These are perceived of as being non-committal and therefore not very fruitful.[90] As one EU intelligence officer observes:

> *'... it is all relatively volatile. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't. And it can always end suddenly.'*[91]

As for procedures, information coming to either EUMS INT or INTCEN is not automatically shared with the other, despite SIAC being in place.[92] In addition, SIAC primarily relies on a system where they send all their requests for Information (RFI's) to all connected services indiscriminately. It does not take into account which service might have information concerning the topic and little feedback is given on the value of contributions. An EU intelligence officer estimates that SIAC sends out 300 RFI's per year that are 'often vague'.[93] As for routines, some respondents note a lack of outreach by SIAC. They stress that SIAC does not have repeating cycles of agreed-intelligence making like NATO and neither does

86 Interview 6, 9, 29, 36, 43

87 Interview 23

88 Interview 27

89 Council of the European Union, "7371/22 A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security," 21.

90 Interview 12, 14, 15, 28, 42

91 Interview 40

92 See also: Davis Cross, "The Merits of Informality: The European Transgovernmental Intelligence Network," 240.

93 Interview 40

it organize joint conferences for fusing the contributions of the services together. An EU intelligence officer assesses the routines of his own organization as too internally focused; a situation in which:

> *'The action officers are more EU employees than that they are links to the outside world [and] as a result, their needs find little response.'*[94]

Weak connections jeopardize SIAC's function as a bridge between the national services and the EU institutions.[95] In a practical sense, because through their connections with the outer world the EU organizations communicate their needs, receive the contributions required, and channel the intelligence produced. In a relational sense, because these links build the familiarity that is vital for trust. A respondent strikingly observes that 'building trust by carrier pigeon is hard.'[96] When a partner is tied to a network in a multitude of strong and weak ties, this makes it an appealing partner to connect and rely on, but the EU simply is not.[97] Yet, when evaluating this lack of connectivity in relation to trust, it is not enough to only address SIAC. For successful interaction, it takes two to tango. Notwithstanding the perceived flaws on the part of SIAC, there seems little appetite with the national services for a stronger relation either. When there had been a mutual will to connect, a way would probably have been found regardless of technical difficulties. This can best be illustrated by again looking at the routines. Indeed, there are no big conferences for co-production in EU intelligence, but there are working groups and coordination meetings. Yet, many national services see them as too much of an effort and (the level of) attendance is low.[98] One national intelligence officer even doubts whether:

> *'[His] director has ever been to these [EU Heads of Services] meetings; or one of his unit heads for that matter. And I consider us being obedient or dutiful in this respect when compared to other nations.'*[99]

Interestingly, it appears that this 'is not about Brussels'.[100] Some services do attend similar meetings organized by NATO. Apparently, the reputation of the EU does not help cooperation either.

94 Interview 27

95 Interview 5, 6, 19, 39

96 Interview 16

97 Soeters, *Sociology and Military Studies*, 51, 56; Hanneman and Riddle, "Concepts and Measures for Basic Network Analysis," 2011, 363; Macke et al., "The Impact of Inter-Organizational Social Capital in Collaborative Networks Competitiveness," 558; Lotia and Hardy, "Critical Perspectives on Cooperation," 369; Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 2003; Todeva and Knoke, "Strategic Alliances And Corporate Social Capital," 39–40.

98 Interview 5, 17

99 Interview 31

100 Interview 17

6.3.3. Reputations: Mixed Feelings

Reputation is important for the EU. The organization is largely dependent on its good name to invoke national services to contribute to its intelligence support. Contributions that are - after all - purely voluntary. Respondents point out at that, contrary to the Americans in NATO, the EU has no explicit guardian to encourage participants to jump on the wagon, and more importantly to stay on and contribute. There are some forerunners on which the EU floats in terms of capacity, but at this point none seems able or willing to dictate its will in production or intelligence reform.[101] Also, again contrary to NATO, in the EU personal leadership so far had little lasting effect:

> *'It should not be a punishment to be a director of EU intelligence, military or civilian. It should be the other way around. [...] the cherry on the cake for an intelligence leader [...] after a long and brilliant career in national intelligence. A director of a national service should be flattered when they invite him for such a job. [...] Yet this is not the case now."*[102]

In recent years some strong figures with extensive intelligence background were appointed that improved the role of intelligence in the EU, but they have been unable to counter the flawed organizational reputation of the EU in the intelligence community. EU intelligence still holds a poor reputation with national intelligence officers. Respondents state that the leading perception in the community is a very negative one, and refer to it as untrustworthy. One names this reputational deficit directly when stating that 'their [EU] reputation is just substandard'.[103]

This is remarkable. Reputation is the extent to which an actor is believed to be able to live up to the expectations placed upon him. As described above, the expectations placed on the EU by national practitioners are fairly low. In terms of products, it would be hard not to meet them. Even more so, some national practitioners state that the EU does live up to their (modest) expectations in terms of output. One respondent voices this opinion when saying that 'the EU is a trustworthy partner, for the job they have to perform'.[104] An alternative explanation would be that the flawed reputation of the EU is not so much based on deliverables, but on its poor performance in the process. There is some evidence that this is indeed the case. Adding to the remarks quoted earlier, a national intelligence officer evaluates that:

101 Interview 27
102 Interview 30
103 Interview 27, 32, 33
104 Interview 19

> *'When in coordinating meetings nothing is really coordinated, and only shallow or off-topic presentations are being done, and it still takes a whole day, attendance will decrease rapidly. Or rather a replacement of a replacement is being sent to Brussels."*[105]

Yet, this is still somewhat surprising. As noted above, there is low familiarity with EU organizations and processes among national practitioners. The poor processual reputation can hardly be based on a clear first-hand image of current action. That image is lacking. In addition to the assertion that familiarity can breed trust[106], the case of the EU shows that that unfamiliarity can equally lead to distrust.

The distrust and poor reputation of the EU on the outside appears to be based more on a general sentiment and cultivated image than on actual knowledge. It is a superficial glimpse rather than a clear image of the organization. National practitioners are seen to 'not know the organization and therefore [...] dislike it, or think they do'.[107] This is an interesting observation. On the one hand, it underlines the idea presented in chapter 3 that reputation is important for cooperation in secretive and somewhat competitive settings with considerable complexity and uncertainty.[108] Yet, it combines this idea with the notion that in such a setting reputation is likely to take a generalized yet lasting form that is decoupled from specific actions.[109] This can have a distorting effect on cooperation. This is well illustrated by the EU's lacking reputation in security and security awareness. Respondents indicate that they are reluctant to share intelligence products with the EU, because of the way they feel their intelligence is treated there. Many of them state that they perceive the EU to be too 'insecure' to do business, 'a notorious unsafe place' even. Intelligence going into SIAC is perceived to be 'ending up on the street time and time again'.[110] Nevertheless, in practice most of the respondents voicing these concerns cannot think of an actual example in which security was breached. One national officer, when asked for an example when mentioning the security problem of the EU, admits:

> *'When I think of it, I cannot really recollect any concrete examples of such incidents. It is more of a general feeling of unease."*[111]

105 Interview 17

106 Gulati, "Does Familiarity Breed Trust? The Implications of Repeated Ties for Contractual Choice in Alliances."

107 Interview 18, 29, 30

108 Svare, Gausdal, and Möllering, "The Function of Ability, Benevolence, and Integrity-Based Trust in Innovation Networks," 598; Chen, Dai, and Li, "A Delicate Balance for Innovation," 145–76; Przepiorka, Norbutas, and Corten, "Order without Law," 752–64; Luo, "A Coopetition Perspective of Global Competition," 129–44; Tiwana and Bush, "Continuance in Expertise-Sharing Networks," 85–101.

109 Rindova and Martins, "Show Me the Money: A Multidimensional Perspective on Reputation as an Intangible Asset," 20–22.

110 Interview 17, 31

111 Interview 27

Another indication for the shallow image is the easy reference to infrastructures as examples of low standing:

> *'Looking at their building, their hallway, it is all not very impressive. It does not radiate that for intelligence the EU is the place to be."*[112]

This offers a meagre image and one that is sometimes emphasized by comparison with NATO. Another intelligence officer adds that:

> *'[NATO is] perhaps seen as more hardline, cutting edge or sexy. [...] It is huge and impressive. The building has cost billions. By comparison, the EU and EUMS INT are the lowest in the food chain."*[113]

The reputation EU intelligence holds with practitioners on the inside of the organization is more favorable than that on the outside. That is not to say that it is all positive there. In the contrary, when looking at the actual output or rather the outcome, EU intelligence officers are at least as skeptical as their national counterparts. One EU intelligence officer shrugs when saying:

> *'If you constantly bring reports that are qualified merely as 'RESTRICTED' [the lowest level of intelligence classification], then your added value for the countries is exactly that; limited."*[114]

They are critical about the process as well, questioning its timeliness and relevance.[115] Nevertheless, when looking at the potential value of the EU intelligence products for the national services, insiders are far more positive than outsiders. And these practitioners are in a far better position to be the judge of that than outsiders are. They see first-hand the quality of the process and its organizations. Based on this knowledge many insiders challenge the idea of faulty intelligence and praise the 'diversity in experience, expertise and perceptions, [...] all integrated in this one arrangement."[116] An experienced liaison officer explicates:

> *'My credo is 'be here'. You have to be present to be able to judge how it was made. See for yourself. It is like being in a restaurant. A plate can look terrific when presented at the table, but you would want to know what is in it. And you have to be in the kitchen to judge. Is there really this touch of fine Italian basil? Or did they use some cheap substitute."*[117]

112 Interview 27
113 Interview 26
114 Interview 41
115 Interview 44
116 Interview 23, 25, 38, 44
117 Interview 30

Not only are EU intelligence officers more confident about the EU intelligence organizations than their national counterparts. They are also more confident than they were themselves when still being nationally based. This change in perception is well-know from academic publications on international organizations. An EU intelligence officer describes the change:

> *'I actually didn't know how the system works in practice. And I must say, I am surprised in a positive way on how well it works.'*[118]

Another, after admitting that he is still highly skeptical about the organization, finds it:

> *'A fascinating place. [...] When you are actually in, you start to understand why [it works as it does] and why this is necessary. From there on you might even start to appreciate it.'*[119]

The relatively favorable appreciation and expectation of EU intelligence organizations is held not only by those currently working in the EU structures. It extends to those having done so in the past. The divide is so distinct that some term the two groups: 'believers and non-believers'.[120] The potential these 'believers' see differs though. Some point at the possibility of better disclosing the exclusive information present in other EU institutions. They see these institutions to 'provide valuable information on a wide range of topics'.[121] Others focus on educational possibilities or see added value in the circulation of knowledge within the community, for example on intelligence policy or tradecraft. This notion of circulation reflects ideas on cooperation in academic publications by Hoffmann.[122] She brings to the fore the role of transnational knowledge exchange in the constitution of intelligence services and their practices, instead of only looking at international cooperation from a national perspective.

What most of these practitioners have in common is that they think the multilateral arrangement of the EU has exceptional strength as a social platform, literally bringing European intelligence practitioners together. As one EU intelligence officer claims:

> *'I think this unwritten role as a facilitator is more important than what is actually on the agenda. The real agenda is building and developing relations.'*[123]

118 Interview 16
119 Interview 32
120 Interview 7, 24, 43, 44
121 Interview 22
122 Hoffmann, "Circulation, Not Cooperation."
123 Interview 16

Subsequently, they suggest that the organization could assume more the role of a meeting place, instead of a marketplace. A place 'for connecting and getting acquainted many partners who can continue to cooperate elsewhere or build common understanding'.[124] They are convinced that this social platform will grant future access to a network of resources. This resonates the ideas by Lefebvre who suggests that multilateral platforms are not so much useful for their direct operational value, but 'to establish relations based upon trust and confidence with new organizational members or outside partners'.[125] As a meeting place the EU might be able to gain centrality and by doing so 'break [the] lack of attraction and negative expectation'.[126] Some respondents think it will also improve the visibility and familiarity currently hampering its reputation on the outside. It is thought to trigger:

> *'The perception that these institutions are worth something and can actually be of value; [...] that it is not all amateurism and inability there.'*[127]

Some even propose that, instead of trying to be of operational value and having a social effect on the side, the EU could focus on being of social value and have an operational effect on the side. Yet, this will be difficult.

When evaluating perceptions of ability in EU intelligence cooperation at the meso-level, it becomes obvious that trusted relations are very much functional relations. Without an operational need there is little fundament on which to build trust, nothing to start of the relation. The services will not relinquish control.[128] As one national officer explicates:

> *'We cooperate [...] when there is a specific operational need for it, not just because [...] the EU would like to have it all. It is push not pull. You don't meet every month to share it all, go out and come back again. We provide the EU with what we have when it is there.'*[129]

It comprises of a paradox. The EU holds little centrality in the European intelligence network. Therefore, national services do not know the EU intelligence organizations well and they maintain their negative yet superficial image of them. As a result, they keep their distance. Yet, by keeping their distance there is little chance that this shallow picture will alter. There are two ways of changing this. The first is an increasing operational relevance for the EU and its intelligence organizations. Some respondents argue that the increased operational posture of the EU in security matters has started a ratchet of cooperation already. This will be

124 Interview 1, 33

125 Lefebvre, "The Difficulties and Dilemmas of International Intelligence Cooperation," 537.

126 Interview 30, 25

127 Interview 30

128 Interview 5

129 Interview 12

discussed in chapter 8 when dealing with perceptions of benevolence and the role solidarity plays in this. The second option is to somehow increase knowledge of EU intelligence and its organizations. Some respondents suggest that bolstering personal networks enables perceptions of ability to develop from a shallow to a more nuanced image, opening the door for trust and cooperative behavior. This idea is also one of the notions behind ICE, the European platform between intelligence services mentioned in subsection 6.2.1. It seeks to bolster cooperation not through operational exchange, but by 'allowing executives from different services to get together and compare experiences a non-operational level'.[130]

6.4. The Micro-Level: Invaluable Boundary Spanners

6.4.1. Navigators: Knowing the Actors

In this research, personal and direct contacts are among the most frequently mentioned enablers for trust and cooperation in intelligence. Intelligence officers sometimes are intrigued themselves by how important it is in intelligence to get personally acquainted. In practice, even in tight-knit clusters 'it is essential to know each other, to discover likeability and people you can talk to. To smell each other'. Contrary to the hard image of intelligence work often portrayed in academic publications and the media, practitioners describe it as a 'very soft skill enterprise'.[131] Although short of comparative data in other areas, this seems to support the claim that intelligence is 'perhaps most human of all aspects of government' and fits well into the sociological perspective presented in chapter 3.[132]

The role of individuals in accessing the European intelligence network is invaluable. They are the impersonation of the 'weak ties' from the well-known social network theory by Granovetter. In terms of familiarization and reputations, a network with many overlapping ties offers the strongest connectivity. In intelligence, strong ties are seen within the operational clusters mentioned. Nevertheless, between these clusters (or as Granovetter calls them: 'cliques') it is the few isolated connections that are important. They connect actors that are not naturally linked together.[133] In the sparse network of European intelligence, there are some individuals that can bridge divides between the EU and national intelligence services. This boundary spanning activity encompasses being ambassadors to their respective organizations, signaling (new) possibilities and brokering information between them. In social network theory they go by many other names as well, but their role is always the same. They facilitate 'the flow of information between people or groups separated or hindered by

130 Intelligence College Europe, "The College."

131 Interview 12, 7, 16

132 Aldrich, "US-European Intelligence Co-Operation on Counter-Terrorism," 124.

133 Granovetter, *The Strength of Weak Ties*, 1981, 1369–71, 1373, 1375–76.

some gap or barrier'.[134] These people provide channels for interaction and they build and maintain relations.

Boundary spanning starts with knowing the network. Using the possibilities for trust-based cooperation in the European intelligence network requires skillful navigators who know the actors, ties and relations. They have to guide their organizations through generally unknown territory and unseen sensitivity. As shown above, the size and the diversity of the organizations in the network make it hard to know them all sufficiently, let alone cooperate. There are not many people who can be of assistance. Despite the importance of cooperation, most of the practitioners still work on the inside of their building only, or most of their time. Bilateral meetings are common, but for most intelligence officers not something that occurs every week. Knowledge of the network, its actors and interconnections is rare. To know 'your peers and what they are capable of doing' becomes a vital resource for successful cooperation and a form of capital in its own right. Acquiring this social capital requires investment.[135] It 'is more than doing administration and keeping a scorecard'.[136] It is an active process to keep the relation going and maintain access. You have to make an effort to stay connected. Yet, without it, it is hard to get any dialogue going. When describing his own role in a recent initiative for multilateral cooperation, one seasoned intelligence officer stated that his added value had been mainly to know the network from previous experience, 'so as to know what [was] the appropriate, efficient and effective way to proceed'. He added that in the course of the cooperation it became clear to him that he had previously known only what could be considered the tip of the iceberg. Bringing together these partners had not been an easy task, due to the inherent 'tension between differing expectations and realities' in the network.[137] Besides being helpful in mobilizing resources, social capital can smoothen discrepancies and can even help to resolve conflicts.[138]

Getting or staying in contact does not always need to be very complicated or take much time. In some cases, 'it is as simple as a short meeting or conversation', or a shared experience like 'meeting in a hotel lobby during a nightly fire alarm'.[139] Yet, it is considered of the upmost importance that the encounter is face-to-face to be successful and to meet afterwards on a regular basis. Without the 'small talk' and without keeping a 'flame burning' it will be very hard to use contacts for cooperation.[140] In this respect, it is noticeable that when a country does not have a liaison present in a capital, or at some distance like is sometimes the case

134 Long, Cunningham, and Braithwaite, "Bridges, Brokers and Boundary Spanners in Collaborative Networks," 1–2.

135 Interview 20, 36

136 Interview 41

137 Interview 1

138 Interview 21

139 Interview 20, 31

140 Interview 9

with the EU in Brussels, this negatively influences cooperation.[141] Likewise respondents stress the detrimental effects the COVID pandemic had on their work. One intelligence officer remembers seeing most of his colleagues in person only some two years after having started his job in the EU.[142] The videoconferences in that period were barely enough to maintain relations between already acquainted and like-minded counterparts, but far insufficient to get relations going with new partners or to step into new initiatives.

Social capital in the European intelligence network rests with a nucleus of experienced mid-level intelligence professionals in the services and in the arrangements themselves. As indicated when discussing the diversity of the network, external relations branches usually see it as their task to know the network.[143] As shown, they have a pivotal role in building and sustaining relations, especially with new or relatively unknown partners. They also have an important task with those partners that temporarily are not considered most needed or most valuable; maintaining ties despite low expectations and keeping alive the opportunity for future interaction. Nevertheless, it can be doubted whether without these efforts 'no cooperation would exist', as one external relations officer stated.[144] First, the personal and direct character of building and maintaining relations in intelligence cooperation means that the role of any one branch is necessarily limited. Apart from the expertise required, there are only so many people you can personally know and uphold in-depth relations with. Second, in intelligence it is even harder to bundle network knowledge in one place than in other circumstances. As one intelligence officer argues:

> *'Possessing an up-to-date network map is one of the gold nuggets for intelligence cooperation. [...yet,] by its sensitivity and complexity, it would be strange if it really existed somewhere in its totality."*[145]

In practice, knowledge of the intelligence network and the potential gains it holds, is to a large extent scattered among participants. In addition, it is only a small part of the workforce that is intensely engaged in cooperation. A select group of people have cooperation as their daily business, being liaisons, external relations officers or those posted in an international organization. Sometimes they are even seen to form a secluded club of people rotating through international postings for years in a row, building selective ties.[146]

For EU intelligence, personal networks can create a form of access that its organizations are uncapable of delivering. As shown in the previous sections, EU intelligence holds little

141 Interview 20
142 Interview 24
143 Interview 21, 32, 44
144 Interview 20
145 Interview 17
146 Interview 17, 36

centrality in the European network and as a result EU intelligence organizations have low familiarity and low reputation. Moreover, connectivity with the outside world is low as well. This comes at a price for cooperation. Nevertheless, the lack of centrality and connectivity can to some extent be countered by individual interaction and judgment. Regular contacts on a personal level enable cooperation 'with a partner [EU] that is too large to fully grasp and with a reputation that obliges one to be cautious'.[147] Yet, in European intelligence there are not that many experienced navigators for the EU. Few intelligence officers are - or have been - actively engaged in its organizations. In addition, the EU lacks an external relations branch to proactively reach out and facilitate contacts. A remarkable fact for an organization that is fully dependent on external information. It mainly comes down to those select few working in or close to the EU intelligence institutions to uphold relations. As one respondent explained:

> *'To know what is going on and to use the [EU] network, you need to be there. It won't be for free. That means investing in people within the EU structures in operational jobs as well as in policy."*[148]

This is not an investment all countries are willing to make. There are some indications that within the EU there are long-lived job vacancies for which the countries are not readily providing personnel. In addition, as seen when discussing the role of leadership, there are some analysts who prefer not be posted with the EU at all.[149] Yet, it is not staffing alone. Many respondents indicate that the frequent rotation of personnel poses a problem to relation-building as well. They think turn-over to be exceptionally high within the EU, one officer recalling that 'every month or so you get a mail announcing a departure and introducing a replacement."[150] When taking this statement at face-value, it seems somewhat exaggerated. On an international workforce of approximately 200 people, one or two rotations per month is not excessive. Yet, in the context of knowledge building it can be detrimental indeed. One EU intelligence officer clarifies that 'because of high-turn-over, we cannot build stable links, or even know where to start. [...] Each time you start over again."[151] The noted complexity of the EU organization does not help either. For this reason, some respondents advocate extending the period that people work in the EU to five years or so.[152] An EU intelligence officer criticizes that action officers and Seconded National Experts (SNEs) only stay around for three to four years, as 'coming from the outside, it takes up to two years to really come to grips with the intelligence process in the EU'.[153] Another feels the same, although he estimates it takes only a year for them to:

147 Interview 19
148 Interview 18
149 Interview 22, 26
150 Interview 16, 6, 43
151 Interview 15
152 Interview 22, 24
153 Interview 30

'Feel like a fish in the [EU] pond, with the EU acronyms, vocabulary, non-written rules, understanding who is doing what, who counts in a meeting, and who is just pretending...'[154]

No matter the math, for getting to know the EU being there is very important. This is perhaps true for many organizations and surely for many intelligence organizations. However, as one seasoned EU intelligence officer sighs 'it is true in here especially. The scale of the organization is immense, bigger than I have experienced so far anywhere else, and a lot more complex. The amount of mail alone, holy shit'.[155] Being there, and knowing the network, is the basis for two other important individual roles in the EU; being information-brokers and ambassadors.

6.4.2. Information Brokers: Knowing the Way

Individuals are pivotal in bridging the considerable distance between services and the EU, as well as in the EU itself. In general, the already mentioned nucleus of people directly and personally engaged in cooperation plays an important role in advocating the value of cooperative arrangements. They feel it is their task to convince key personnel in their respective national services that these arrangements are 'worthwhile'. If they fail to do so for specific clusters, these are likely to be terminated or will not live up to their full potential.[156] In the case of the EU, termination of the arrangement is not a real option. Yet, the chances of not living up to its full potential are ever the more. Given the organizational weaknesses in EU centrality, discussed above, the flow of information to the EU is far from guaranteed both in quantity and in quality. Its standing, connectivity and reputation are not very helpful in convincing national services to contribute. Yet, without their information EU intelligence is lost. The organization loses its practical value and is doomed as a meeting place as well; without information there is little incentive for coming in and exchanging views. For this reason, information brokerage is an - perhaps the - essential part of social relations in EU intelligence cooperation. And it is up to individuals to keep the flow of information going.

As depicted in chapter 3, the first to come to mind when discussing information brokerage in intelligence cooperation, is the leadership. Directors of national intelligence services are often the most prominent and most visible individuals on the outside. Of course, with respect to cooperation, they are also the formal and ultimate gatekeepers of their organizations. Without their general approval and support, connections among subordinates would mean

154 Interview 36
155 Interview 40
156 Interview 9

little. Moreover, their personal relations can make or break an arrangement. This seems especially true in the formal setting of the EU. As one EU intelligence officer states:

> *'If the leadership is willing and able to talk, and are on the same track, then a lot is possible based on personal relations on the lower levels. They have the final say. If they do not approve, it will not be signed. [...] If it is not on paper, it will not happen.'*[157]

Multiple EU intelligence officers note a distinct difference in SIAC effectiveness between various sets of directors. Their closeness is seen to be of the upmost importance, a point further elaborated on in chapter 8. Like their EU counterparts, national directors are 'in a position to formally prolong or stop cooperation arrangements'. And their open support for the arrangement is a powerful signal for their subordinates. It 'helps when people feel a blessing from above'.[158] In addition, directors can loosen up grinded relations or sanction cooperation on new and sensitive topics.

Yet, when compared to what Guttmann for example observes in the Club de Berne, the boundary spanning by formal leadership in EU intelligence cooperation seems limited.[159] However, Guttman mainly addresses the fundamental role of leadership in subsequent counterterrorism initiatives, mainly being change management. The EU might provide a more static setting of ongoing exchange. However crucial their approval and support on major issues, the directors of the intelligence services and EU intelligence organizations are not the most influential individuals when it comes to giving substance to practical EU intelligence cooperation. The chances of significantly altering the arrangement or putting it to an end are slim. The opportunities to play an active role in bolstering it are rare, confined to those moments that a reform of the arrangement is at hand, or that the scope of cooperation is drastically expanded.[160] Within an existing frame like the EU, the most important question is what will be shared exactly on a daily basis. And when it comes to deciding on the amount or type of intelligence shared, this is seldomly done at director's level. One EU intelligence officer shrugged when considering the role of leadership directives in ongoing cooperation, stating that:

157 Interview 39

158 Interview 20, 25, 43

159 Aviva Guttmann, 'Combatting Terror in Europe: Euro-Israeli Counterterrorism Intelligence Cooperation in the Club de Berne (1971–1972)', *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 2 (23 February 2018): 159; Shpiro, 'The Communication of Mutual Security: Frameworks for European-Mediterranean Intelligence Sharing', 21.

160 In this respect, the current momentum that appears to be developing in strengthening SIAC could prove to be one of the rare occasions in which national directors can play an active and influential role. This process will come back in chapter 8.

> *'Of course, we listen when we are told to work together more. But in the end the real output is about every-day interactions and interpretation. They cannot do that for you. You can work together, and you can work [emphasis] together."*[161]

As will be shown in the next chapter, the practice of intelligence and intelligence cooperation is a very bottom-up and informal affair. Besides the fact that directors probably have far more important things at their tables than micro-managing RFI's, their personal networks are considered too weak and too short-lived to be much of an influence in this informal setting. The formal leadership is hardly in a position to do more than provide leverage to the informal networks of experienced practitioners working in the various branches and teams.[162] Despite their international travels, they are not part of the nucleus of internationally active intelligence practitioners. They have little opportunity to establish and maintain a strong network built on repeated interaction. Moreover, some intelligence officers point at the frequent turn-over of key officials and their lack of intelligence background as further limiting their role in building and maintaining worthwhile arrangements. They are seen to 'come from many backgrounds', to 'maybe have only been in intelligence for a short period of time', or even to just to 'do their tour and leave'.[163]

In the EU, cooperation is perceived very much a working-level affair. The role of information-brokers again befalls on the experienced practitioners that interact on a day-to-day basis. Contacts among them are 'much more intense' than those of the leadership.[164] One EU intelligence officer even poses that 'the further you go down the scale, the better [cooperation] gets'.[165] At working level, the bureaucratic interests noted by Fägersten[166] are seen to be less of an issue. Even more so, one respondent notes that at working level partners will be seen 'playing with their own national and services' limits' without their leadership ever being involved.[167] EU intelligence officers mostly do not consider themselves as analysts only. They also see themselves as representatives and entry points for their national organizations, even when officially they are not. As one describes: 'I am the connecting link between the Member States collecting the information needed and EUMS."[168] By being in touch with their countrymen both in the EU and at home, these officers together with the liaisons are able to lower the threshold for cooperation both between services and with the EU. Position can dictate instrumental behavior here. An EU intelligence officer reflects with interest on his own (change of) behavior:

161 Interview 38
162 Interview 10
163 Interview 16, 17, 43
164 Interview 7
165 Interview 16
166 Fägersten, *Sharing Secrets*.
167 Interview 36
168 Interview 14

> *'We here can be a bridge, push them [...] I have seen the change up-close. Saw it in my own person. Formerly I was a [national] staff officer. But now, in need of input, I called a friend of old times. And I pushed him to work harder. Almost against his better interest, making his life somewhat miserable. Now all of a sudden, I had become a European staff officer."*[169]

As information-brokers, EU intelligence officers act as negotiators between national and EU interests and use 'their power to persuade'.[170] Not only are they in a perfect position for passing important and exclusive information, they are legitimate members of both SIAC and their national service as well. By closing the gap between the two they facilitate cooperation.[171] They have at their disposal relevant national systems for secure communication, know their national counterpart, and can talk to them directly. Moreover, they are in the exclusive position to know not only what information is potentially available at home, but also to judge the usability in the EU. Contrary to the formal system, they are able to be very specific in their requests even pointing at certain valuable paragraphs that could be extracted from otherwise non-releasable products. Being in between worlds, EU intelligence officers use their personal relations to bridge divides. As in the voluntary EU system it is not enough to just impose sharing from the top, they informally 'walk-the-walks to create support in the hallways of the workforce'.[172] The extent to which they succeed in this role of course very much depends on the person at hand. Some will be more pro-active than others. Moreover, a good link to proficient intelligence services at home is crucial and not all possess those links. Nevertheless, there is none who challenges the idea that bridging is an essential part of his job. One officer, after mentioning the hurdles he came across in trying to be a bridge, adds:

> *'Still, being here I take professional pride in trying to establish that connection. I add value by doing so."*[173]

The personal bridge between EU intelligence officers and their home organizations provides the system with credibility. Personal networks can create a form of leverage that the EU's organizational network cannot. In practice, intelligence cooperation is 'tailor-made; there is no such thing as sharing on auto-pilot."[174] For the EU, interpersonal relations are seen as indispensable. As one respondent describes:

169 Interview 24

170 Interview 2, 44

171 Giardini et al., "Four Puzzles of Reputation-Based Cooperation," 52; Giardini and Wittek, "Gossip, Reputation, and Sustainable Cooperation: Sociological Foundations," 31–32; Long, Cunningham, and Braithwaite, "Bridges, Brokers and Boundary Spanners in Collaborative Networks," 9.

172 Interview 19

173 Interview 26

174 Interview 18

'What is unachievable by adhering to the formal rules and structures, can be done by using networks of relations."[175]

This EU officer spoke of a recent crisis in which the EU lacked a good information position for planning potential extraction operations. By utilizing informal personal contacts with a partner, it became possible to bypass bureaucratic procedures and sensitivities up front. These would have made timely support impossible. In cases where deep cooperation between the EU and (clusters of) partners is hard, personal relationships can soften the edges of a seemingly impossible exchange. In the case above the exchange was formalized later, but many times none of it is ever done in writing. Similar informal dynamics are noted within SIAC itself.[176] This necessarily limits the utility of the information exchanged. However insightful, it can never be formally incorporated in EU products nor can it be processed in EU systems. Moreover, it obeys the red lines of intelligence cooperation; no information on sources is given, no products are shared that are classified as not releasable to the EU. This seems a problematic grey zone, yet in many instances it concerns merely circumstantial information intended for interpretation and explanation. To facilitate discussions. This is not uncommon in other intelligence exchanges either. A national officer explicates that exchange mostly requires social interaction:

'The reality of intelligence cooperation is not black-and-white. [...] Intelligence sharing [...] is nothing like exchanging Pokémon cards. This reality does not exist. It is one of the erroneous assumptions with the outside world. [...] Our reality has become so complex and so layered that without interpretation no understanding will occur. So, exchanging intelligence can hardly be as simple as a transactional process."[177]

Experience is mentioned as a prerequisite for daring to seek and use the individual room for maneuver. Whereas junior analysts are thought of as being hesitant to wheel and deal informally, seasoned officers see it as a second nature. They feel confident to act without explicit approval. An experienced analyst says:

'I am able to handle the limits [...] with more ease than they [unexperienced analysts] do. To do the business of giving and taking information. These limits are not always that clear, not prescribed. There is room for interpretation in what is open and what is not."[178]

175 Interview 14
176 Interview 15, 23, 29
177 Interview 34
178 Interview 37

6.4.3. Ambassadors: Knowing the Reputations

Direct contact offers the first step of relation building and a precondition for testing a partner's ability first hand. It is also an instrument for signaling quality. In the context of the EU, the role of signaling and communicating quality lies primarily with the intelligence officers working in the structures themselves. The roles of navigators and information-brokers can to some extent be also fulfilled by external relations personnel and liaisons, and they certainly are adept in discerning the potential of partners. Nevertheless, signaling the quality of the EU products and process for them is more difficult. The action officers and SNEs in SIAC are the only ones able to judge the quality of contributions and the proficiency of seconded personnel on a day-to-basis.[179] This information is not officially disclosed to others. Products going out contain no information on the number of contributions used and where they came from. In addition, the national services have no information on the way EU products were constituted, and what perspectives were taken into account. As far as they are concerned, it could be an 'old Beetle dressed up like a Cadillac'. As shown above when considering reputations, in many cases they do not even think it looks like a Cadillac to begin with. This is different from the people working in the EU structures themselves. Based on their exclusive insight in 'what is under the hood', they can attest of the quality involved. Even for those products that look 'shallow from the outside'. In doing so, they use their personal reputations to make up for the reputational deficiency on the side of the EU. They act as ambassadors of the latter and enable the future flow of information. Yet, their personal reputations serve not only the EU.

The EU provides national services with an excellent setting for testing the waters of old and new European partners. Being part of a multilateral arrangement like the EU intelligence structures, is seen as 'a kind of missionary work that bolsters [...] reputation'.[180] It is a way of becoming visible and known to a wide range of potential partners. Moreover, it provides a signal of commitment and ability. The way services cooperate in the EU arrangement and the quality they deliver - both in contributions and manpower - provide insight in their ability, and in what can be expected of them in terms of cooperative behavior. It can lead to new bilateral arrangements or the inclusion in existing plurilateral formats. Given the importance of partner experience in 'climbing the ladder of trust', old allies are expected to be the most prominent in this process of expansion. Yet, this is not always the case. Sometimes they are not seen as the most attractive. First, reputation works two ways. A long-time partner in EU cooperation can have established a track record for not participating, mostly being passive and holding back. Although formal naming and shaming is not common in EU intelligence,

179 Interview 37, 43, 44

180 Interview 18, 4, 36, 43, 44

insiders do notice cases of such 'free-riding'. And this obviously does not help future cooperation.[181] In the long run:

> *'Being part of the old guard is not sufficient to maintain a positive reputation. You have to show that you are in, and be there when there is work to do. [...] And this participation is not only operational [...], it is about being willing to take part in [EU intelligence] reform as well."*[182]

Second, a multilateral platform like the EU introduces partners that in many cases are 'less likely to come to mind' when considering intensifying or starting operational cooperation in a bilateral setting'.[183] Although some EU intelligence officers doubt whether this is formally allowed, many indicate that they use their multilateral posting to bolster bilateral cooperation as well. They are on the look-out for new partners or explore which partner might hold valuable information and on what topic. One EU intelligence officer depicts SIAC as:

> *'A scouting ground for cooperation. Based on the personal contacts in the EU setting it becomes possible to have a broad view."*[184]

The effect of reputations in multilateral cooperation is wider than for one partner alone. Reputational information travels through personal networks among analysts and onwards. One national intelligence officer illustrates this when speaking about a close bilateral partner:

> *'[They are] quite open about their cooperative arrangements, even about the partners they work with well and on what topics or areas of interest. But I guess that is because our [organizational] relationship with them is quite good. And because on a personal level we have good relation [as well]."*[185]

This functional gossip among trusted partners occurs in plurilateral clubs as well:

> *'The sharing of reputational information among sworn brothers is commonplace. In some informal clubs it is the business of the day even. [...] About good qualities, but certainly about their doubts."*[186]

People talk, especially when they know each other well. From this interaction information is derived about 'which partners are interesting and which are not'; the community will get

181 Interview 36
182 Interview 30
183 Interview 17, 25, 27, 33
184 Interview 25
185 Interview 20
186 Interview 30

to know 'who are co-operators' and who are not.[187] One respondent even finds that 'the true function of liaison is assessing partners on the level of trust they have accumulated, either directly or with other trusted partners'.[188] When it becomes clear that one of the participants in a cooperation is not really committed, or not committed at all, this will turn against him. As one national intelligence officer remarks:

> *'At one point you will notice that you no longer are being approached for separate deals, or ad-hoc groups or arrangements."*[189]

Between the intelligence officers exchanging reputational information, there is an opposite effect. Exchanging gossip creates or strengthens social bonding between participants and increases benevolence.[190] When looking at EU intelligence cooperation, it is exactly between these information-brokers and ambassadors - the action officers and SNEs - that social bonding occurs. This will be discussed in chapter 8.

The national services show themselves through the people they sent to the EU. Action officers and SNEs can be powerful ambassadors for their services. Their individual reputations provide their national services with reliability and put a face on them. As 'to trust all is virtually impossible, [it] is commuted on connections below that'.[191] One national intelligence officer even remarks that 'building successful cooperation is about that one analyst everybody knows to be able and willing to contribute'.[192] An EU intelligence officer reflects on this role:

> *'We [also] look at their service and the persons involved. Are they able to deliver or do they just talk nonsense. When I behave like a moron, then this will jeopardize my services' reputation."*[193]

Another is equally aware of this responsibility when stating that 'there is a great deal of trust by the national services in the [people] sent here. [...] If you screw up, there is nobody to contain the damage."[194] In an international organization, a malfunctioning intelligence officer will be able to ruin the relation not only for himself, but for his colleagues as well. When there are 'bad experiences with other members of an organization, you tend to generalize these feelings'.[195] On the other hand, they are equally aware that good individual reputations 'are

187 Interview 15
188 Interview 9
189 Interview 17
190 Giardini and Wittek, "Gossip, Reputation, and Sustainable Cooperation: Sociological Foundations," 29–30.
191 Interview 42
192 Interview 27
193 Interview 37
194 Interview 38, 40
195 Interview 26, 18, 24

being reflected on [their] country and organization' as well.[196] And once established, these organizational reputations are seen to stick; they are not only slow to build, but slow to decay as well.

The personal reputations of EU intelligence officers and their relations can bolster trust and help broaden the scope of cooperation between home organizations, as well as with the EU.[197] Although practitioners can meet in many settings, the systematic arrangement of EU intelligence adds the benefit of bringing together practitioners, repeatedly and for longer periods of time. When reflecting on this process, many respondents picture it being like a 'ratchet'.[198] They experience that on the basis of good personal reputation and repeated interaction between individuals, 'partners are open for increasing cooperation on current topics, or expanding it to other areas'.[199] Without being aware of this, they adhere to the idea of a repetitive and reinforcing circle of trust, introduced in chapter 3. At one point, reputations are even seen by respondents to supersede the individual. Based on previous experiences with people from the same organizations or backgrounds, an image is constructed of what generally can be expected of people from that origin. This relates to well-known theories on the effect of social networks on individual behavior and vice versa. It specifically underlines the link between individual and organizational reputations discerned by Zinko and Rubin. They note that the two levels of reputation rub off on each other. It allows individuals to make a head start based on the reputation of their home organization, a point that will return in the next chapter.[200]

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter set out to answer how perceptions of ability influence social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation. It started from the entity, process and structure identified in chapter 3. The conceptual framework introduced reputation, familiarization and network as constituent parts of perceived ability. From a conceptual point of view, these proved valuable entry points for obtaining practitioner's beliefs and perceptions about the role of social relations and trust in cooperative behavior. The relation between perceptions of ability, trust and preferences for cooperative behavior was clearly underlined by respondents. Moreover, they proved receptive to the words 'network' and 'familiarity' when describing how they felt about the EU's ability in intelligence. In many cases, they automatically coupled these to the role of 'reputations', although using a variety of related terms there like 'standing'

196 Interview 24

197 Interview 16, 19, 22

198 Interview 9

199 Interview 20

200 Zinko and Rubin, "Personal Reputation and the Organization," 17–18; Raub, Buskens, and Corten, "Social Networks," 665.

and 'image'. Nevertheless, an additional step proved necessary to critically examine how perceptions of ability influence cooperation practice. Iteratively benchmarking the empirical results with sociological concepts from interorganizational relations and especially network theory provided a more in-depth insight. It frames respondents' ideas in terms of network complexity, acknowledging the importance of size, diversity and density of the network. Moreover, it puts emphasis on the roles and positions of actors within this network. Their degree of centrality and connectivity plays a major role in the way they are known and how their reputation is construed. Lastly, it draws attention to the roles of individuals as boundary spanners. Interpersonal ties appear to play a much more important role in international intelligence cooperation than often thought or admitted by scholars and practitioners.

From an empirical point of view, this chapter concludes that in the case of the EU intelligence system perceptions of ability have a negative effect on cooperative behavior. It scrutinized this relation on three levels; the macro (international), the meso (organizational) and the micro (personal). The aggregate conclusion as well as the layered sub-conclusions on which it is built are depicted in Appendix E. They are building blocks for the main conclusion in chapter 9. On all levels, perceptions of ability definitely play a role in preferences for cooperative behavior. The image people hold of the partners in a network influences the amount of trust in the relation. Yet, in the case of the EU it is mainly a blurred image that governs the mechanism of social relations and trust. Except for the interpersonal level, participants in the EU intelligence system do not know each other well. As a result, they have a distorted perception of each other's ability and it is mainly a lack of trust that is noted. Practitioners often refer to calculative notions and show a preference for control measures in EU intelligence cooperation.

On a macro-level, EU intelligence holds only a peripheral position in a complex European intelligence network. The network is sizeable which makes it already hard to connect. However, it is mainly a lack of density that causes the problem. It is not a small world; it is several separated small worlds. The European intelligence network is a sparse policy network where functional divides pose an obstacle to familiarization. EU intelligence can be considered a cluster of the wider European intelligence network. Yet, it is a cluster with low prominence. It holds little centrality in this network and not much is expected from it. National intelligence services prefer cooperation in clusters that are based on their operational activity. As the EU's appeal as an operational cluster is low, so is it's perceived ability among intelligence practitioners. They do not know the EU well and as a result its ability to invoke cooperative behavior suffers further. Multilateral cooperation outside the well-known operational clusters is avoided and mainly reserved for the more familiar NATO alliance.

On a meso-level, EU intelligence organizations suffer from poor reputations due to this low familiarity. SIAC is not perceived to be the central actor in the EU intelligence network. Even when considering intelligence support to the EU, in the perception of most practitioners the EU organizations hold only second place. Intelligence services are seen to form the core of the EU cluster despite an apparent lack of interest from their part. This is not as surprising as it may seem, as it simply follows the service-centric architecture of the EU intelligence system described in chapter 5. SIAC mainly has an intermediate function in intelligence support to EU decision makers. In this respect, it is significant for cooperation that EU intelligence organizations are limited in their ability to perform the task of linking EU policy makers to national services. Weak connectivity in terms of lacking technical connections, insufficient procedures for exchange and inadequate routines hamper cooperation. Added to the EU's lack of centrality noted above, it leads to a general unfamiliarity with EU organizations among intelligence practitioners and a low reputation. The EU can be a good place to do business, but most European intelligence practitioners are not aware of this. They tend to base their image of EU intelligence on a flawed idea of what it is and how it works. As a result, especially intelligence practitioners working outside the EU do not value the organization highly and tend to keep their distance.

On a micro-level, the individuals working in SIAC can somewhat downplay the effect of lacking interorganizational trust. For them, keeping their distance is not a viable option. SNEs have a much more developed idea of the benefits that cooperation in this arrangement can bring, although they still display great skepticism towards the EU organization. In practice, these intelligence officers use their personal reputations to make up for the EU's lack of reputation. They perform several roles that facilitate cooperation with(in) the EU intelligence organizations. First, they are able to navigate the network. A quality that is not as widely spread as presumed due to the diversity noted. Second, they can act as information brokers. They are trusted travelers between intelligence services and EU intelligence organizations, able to negotiate interests between the two. Third, they are ambassadors to both the EU and the services, signaling reputational information. Their everyday interactions enable them to judge and communicate the quality of products, the proficiency of their colleagues and the possibilities of cooperation. In sum, these EU intelligence officers are essential boundary spanners between the national services and SIAC. They are the weak ties in a sparse European intelligence network.

When evaluating how perceptions of ability influence social relations in EU intelligence cooperation, a metaphor is helpful.[201] It presents a situation in which a general view of the network shows mainly hurdles and a lack of strong ties, while a more in-depth or nuanced

201 For an elaborate study on the advantages and limitations in the use of metaphors in organizational studies, see for example: Örtenblad, Trehan, and Putnam, *Exploring Morgan's Metaphors : Theory, Research, and Practice in Organizational Studies*; Morgan, *Images of Organization*.

evaluation shows the possibilities and the strength of weak ties present. The relation between the EU organizations and national services to some extent resembles those in a school yard. An analogy that was actually used by one of the respondents in the research. In this image, there is a large group of children playing soccer in a corner of the yard (the services). This has been their favorite game for quite some time, and some have become quite skillful. Being a team sport, in the course of time small teams have formed of like-minded kids (clusters). In a distant corner of the school ground another kid is sitting (EU organization). Recently he has started to develop an interest for soccer, yet he has a hard time hooking on with the other group. He lacks a prominent status as a soccer player (centrality), does not talk to them much (connectivity), and suffers from a bad reputation that is based on a general image. He remains excluded from the game. He has one big advantage. Several of his friends have been soccer players in one of the teams (SNEs and action officers). Through them he is not as disconnected as it might seem from just looking at the school yard from a distance. First, these friends know many of the other players, their relations and sensitivities, and they can help circumvent tensions (navigate). Second, they can introduce him to one of the teams (broker). Third, they can attest to his specific qualities that are not seen by the rest (signal). Through them he might someday gain the trust of the soccer players and join the game proper. Until that day he is far less isolated than he would be without them.