The social ties that bind: the role of social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation
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It is often said that there are no friends in intelligence. Operating in the shadows, intelligence services are designed to deliver decision advantage in a setting of international competition. This perception of rivalry is where the well-known adage of 'Quid pro Quo' in intelligence cooperation comes from. To only give information when there is an assured return, always striving for relative gain versus a 'partner'. To rationally calculate cost and benefit and try to control the exchange as much as possible. This approach severely limits their cooperation. It presents a prisoner's dilemma where there might be some gain, but never absolute or optimal. Services behave like players in a game of poker. Not showing their cards, not blinking an eye, and operating with caution and distrust. In this game, the wins of one automatically lead to the loss of all others.

This thesis shows that this cynical view on present-day international intelligence cooperation is too one-sided, especially in a long-standing multilateral arrangement like the EU. It is largely fed by cliches surrounding intelligence as a practice. Although the mechanism of rational calculations and control definitely plays an important role, it needs to be complemented by another that is based on social relations. An in-depth multi-level analysis of EU intelligence cooperation reveals that these play a far bigger role in international intelligence cooperation than is often assumed. They provide an efficient way to cooperate under circumstances of risk and uncertainty. Professionals are able to cooperate when they know, recognize and value each other, even in the face of competing interests.

In the setting of EU intelligence, the social construct of trust positively influences cooperation, especially through benevolence and on a personal level. More often than expected, it is interaction rather than transaction that determines cooperative behavior. Moreover, contrary to the common view that there are no friends in intelligence, in the setting of EU intelligence cooperation likeability and personal relations downplay feelings of competition and rivalry. Despite low familiarity and poor reputation of the EU in the intelligence network, shared institutions and collective identities in the intelligence community bolster cooperation. From this perspective, if intelligence services were to have any friends, they would be other intelligence services.

International cooperation between intelligence services poses a dilemma. It is an important tool in countering today's complex transnational threats, but cooperation is also a risky business. Intelligence services can never be sure that a partner will reciprocate in kind. Intelligence scholars have been struggling to find the conditions under which international cooperation occurs nevertheless. They often identify trust as one of the foremost conditions to overcome the dilemma. Yet, the notion of trust is seldom conceptualized - let alone

operationalized - in the context of intelligence. This thesis fills this gap. It takes a sociological approach, focusing on the interaction between institutions and individuals, and the way their trust relations construct preferences in (cooperative) behavior. From this perspective, trust is the 'intentional and behavioral suspension of vulnerability by a trustor on the basis of positive expectations of a trustee'. These expectations are built on perceptions of ability, integrity and benevolence. Together they determine the degree of trust between partners.

This study critically examines how social relations and trust influence cooperation within the EU intelligence system. Its practice-approach offers an insider's perspective that has been largely absent in the debate on intelligence cooperation so far. It scrutinizes practitioner's beliefs and perceptions about trust-based cooperation. The thick analysis is based on extensive desk research as well as 47 in-depth interviews with senior intelligence professionals from national services and EU intelligence organizations. It shows that intelligence might be a 'special' field for its extraordinary tasks and mandates, but not for the way known reputations, recognized professional standards and shared traits socially bind intelligence professionals to their community of practice. In this social sense, intelligence services resemble many other organizations in the public and private domains. We may therefore need to somewhat de-exceptionalize their cooperation practices.

The case of the EU intelligence system has proven well-suited to showcase the role of social relations and trust in international intelligence cooperation. On the one hand, it provides a context similar to many other types of cooperation between intelligence services. Despite the absence of special collection capabilities, fusion within the EU's Single Intelligence Analysis Capability (SIAC) resembles intelligence services' tradecraft. In addition, despite the aim of collective action, caution and restraint still dominate the multilateral exchange. On the other hand, there are also marked differences that make it likely for the mechanism of social relations and trust to surface. The arrangement consists of a repeated - even continuous - interaction between a large set of intelligence organizations and personnel. In addition, intelligence in the EU is a rather young concept that is still developing. The prominence of the EU intelligence system is thought to be increasing. In sum, the EU intelligence system provides a setting in which trust is both fostered and put to the test.

Perceptions of ability contribute negatively to social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation. The European intelligence network is a sparse policy network where functional divides pose an obstacle to familiarization and reputation building. For intelligence services, the EU is simply one of many potential clusters for cooperation and by far not the most important one. Reputations matter enormously in intelligence cooperation and the reputation of the EU in this respect is poor, partly due to operational ignorance. Nevertheless, intelligence practitioners working in the EU play an invaluable role as boundary-spanners between national services and EU intelligence organizations.

A more positive picture emerges when looking at perceptions of integrity. These have a moderate effect on social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation. An overarching occupational culture of intelligence exists that bolsters trust, but one that is at odds with the organizational culture of the EU and has conflicting subcultures that limit trust. However, again on the individual level, the setting of EU intelligence organizations provides an excellent opportunity for a subjective test of behavioral norms between intelligence professionals, allowing recognized individuals entrance into the in-group based on personal qualities.

Contrary to expectations based on the cynical view on cooperation that is dominant in the debate, it is perceptions of benevolence that have the most positive effect on social relations and trust in EU intelligence cooperation. Member State interests still dominate formal exchange. Yet, growing relevance of the EU as a security actor stirs goodwill and lenience among partners. Moreover, there is a growing sense of collective identity that helps cooperation. On a working level, especially inside the organization, intelligence practitioners are teaming up to get a job done that in their eyes only they can do. Emotional bonding helps them to accomplish their task. It opens the floor to sociability, likeability and fairness in interaction.

This research contributes in various ways to the scientific debate in and outside Intelligence Studies. First, it contributes to the body of knowledge on EU intelligence cooperation. It acknowledges the pivotal role of utility in developing EU intelligence, but extends its meaning beyond realist terms. Even more so, it argues that the added value of the EU intelligence arrangement may be misunderstood altogether. Instead of being a lean and mean transaction machine, it rather serves as a meeting place for sustained interaction, social relations and trust-building. Trust facilitates an ongoing process in which actual cooperation precedes formal structures. This conclusion might have implications for the broader debate on European integration as well. When even in intelligence cooperation, the domain least likely to integrate based on considerations of national sovereignty, notions of collective identity and benevolence show to be relevant, then neofunctionalism still holds a promising explanation for EU integration.

Second, it contributes to the body of knowledge on international intelligence cooperation in general by showing that the European intelligence community is above all a community of practice. Its members do not all share the exact same policy goal, but they have similar methods for problem-solving and sense-making. However, in practice, this one community consists of several subcommunities. Indeed, 'intelligence is what intelligence does' and what the members of the intelligence community actually do, varies. This notion urges not to focus only on national differences when addressing intelligence cooperation, but to look at occupational and organizational divides as well. The diversity of intelligence

subcommunities leads to substantial differences that severely limit the potential for convergence and isomorphism noted by other scholars. Differences that, perceived or factual, limit cooperation.

Third, it contributes to the body of knowledge on trust and cooperation. The research goes beyond an objective understanding and underlines that in practice trust is also a relational and gradual concept that travels between knowing and not knowing a partner. In effect, trust in intelligence cooperation serves the same purpose as in many other fields of social behavior. It enables cooperation by achieving reasonable expectations about a partner under conditions of uncertainty and risk. In doing so, trust is not a fully rational or deliberate determinant for intelligence cooperation. Instead of relying solely on formal rules and performance measurement, individual intelligence practitioners use interpretation and inference. They are based on clear conditions that are in turn shaped by the valuation of field-specific factors, like professional norms and standards. Trust thus becomes a subjective tool for the selection of suitable partners. It defines an in-group with which cooperation is preferable from an out-group where this is less the case.

Fourth, it contributes to the body of knowledge on social relations in intelligence by answering the call for a more sociological approach to Intelligence Studies. The research implies that intelligence as a human activity follows the same mechanisms as other forms of social behavior and shows that applying social theories delivers fresh insights in well-known intelligence activities and phenomena. Moreover, emphasizing the explanatory value of social concepts adds to the poststructuralist 'turn to practice' that has already been visible in IR since the start of the millennium, and is more recently beginning to show its worth in respectively Security Studies and Intelligence Studies. It gives way to a multidisciplinary dialog and contributes to a nuanced understanding of intelligence activity.

Finally, this study challenges the split between studies *of* intelligence and studies *for* intelligences. Practical, conceptual and theoretical knowledge are intimately connected. A better understanding of intelligence can also help practitioners. Therefore, some practical considerations on intelligence work are distilled from its conclusions. First, social capital is a type of resource in cooperation. A resource that has a direct link with the depth and breadth of the arrangement and can provide or make up for other capacities and capabilities like information. Second, cooperation between partners with a cultural fit, perhaps even with a similar identity, will be more agreeable, less conflictual, and probably less costly than with others. Including subjective social relations and trust when (e)valuating partnerships will provide a more comprehensive and thus telling insight in the conditions for success. Third, individuals play an invaluable role in intelligence cooperation. They need specific social skillsets that help them in the arrangement at hand. In addition, they need room to maneuver and operate effectively. Strict hierarchy, while important for avoiding risk, can

be suffocating for trust-based intelligence cooperation. Fourth, cooperation within the intelligence community is much easier than crossing its boundaries and reaching out to non-traditional partners. Although many intelligence leaders acknowledge the value of cooperation with scientific institutions and the private sector, a normative divide remains between them, for example regarding secrecy and openness. Trusted travelers are needed to - sometimes literally - cross this divide, connect the two worlds, and navigate obstacles.