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

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Acknowledgements

Sometimes, things turn out for the best and good things seem to come your way by chance or sheer luck. For me, doing this PhD was one of these things. Having been an army officer for many years and a civil servant afterwards, I was not the most obvious PhD candidate to begin with. As the head of a policy branch within the Netherlands MoD, I - and many others - considered myself a practitioner rather than an academic. The logical next step would have been to attain a more general position of management, not indulge in years of in-depth deliberation on an academic niche topic within the domain of security. Moreover, within this practitioner context doing a PhD was not commonplace. Nor was it equally valued by all around me. I remember vividly a colleague who, after hearing of my plans, displayed a dislike, questioned the relevance of a PhD and thought it mainly a distraction from doing some 'genuine' work. It must be said that this same colleague 'was happy for me nevertheless'.

Happy I certainly was. Although perhaps not the most obvious step, doing a PhD had long been on my wish list. In previous years I had already explored the possibility of doing one alongside my job, only to arrive at the conclusion that at that stage in my career and private life it would have been a bit too much. Nevertheless, the idea never left me. It resonated well with my curiosity on the 'why and how' of things, my taste for reasoning and research, and my fondness of critical thinking. So, when the opportunity arrived, I was mentally well prepared to do a PhD. Or so I thought. In the end, of course, it was a challenge. There are some people I owe a big debt of gratitude. Without them I would not have been able to do this PhD, let alone finish it.

First, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisors: Professor dr. ir. Sebastiaan Rietjens (known to my children from the COVID Teams-meetings as my boss 'Professor Bas'), Professor dr. Joachim Koops and Professor dr. Thijs Brocades Zaalberg. Their complementary approaches and positive feedback helped me greatly in growing as a scientist and delivering a solid dissertation. Thijs constantly reminded me to be 'to the point', to take readers into account and he emphasized the power of the empirics. Joachim encouraged me to take a multilevel approach, relate to International Relations theory and pointed at the added value this thesis can have for to the debate on European integration. Bas has not only been my methodological compass hammering at a consistently executed research design; I also consider him to have been my scientific coach and mentor. Without his open and reflective approach to me as an experienced practitioner, I am not sure whether or not I would have successfully finished the work.

Besides friends and family, there are numerous others who have displayed (scientific) interest in my project and helped it proceed. I can only mention some of them by name here. On the

academic side, there were my fellow PhDs and colleagues at the Faculty of Military Sciences at the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) as well as at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University. Discussions and conversations with them challenged my thought process and sharpened my analysis. Perhaps equally important, social talks added much joy to what is in many respects a very solitary project. Without them my time at the Faculty would definitely have been less insightful and less fun than it was now. Raïssa, Bram, Tess, David, Paul, Peter and Martijn thank you for helping me enjoy. In this respect, I want to especially mention my fellow PhD Ivor Wiltenburg who deceased in the period we worked together at the NLDA. It has been a pleasure and privilege to do part of our PhD journey together. I will miss his somewhat cynical humor and ability to put things into perspective. On the practitioner side, I want to thank those who enabled me to do a PhD in the first place. I have very much appreciated the luxury of doing it full-time and acknowledge that this is not a chance all get. Although not being able to name them in person, a special thanks goes to those practitioners who helped me acquire the interviews within the EU intelligence organizations and national services. The sponsorship of these insiders was invaluable for my research. In addition, I am grateful to all the intelligence officers who dared step out and help me with their insights. As I describe in my last chapter, doing interviews is still out of the ordinary in the closed world of intelligence. It requires some courage to openly express your professional beliefs and perceptions. Without them, I would definitely not have been able to do the research presented in this volume.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to mention my wife Natasja who has been a source of unwavering support. She has been on my side during this project as she has been for the best part of my life. She downplayed her effort by mockingly remarking that this period has been a blessing rather than a burden, as I was at home more often than I ever was during my previous jobs. We both know that this is only half the story. Home I was, but often working. A PhD never really stops; finishing chapters in the weekends, pondering about your analysis in the shower and stepping out of bed at night to take notes. And let's not forget the times I was frustrated and grumpy for not making progress or hitting the mark. My sons Lars and Koen probably remember the times I was late for dinner despite working at home, as well as the moments I 'politely urged' them to leave the study immediately or face the consequences. Even more than dealing with my moods, Natasja downplayed setbacks and kept faith in my ability to finish the project even more than I did. Only when I arrived at that point myself, acknowledging that it was worth defending, I knew I had come to the end of it. A PhD, like any scientific publication, is never finished, not even when it is done. It has been a remarkable and learning experience. I look forward to taking the next steps in my scientific journey.

Curriculum Vitae

Curriculum Vitae

Pepijn Tuinier (Utrecht, 08 August 1978) acquired his secondary education at Cals College in Nieuwegein (1990-1996). He then started off his professional career as an army officer. After his initial training as a cadet at the Royal Military Academy (1996-2000), he served as an officer in various positions (2000-2009) including deployments to Bosnia-Herzegovina (SFOR, 2003) and Afghanistan (ISAF, 2008). During the same period and alongside his work in the army he studied political science at Leiden University, acquiring a Master of Arts degree in 2008. His thesis addressed the role of (operational and tactical) military considerations in (strategic) political decision-making on the deployment of Dutch military forces overseas. In 2009 he left the Armed Forces and became a civil servant in the Netherlands Ministry of Defence. He worked as a (senior) policy advisor and manager in the security domain on both the strategic and operational levels. From 2019 to 2024 he was allowed to work on this PhD-thesis while being part to the War Studies Research Centre of the Netherlands Defence Academy. Returning to a policy position afterwards, his latest role is to bolster cooperation between practitioners and academics.

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

