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

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The Social Ties that Bind:

The Role of Social Relations and Trust in EU Intelligence Cooperation

1. Social relations are just as important for international intelligence cooperation as rational calculations and control mechanisms.
2. Intelligence cooperation needs to be demystified, as it is -in many ways- an ordinary human activity rather than merely a clash of state-interests.
3. SIAC faces a catch-22 situation: being a weakly institutionalized part of the EU bureaucracy it is an unattractive partner for services, but strengthening its position is likely to trigger bureaucratic resistance.
4. Whereas the adage goes that there are no friends in intelligence, if intelligence services were to have any friends, they would be other intelligence services.
5. The added value of the EU intelligence system is being a meeting place where social belonging and a shared narrative bolster cooperation through commitment, cohesion and team spirit.
6. Trust in intelligence cooperation is a means for selecting partners into an in-group based on reasonable instead of rational expectations.
7. Intelligence Studies requires the integration of sociological theories to foster a multidisciplinary dialogue rather than depending on the dominant neorealist approach.
8. The much-debated split between studies of intelligence and studies for intelligence is an artificial one and counterproductive to knowledge building, as practical, conceptual and theoretical knowledge go hand-in-hand.
9. As the secrecy of the field inherently limits confirmability, intelligence research requires rigorous positional awareness, conceptual robustness and semantic reasoning to ensure academic accountability.
10. Bridging the academic-practitioner divide in Intelligence Studies requires boundary-spanning activities that balance secrecy with openness and help build trust-based relations.
11. The 'low politics' of international intelligence cooperation is relatively resilient to political turmoil, regime change and international tension, but vulnerable to political interference and politization.