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## Introduction

The rise of increasingly complex threats in the last quarter of the century, such as terrorism or transnational organised crime, has led to calls for new and improved intelligence cooperation in the European Union (EU).<sup>1</sup> In addition to this, concerns about the US's commitment to the transatlantic alliance and its willingness to share intelligence with partners are bringing European agencies closer together than before.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the tide seems to be turning towards enhanced EU-wide collaboration in the field of intelligence.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this endeavour is not without its challenges, the most significant one being the issue of trust between agencies.

Considering this context, this paper aims to examine the current intelligence collaboration structures in Europe, in order to discern their limitations and offer suggestions to improve the EU's capabilities in the intelligence field. The analysis focuses on frameworks found within the EU and outside of it, such as informal groups. Additionally, potential initiatives that have been presented for the aim of improving Europe's readiness are also considered. The analysis shows that, while some progress has been achieved at the EU level, the lack of trust between national intelligence agencies and the EU's reliance on Member States' (MSs) intelligence input undermines efforts taken towards the consolidation of an intelligence community. Accordingly, recommended lines of action, such as the creation of an independent EU intelligence agency, are provided to overcome this challenge. The recommendation claims that an integrated agency would enable better-informed decision-making, planning, and more effective counterintelligence. By remaining independent from, but allowing for, national intelligence contributions, the agency's autonomy would disallow possible claims of national sovereignty encroachment. Furthermore, it would reaffirm the EU's commitment to collective defence by encouraging a culture of trust among MSs in the realm of intelligence and moving towards the creation of an EU intelligence community.

## Current Intelligence Apparatus in Europe

### 1.1 Intelligence Structures within the EU

First and foremost, the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN), described as an exclusive civilian intelligence function of the EU,<sup>4</sup> is the core intelligence-sharing and analysis hub within the EU structure. Its main task is the production of in-depth analytical work for EU decision-making bodies, chiefly based on the intelligence provided by the intelligence and security services of the EU MSs. While the idea of an intelligence cooperation centre was first pitched with the establishment of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it was not until the events of 9/11 and the rise of terrorism that the need for intelligence analysis

1. Joshua Posaner, 'Create a CIA-Style European Spy Service, von Der Leyen Is Told' *POLITICO* (Berlin, 30 October 2024) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-spy-service-cia-ursula-von-der-leyen/>>.

2. Antoaneta Roussi and Amy Mackinnon, 'Trump Deepens NATO's Crisis of Trust on Sharing Intel' *POLITICO* (6 March 2025) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-crisis-slovakia-donald-trump-hungary-slovakia-national-defense-academy/>>.

3. Antoaneta Roussi, 'Europe's Spies Are Learning to Trust Each Other — Thanks to Trump' *POLITICO* (Brussels, 22 October 2025) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-intelligence-spies-donald-trump-russia-security-politics/>>.

4. EEAS, 'EU INTCEN Factsheet' (2015) <<https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2016/may/eu-intcen-factsheet.pdf>>.

production for EU policymakers was truly underscored. Thus, the EU Situation Centre, later renamed EU INTCEN, was created in 2002.

Since 2011, the EU INTCEN has been a Directorate of the European External Action Service (EEAS). It is currently composed of two divisions, namely Intelligence Analysis and Reporting, and Support/Open Sources Research,<sup>5</sup> reporting directly to the High Representative. The staff is made up of both EU officials and temporary agents, in addition to seconded national experts from intelligence, counterterrorism, and security services, that provide insight to the centre.<sup>6</sup> Its mission revolves around the provision of exclusive information to the High Representative and EU decision-makers in the CSFP and CSDP spheres via the production of intelligence and threat assessments, summaries, reports and briefings. It is worth noting that their sources are limited to the information MSS' security and intelligence services are willing to provide, as well as open sources, diplomatic and consular reports and networks, international organisations, civil society, CSDP missions or operations, data provided by the EU Satellite Centre, and visits or field trips.<sup>7</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that an EU Hybrid Fusion Cell has been integrated into the INTCEN framework to improve situational awareness, alongside the publication of an EU Hybrid Toolbox.<sup>8</sup> This unit's mission is to inform EU institutions and MSs alike on hybrid threats and provide measures to counteract these. Nevertheless, and similarly to INTCEN, the information on which the Cell bases its intelligence product is entirely dependent on the information MSs are willing to provide.

In tandem with the EU INTCEN, the EU Military Staff's (EUMS) Intelligence Directorate also supports EU decision-making by providing intelligence expertise from a military perspective.<sup>9</sup> Established in 2001, the EUMS remains the EEAS' military component, but it was not until 2005 that an Intelligence Division was created to encourage military intelligence exchange at the EU level, later renamed the Intelligence Directorate.<sup>10</sup> The EUMS' main sources for intelligence analysis and production are still open sources, but there is also voluntary intelligence input from national military intelligence services.<sup>11</sup> The Directorate's intelligence production mostly takes the form of early warning or situation assessments, but they also provide support and analyses for mission-planning, operations and exercises.<sup>12</sup>

Since 2007, there has also been a functional agreement between the EU INTCEN and the EUMS Intelligence Directorate, in the form of the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC). The work undertaken within this partnership entails the monitoring of global events and the production of joint intelligence output. The latter can consist of morning briefs, intelligence summaries or reviews, threat assessments, intelligence flashes and assessments, and oral

5. EEAS, 'EEAS HQ Organisation Chart' (2025) <[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/2025%20-%2010%20-%2001%20-%20EEAS%20OrgChart%201.03\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025/documents/2025%20-%2010%20-%2001%20-%20EEAS%20OrgChart%201.03_0.pdf)>.

6. EEAS (n 4).

7. Ibid.

8. Bernard Brunet, 'Strengthening Europe's Actions Against Hybrid Threats: Setting Up a PROTEUS Programme' (Global Policy Center 2025) <[https://docs.ie.edu/GPC/3\\_AAF\\_short%20CGP\\_Strengthening%20Europe%27s.pdf](https://docs.ie.edu/GPC/3_AAF_short%20CGP_Strengthening%20Europe%27s.pdf)>.

9. EEAS Strategic Communications, 'The European Union Military Staff (EUMS) (EEAS, 2022) <[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eums\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eums_en)>.

10. Council Decision 2005/395/CFSP of 10 May 2005 amending Decision 2001/80/CFSP on the establishment of the Military Staff of the European Union (OJ L 132, 26.5.2005, pp. 17–24).

11. Artur Gruszcak, *Intelligence Security in the European Union: Building a Strategic Intelligence Community* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016) 104–106.

12. EEAS Strategic Communications (n 9).

presentations on sensitive regions, terrorism and other hybrid or global threats, which are then disseminated to the High Representative, leadership within the EEAS, and other EU institutions, as well as MSs.<sup>13</sup> As is the case with the units' separate work, SIAC intelligence outputs are also based on voluntarily given information by national intelligence and security services, EU delegation reports, open sources, and satellite imagery provided by the EU Satellite Centre (SATCEN).<sup>14</sup>

SATCEN, formerly known as the Western European Union Satellite Centre, is an essential asset for the European Union. Based at the Torrejón Airbase, this centre's mission is to support CFSP and CSDP decision-making by providing intelligence products and services based on collected space data, such as satellite and aerial imagery.<sup>15</sup> The agency's main clients are the EEAS, MSs, the Commission, other EU agencies, third countries (upon request), and international organisations. SATCEN's intelligence output is mainly used to support missions and operations involving humanitarian aid, contingency planning, and security surveillance. Nevertheless, the agency's tasks also entail the monitoring of critical infrastructure, military capabilities, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, Europol also possesses an intelligence dimension. The Europol Information System (IES) is an intelligence database that covers all of Europol's crime areas they have a mandate over, including serious international crimes and terrorism.<sup>17</sup> Launched in 2005, it contains information on suspected and convicted persons, criminal structures, potential offences and how these could be committed.<sup>18</sup> The database can be accessed by Europol officials, national liaison officers and seconded national experts, and the corresponding competent authorities of MSs. The data is, thus, mainly used for law enforcement purposes rather than policy or decision-making, and is not easily accessible unless partnership agreements or access to platforms have been previously granted.

Last but not least, it is important to note that, nowadays, most MSs' permanent representations to the EU also have intelligence officers in their staff, as liaison between the Union and their corresponding national services, but little else is known about their responsibilities.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2 Clubs, Groups and Collaboration beyond the EU

Outside of EU structures, the continent also boasts informal intelligence alliances, with the Club de Berne as the prime example. Founded in the late 60s to early 70s, this network – much like other previously discussed frameworks – works exclusively on a need-to-know basis, by exchanging information, best practices, and discussing potential issues.<sup>20</sup> Not

13. Nicola Delcroix, 'Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) and Its Role in Supporting EU Decision Making' [2019] *IMPETUS*, 10-11.

14. Ibid.

15. SATCEN, 'Mission, Users and Partners' (SATCEN, 2017) <<https://www.satcen.europa.eu/Who%20we%20are/our-mission>>.

16. SATCEN, 'Geospatial Intelligence' (SATCEN, 2016) <[https://www.satcen.europa.eu/what-we-do/geospatial\\_intelligence](https://www.satcen.europa.eu/what-we-do/geospatial_intelligence)>.

17. Europol, 'Europol Information System (EIS) – A System for Information on Serious International Crime' (Europol, 2025) <<https://www.europol.europa.eu/how-we-work/services-support/information-exchange/europol-information-system>>.

18. Ibid.

19. Antoaneta Roussi (n 3).

20. Federal Office of Police Press Service, "Club de Berne" Meeting in Switzerland' (Federal Department of Justice and Police, 2004) <[https://web.archive.org/web/20110510110856/http://www.ejpd.admin.ch/ejpd/en/home/dokumentation/mi/2004/ref\\_2004-04-28.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20110510110856/http://www.ejpd.admin.ch/ejpd/en/home/dokumentation/mi/2004/ref_2004-04-28.html)>.

much else is known about this group, other than their biannual meetings, a lack of official bodies or headquarters, and a vague awareness of its participants. Of note is the club's creation of the Counter Terrorism Group (CTG) in 2001, as a response to 9/11. Since 2004, it has acted as the link between the Club and the EU on terrorist matters, providing policy-making bodies with threat assessments, and collaborating with the Union via the EU INTCEN.<sup>21</sup>

Another notable example of extra-EU alliances is SIGINT Seniors, especially its European subdivision. Named after the intelligence-gathering practice of intercepting communication, signals intelligence, this group was purportedly formed amid the Cold War.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays, its main focus is counterterrorism. Similarly to the case discussed previously, there are no reported headquarters, and annual conferences are held in different locations. Collaboration within this group entails the joint monitoring of communications and targeting of suspects, sharing intercepted intelligence, and the development of new techniques and tools for enhanced surveillance.<sup>23</sup>

In the mid-2010s, the Paris Group, also known as G15, emerged as yet another intelligence-sharing forum, as a response to rising numbers of terrorist attacks on the continent. It is now a known fact that the European institutions and informal groups other than the G15 can participate in their forum, as evidenced by the attendance of staff from EU INTCEN and the Counter Terrorism Group.<sup>24</sup> Once again, little else is known about the Group, other than the fact that annual meetings are being held and that intelligence service coordinators are the key participants in the meetings.<sup>25</sup>

It bears mentioning that, beyond exclusively European efforts, NATO also has an initiative that encourages the sharing of information, known as Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR). Indeed, one of the JISR's vital aims is to encourage the 'responsibility to share' over the usual need-to-know approach that intelligence-sharing structures tend to maintain. Its main strength is that it does not merely promote intelligence-sharing among its members but also includes provisions that ensure information and network protection.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the initiative remains insufficient, as intelligence-sharing remains a voluntary effort within the organisation.

## 2. The Winds of Change? The Niinistö Report

Notwithstanding, it would seem that support for deeper cooperation in the field of intelligence is on the horizon. Whether due to fears of a less reliable transatlantic alliance or alleged attempts to infiltrate EU institutions by third countries,<sup>27</sup> shifts in the geopolitical

21. Ibid.

22. Ryan Gallagher, 'The Powerful Global Spy Alliance You Never Knew Existed' *The Intercept* (1 March 2018) <<https://theintercept.com/2018/03/01/nsa-global-surveillance-sigint-seniors/>>.

23. Ibid; Adrian Hänni, 'Prequel To The Present - Multilateral Clubs And The Secret History Of International Counterterrorism Cooperation in Western Europe, 1969-1989' (2018) 19 *National Security and the Future* 65-109.

24. Matthias Monroy, 'Yet Another New European Intelligence Forum: The Paris Group' (Dissecting Security Architectures, 20 December 2016) <<https://digit.site36.net/2016/12/20/yet-another-new-european-intelligence-forum-the-paris-group/>>.

25. Pierre Gastineau and Antoine Izambard, 'Rome Briefly Turns into European Intelligence Hub' *Intelligence Online* (Paris, 9 April 2025) <<https://www.intelligenceonline.com/government-intelligence/2025/04/09/rome-briefly-turns-into-european-intelligence-hub,110410986-eve>>.

26. NATO, 'Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance' (NATO, 2025) <[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_111830.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111830.htm)>.

27. Antoaneta Roussi (n 3).



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sphere have paved the way for a potential change of approach in the field of intelligence.

The Niinistö Report is former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö's attempt to give a detailed account of the EU's current readiness for war, crises, and the state of its civilian defence. Requested by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and published in late 2024, one of its proposals to improve EU intelligence structures entails the creation of a fully-fledged intelligence cooperation service.<sup>28</sup>

The Report offers a brief step-by-step plan to develop the proposal towards the creation of an agency. First, and in accordance with the lines of action put forward in the Strategic Compass, it calls for the reinforcement of SIAC and the Hybrid Fusion Cell.<sup>29</sup> This would entail, for instance, a better structuring and coordination of SIAC to adequately address and process information requests for its intelligence products. In addition to this, the plan suggests the formalisation of information and data-sharing agreements between SIAC and other EU actors, to improve information aggregation and an enhancement of cooperation between SIAC and the relevant security and defence services under EU institutions and MSs, for the aim of better coordinating counterintelligence and counterespionage efforts.<sup>30</sup>

Although vague in its wording, the proposal envisions that the service would be used for both the strategic and operational needs of policy-planning and decision-making, so long as it does not overlap with the tasks undertaken by national intelligence agencies. Moreover, chiefs of national intelligence agencies have also been overt in their support for more independent European intelligence capabilities,<sup>31</sup> possibly tied to worries about a historic overdependence on American-driven intelligence-sharing and coordination structures. Nevertheless, with trust being the backbone of such a proposal, the path forward is not without its challenges.

### **3. The Role of Trust in Intelligence Cooperation for European Security and Defence: Analysis of Pitfalls and Possibilities**

On the one hand, as previously discussed, intelligence cooperation within the EU is exclusively limited to information-sharing done by national agencies on a purely voluntary, need-to-know basis. This poses a fundamental issue for improving the Union's readiness for conflict, as it makes the institutions' policy-planning and decision-making entirely dependent on the intelligence contribution of MSs. Furthermore, the flow of information within the EU itself is still flawed, as exemplified by the fact that the Europol database has only been accessible to the EU INTCEN since late 2022,<sup>32</sup> despite the platform's launch in 2009. The lack of a proper information flow within the Union, if left unchecked, could create coordination issues between units and bodies, and presume an overall inefficient use of

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28. Sauli Niinistö, 'Safer Together: Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness' (2024) <[https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5bb2881f-9e29-42f2-8b77-8739b19d047c\\_en?filename=2024\\_Niinisto-report\\_Book\\_VF.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5bb2881f-9e29-42f2-8b77-8739b19d047c_en?filename=2024_Niinisto-report_Book_VF.pdf)>.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Antoaneta Roussi (n 3).

32. European Commission, 'Answer given by Ms Ylva Johansson on Behalf of the European Commission for Question E-001355/24 |' <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2024-001355-ASW\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2024-001355-ASW_EN.html)>.

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existing operational information.

On the other hand, the existence of unofficial clubs and groups shows that secrecy reigns in the realm of intelligence. This not only raises questions over the lack of information flow between such groups and the EU but also illustrates the fact that these structures can act outside democratic control. Indeed, document leaks like the one the Club de Berne suffered in 2019 have shown that these informal groups do not necessarily limit their activity to intra-European intelligence sharing, going as far as inviting non-European bodies such as the FBI, the CIA or Mossad for information exchanges.<sup>33</sup> Thus, with little to no cooperation frameworks within the EU and the ability to elude transparency or accountability, it is clear that intelligence cooperation in Europe needs to head in a new direction.

Niinistö's call for a fully-fledged European intelligence cooperation service seems a promising proposal. Nevertheless, as the report states, the creation of such a service is not meant to emulate the work undertaken by national intelligence agencies, including their role in intelligence gathering.<sup>34</sup> The modesty of the proposal, which merely aims to improve current cooperation and information flow, denotes the persistent lack of trust between MSs. Following this line of action only perpetuates the EU's dependence on national intelligence agencies for input and further undermines the Union's goal of preparedness for conflict and crises. In other words, it compromises the region's ability to develop the necessary tools and capabilities to tackle transnational and complex challenges that cannot be successfully dealt with by states on their own.

A more ambitious course of action must therefore be taken to enhance the Union's readiness for conflict. What the EU needs is the creation of a truly independent EU intelligence agency. That is, a service with its own staff, professional training, and intelligence-gathering capabilities, which is not linked to any of the MSs' intelligence services. Moreover, the creation of such an agency within the EU would also entail the enforcement of safeguards that would ensure the agency's accountability and transparency. This could be achieved by imposing strict codes of conduct and grave penalties for breaches, but also by taking any necessary precautions to preserve the agents and their networks' identity and/or privacy for their safety. That is not to say that MSs would not be invited to participate or cooperate within this structure. In fact, there could be information-exchange agreements between the agency and national intelligence services, thus encouraging reciprocity within the EU and among MSs.

A potential issue that may arise because of this proposal is the accusation by MSs that such an agency and its activities would be an attempt by the EU to encroach on their national sovereignty, especially over a matter as delicate as intelligence. Indeed, it could be argued that, under Article 4, paragraph 2 of the Treaty on European Union, the EU is under the obligation to respect the essential functions that each MS carries out independent of the Union.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the article goes on to emphasise that national security remains the sole

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33. Jan Jirat and Lorenz Naegeli, 'The Club de Berne: A Black Box of Growing Intelligence Cooperation' (about:intel 2020) <<https://aboutintel.eu/the-club-de-berne/>>.

34. Niinistö (n 28).

35. Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (OJ C 202, 762016) art 4 para 2.

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responsibility of MSs. Thus, it is possible that MSs may attempt to invoke this article to not only avoid sharing potentially sensitive information but also disallow the Union from taking any measures they believe to be compromising their sovereignty or security.

Nevertheless, the current geopolitical climate and the rise of hybrid transnational threats require an assertive and far-reaching solution. A more lenient interpretation of the current EU Treaties has allowed MSs to entrust the Commission with more power in the planning and development of defence capabilities it can invest in and own via the new Defence Industrial Readiness Board or the European Defence Agency in a situation of crisis.<sup>36</sup> As intelligence is considered a core military capability, it could be argued that the Commission should, if needed, be ready to invest in the creation, staffing and training of an EU intelligence service. If MSs are not willing to compromise, learn to trust one another and truly enhance intelligence-sharing, then the EU has the duty to take matters into its own hands for the security of the continent and its citizens. In other words, while cooperation with national intelligence services would be desirable and more than welcome, it should ultimately be inessential to the functioning of the agency. In the event that MSs are severely against the creation of an intelligence agency, an alternative could be to utilise the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) as a platform through which willing MSs may systematically enhance their military intelligence cooperation, further than the bounds of their commitments within current structures.

## **Concluding Remarks and Future Lines of Action**

This paper has shown that MSs' mistrust regarding intelligence-sharing is severely impacting the EU's preparedness for conflict. Current structures within the EU are proving insufficient for effectively identifying threats and enabling informed decision-making for the protection of Europe and its citizens. Beyond the EU, informal groups and clubs lack the proper accountability and democratic control to ensure responsible use and exchange of intelligence among members.

The EU has the duty to rise to the occasion and do more for its own security and defence. Inspired by Niinistö's report, the creation of an independent EU intelligence service can help overcome ongoing challenges in the intelligence realm. Naturally, MSs might be reticent, on account of security and defence being an exclusively national responsibility. Nonetheless, the current climate and the complexity of cross-border hybrid threats prove that ambitious measures are needed to ensure preparedness and resilience.

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36. Steven Blockmans, 'Roadmap towards a Common Defence for Europe' (CEPS 2025) <[https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ROADMAP-TOWARDS-A-COMMON-DEFENCE-FOR-EUROPE\\_V4.3.pdf](https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/ROADMAP-TOWARDS-A-COMMON-DEFENCE-FOR-EUROPE_V4.3.pdf)>.



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