'There is only so much you can do from the outside': EU–UK intelligence-sharing through Brexit and the war in Ukraine

LUCIA FRIGO*

When the United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union, it did so without clear arrangements on foreign and security cooperation. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) between the two sides contains no references to this issue. This led to a reconfiguration in the EU's security architecture and to a reorganization in broader European security governance.[1] This article focuses on the impact of Brexit on intelligence-sharing for external security: here, too, Brexit caused a reorganization in structures and roles, due to the UK's significant contribution in this domain before its departure. It reveals that the EU's foreign intelligence framework was able to adapt to these changes through informal channels and to respond to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Yet critical gaps and fragilities remain in the intelligence-sharing relationship as a result of Brexit.

While the effects of Brexit on foreign intelligence were largely dismissed in the years preceding and following the Brexit referendum, especially by British policy-makers,[2] Russia's invasion of Ukraine brought the issue to the fore. It was not only a stark reminder about the importance of sharing intelligence on foreign threats; it also raised the issue of whether and how the EU and UK could cooperate on external security after Brexit. This is the puzzle that this article seeks to explore by asking two interconnected questions: How has the UK's role in the EU's foreign intelligence framework changed since Brexit? And what does this mean for the continent's security?

Brexit opened a chasm in the intelligence sphere as the UK's crucial intelligence contributions to the EU ceased. On the other hand, the two sides' security interests remained aligned, which called for a degree of continued

* This article is part of a special section in the July 2026 issue of *International Affairs* on 'Security provision in and beyond Europe: transformed narratives and roles', guest-edited by Sarah Wolff, Karolina Pomorska and Richard G. Whitman. The author would like to thank Richard Whitman, Karolina Pomorska, Sarah Wolff, Marianna Lovato, Tom Dyson, Nicholas Wright, Benjamin Martill and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. In particular, many thanks go to the interviewees who chose to participate in this research.

[1] Sarah Wolff, Karolina Pomorska and Richard Whitman, 'Security provision in and beyond Europe: transformed narratives and roles', *International Affairs* 102: 4, 2026, pp. 1109–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiag090.

[2] Among others: Richard Dearlove, 'Brexit would not damage UK security', *Prospect Magazine*, 23 March 2016; Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, *International partnerships* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 2023).

International Affairs 102: 4 (2026) 1203–1221; DOI: 10.1093/ia/iiag047

security cooperation. Numerous forums were activated in response to Russia's war in Ukraine, from NATO to the G7, the Joint Expeditionary Force and various minilateral groupings. However, the EU's proactive role on sanctions, energy security and support to Ukraine dictated that the UK should interact with it directly.[3] This article's focus on the UK's intelligence relations with the EU allows us to explore how the latter's most secretive security architecture adapted in rapid succession to two crises—Brexit and the war in Ukraine—and what consequences this has had for the EU and for the UK, including for the latter's agency in broader European security.

These questions about the UK's changing role and the adapting EU security architecture are addressed by applying a network analysis lens to intelligence-sharing. Through this sociological–relational approach, intelligence-sharing is revealed as a web of social interactions, in which actors continuously shape each other and their environment.[4] The UK's role is traced in terms of network power, and its contributions—in intelligence products and expert knowledge—are understood as ties that link it to other actors. To map these changes, I conducted a longitudinal study of the UK's role in this network in three phases: before Brexit (from the referendum in June 2016 to the UK's withdrawal in January 2020), after Brexit (from February 2020 to February 2022) and from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to the adoption of the EU–UK Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) (February 2022 to May 2025). This approach offers theoretical, methodological and policy-related advantages. From a theoretical standpoint, this article brings a fresh perspective to the study of intelligence cooperation. While this field remains predominantly focused on alliance formation, I reflect on how, and through what channels, the EU–UK intelligence cooperation was partially restored after a break. Methodologically, network analysis concepts like network power, centrality, exit power and brokerage offer a high standard of replicability and precision in tracking such changes. In a field where secrecy and politicization often threaten the rigour of academic discourse, this methodological precision offers practical benefits. By making the impact of Brexit observable and measurable, this study opens the black box of EU–UK intelligence cooperation to inform policy reflections and future debates.

This article presents three interconnected findings. First, Brexit has left the UK with significantly reduced social power and curtailed opportunities to influence the EU's strategic decision-making. If 'Brexit means Brexit', this may be an implicit consequence of a British policy choice. Yet, in revealing the extent and consequences of this change, I challenge the narrative according to which Brexit has 'not had an effect on intelligence co-operation' with the EU and its members.[5] Second, the UK's changed role has had concrete conse-

[3] Federico Fabbrini, 'EU–UK relations after the war in Ukraine: options to re-engage post Brexit', *West European Politics* 48: 5, 2025, pp. 1136–58, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2420298.

[4] Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler and Alexander H. Montgomery, 'Network analysis for International Relations', *International Organization* 63: 3, 2009, pp. 559–92, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818309090195.

[5] Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, *International partnerships*, p. 88.

quences, as evidenced in the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Third, informal cooperation channels and knowledge-sharing avenues have played a crucial role in ensuring this network's connectedness with the UK, although gaps remain compared to before Brexit. These findings emerge from the textual analysis of policy documents, secondary literature and, mainly, novel interview data. The latter is the result of 30 semi-structured interviews with intelligence practitioners, diplomats and experts (think tankers and academics) from the UK, EU agencies, and member states' national security communities, chosen for their involvement in the EU–UK relationship.[6] Wherever possible, to avoid interviewee bias, I include British and continental perspectives on the same issue, and support them with references to the literature.

The article unfolds as follows. First, I reflect on the literature about Brexit's impact on EU–UK cooperation in external security and intelligence, revealing the necessity for more investigation into the latter case. I next present the methodological tenets of network analysis used in this study and cast the EU's foreign intelligence framework in a network perspective. The analysis then moves to observing the UK's position in this network before and after leaving the EU and following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This prompts a reflection on its role and power, its changed intelligence relations with the EU and the consequences for European security. I argue that, while other networks like NATO offer cooperative alternatives, the UK's new distance from the hubs in the EU network has damaging effects on its ability to influence the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This means that, while NATO's future becomes increasingly uncertain[7] and the EU steps into its role as a security actor, the UK's intelligence contributions in matters of regional security risk remaining sidelined.

Researching Brexit's effects on external security and intelligence co-operation

The UK's changing relations with the EU has received significant scholarly attention since the Brexit referendum. A large literature has explored how the UK, which had been an awkward partner in the CFSP, would maintain foreign policy relations with the EU in the absence of a dedicated agreement.[8]

[6] All categories include current and former professionals. To protect their anonymity, the interviewees' status in past or active service is not disclosed, and only their professional category is revealed. For more information about the interviewees, see Lucia Frigo, 'There is only so much you can do from the outside: EU–British intelligence-sharing through Brexit and war in Ukraine. Appendix A—list of interviewees', available at https://rb.gy/1u5nwh. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 19 Jan. 2026.)

[7] Shreya Sinha, 'Tracing the trajectory of transatlantic ties: dealing with Trump 2.0', *National Security* 8: 2, pp. 229–46, https://doi.org/10.32381/NS.2025.08.02.8.

[8] Nicholas Wright, *Brexit & the re-making of British foreign policy* (London: UCL, 2017); Paul James Cardwell, 'The United Kingdom and the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU: from pre-Brexit "awkward partner" to post-Brexit "future partnership"?' *Croatian Yearbook of European Law & Policy*, vol. 13, 2017, pp. 1–26, https://doi.org/10.3935/cyelp.13.2017.282.

The answer was by 'muddling through'.[9] More recently, the war in Ukraine moved the conversation to a new era of collective security, in which the UK's role again appears transformed. Fabbrini[10] and Martill and Sus[11] show the UK seeking a closer relationship with the EU, while Rees and Xu[12] reveal its preference for minilateral and bilateral security arrangements, leveraging its relationship with the United States.

Such engagement with the consequences of Brexit has not yet extended to intelligence, a choice often justified by the fact that the EU has no competence in this domain[13] and that all EU intelligence structures are purely intergovernmental.[14] This literature has taken two distinct approaches. The first focuses on intelligence cooperation for internal security, from law enforcement to border control, where the TCA mandates some cooperation.[15] The second, which emerged during the Brexit negotiations, has explored external security, speculating on whether and how an agreement would include foreign intelligence-sharing.[16]

This article thus provides an important contribution to the scholarship. By mapping how the UK's role has changed in the EU intelligence framework and what consequences this has had on European security, it aims to fill a gap that has at times been instrumentalized in political commentary, which has insisted either that Brexit changed nothing or that informal cooperation, like the one around Russia's invasion, would overcome any Brexit-related obstacles.[17] As this article argues, the reality is more complex. This is timely research, given the importance of shared intelligence for the EU's common approach to foreign threats, and the increased demands for more intelligence cooperation within the EU and with external actors.

[9] Richard Whitman, 'The UK's European diplomatic strategy for Brexit and beyond', *International Affairs* 95: 2, 2019, pp. 383–404, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz031.

[10] Fabbrini, 'EU–UK relations after the war in Ukraine'.

[11] Monika Sus and Benjamin Martill, 'There and back again: how UK–EU de-institutionalisation after Brexit shaped re-engagement after Ukraine', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 64: 1, 2026, pp. 371–86, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13694.

[12] Wyn Rees and Ruike Xu, 'US–UK–France relations amid the Russia–Ukraine war: a new strategic alignment?', *International Affairs* 100: 3, 2024, pp. 1249–61, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae075; Daniela Schwarzer, 'The war in Ukraine and its challenges to European security, transatlantic relations and EU–UK cooperation', Brexit Institute working paper no. 4, 2023, http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4599163.

[13] Treaty on European Union, art. 4.2.

[14] Björn Fägersten, 'European intelligence cooperation', in Isabelle Duyvesteyn, Ben de Jong and Joop van Reijn, eds, *The future of intelligence: challenges in the 21st century* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 94–112; James I. Walsh, 'Intelligence-sharing in the European Union, institutions are not enough', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44: 3, 2006, pp. 625–43, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00638.x.

[15] Karen Bullock et al., 'United Kingdom–European Union policing and law enforcement cooperation in the post-Brexit era', *Policing and Society* 35: 7, 2025, pp. 901–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2024.2442714; Hager Ben Jaffel, *Anglo-European intelligence cooperation in Europe: Britain in Europe, Europe in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[16] Noteworthy is the *Journal of Intelligence History*'s special issue 16: 2 of 2017, which collected preliminary reflections in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

[17] Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, UK, *International partnerships*; Dearlove, 'Brexit would not damage UK security'.

A network approach to intelligence cooperation

Bringing a network analysis lens to the EU's intelligence framework, I expose the UK's role as object of and contributor to the socialization process in intelligence, and I inquire how much this role has changed since Brexit. Ontologically, network approaches are inherently relational, focused as they are not on actors but on their relationships.[18] This implies that actors are not static, rational choice players, and that their interactions are arenas for constant socialization, where they are simultaneously shaping their environment, each other and their ways of thinking, doing and performing roles.[19] Cooperating actors share not just material assets but also beliefs, practices and world-views. This attention to socialization dynamics is a necessary step in intelligence studies, as it investigates the inter-agency and interpersonal relations that deeply shape European intelligence-sharing.[20] The openness of network analysis to contributions from practice theory and knowledge circulation theory, both of which have promisingly entered the intelligence studies scholarship,[21] offers a useful theoretical and methodological approach that can zoom in on interpersonal relations but also consider macro, network-wide dynamics.

Most importantly, the benefits of network analysis lay in its conceptual toolbox. With it, I measure the UK's relationships and network power in each phase in this study, and then compare and reflect on the practical implications of such changes. In this article, I adapt to the intelligence world the concept of network power as defined by Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery.[22] In this context, power is defined as 'prominence in networks where valued information and scarce resources are transferred from one actor to another'.[23] This translates into one node's ability to influence the network's shape, activities and outputs—here, its security provisions. According to this model, a node has network power when it displays features of centrality, brokerage or exit options. Before introducing the network, I illustrate these variables below.

Centrality indicates the importance of a node in the network. This can be measured by counting the number of ties it has to other actors (degree centrality) or in terms of its proximity to other nodes. In this article, I use degree centrality and, principally, Eigenvector centrality. This indicator measures a

[18] Emilian Kavalski, *The guanxi of relational international theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

[19] Elke Krahmann, 'Security governance and networks: new theoretical perspectives in transatlantic security', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18: 1, 2005, pp. 15–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570500059514.

[20] See, among others, Pepijn Tuinier, 'Explaining the depth and breadth of international intelligence cooperation: towards a comprehensive understanding', *Intelligence and National Security* 36: 1, 2021, pp. 116–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2020.1821461; Rubén Arcos and José-Miguel Palacios, 'EU INTCEN: a transnational European culture of intelligence analysis?', *Intelligence and National Security* 35: 1, 2020, pp. 72–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2019.1649912.

[21] Sophia Hoffmann, 'Circulation, not cooperation: towards a new understanding of intelligence agencies as transnationally constituted knowledge providers', *Intelligence and National Security* 36: 6, 2021, pp. 807–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2021.1938371; Jelle van Buuren, 'Analysing international intelligence cooperation: institutions or intelligence assemblages?', in Duyvesteyn, de Jong and van Reijn, eds, *The future of intelligence*; Ben Jaffel, *Anglo-European intelligence cooperation in Europe.*

[22] Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery, 'Network analysis for IR'.

[23] David Knoke, *Political networks: the structural perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994, first publ. in 1990), p. 9.

node's influence on the network's hubs (that is, its key nodes).[24] A node that closely interacts with the hubs potentially has more opportunities to shape the network, because it can exercise influence directly on its central venues. In this study, Eigenvector centrality measures a node's authority—its ability to make its intelligence and expertise relevant in key multilateral settings.

Brokerage indicates a node's ability to act as gatekeeper in certain parts of the network by being the sole 'bridge' of communication between two subgroups. While in most networks some actors act as brokers among subgroups, controlling the flow of information between them, this does not hold true in intelligence. Here, each state maintains full control of its intelligence and how it is shared, and can always transmit its intelligence to any partner through a bilateral connection.[25] This article, therefore, analyses not brokerage within the network but 'external brokerage', a novel adaptation that captures a node's ability to connect its network with external clusters and actors. So, while an EU node cannot keep intelligence from circulating to one member state to others, its power can be enhanced by contact with external actors or membership in external clubs, which expose it to new information, practices or technologies.

Exit options refer to a node's ability to delink from the network without it suffering grave consequences. They give a node the ability to credibly threaten to leave the network—because the node holds few connections or because it has other credible alternatives. I observe these three variables—centrality, external brokerage and exit options—with regard to the UK in the three phases set out above. Tracking its power in the network, I also examine how its relations with the core EU hubs have changed.

The EU's foreign intelligence-sharing network

To apply this methodology, I begin by delimiting the EU's foreign intelligence-sharing network, illustrating its relevant nodes and ties. This is especially important here, as the member states engage in intelligence-sharing beyond the EU in a broad web of cooperative relationships, multilateral frameworks and minilateral groupings.[26] However, European states also share intelligence bilaterally: this remains the preferred way to share classified information.[27] Moreover, this network is complicated by its intersections with the equally convoluted intelligence-sharing arrangements for internal security.[28]

The focus of this article is the EU framework (excluding NATO or other regional initiatives) and in particular its foreign intelligence arrangements (excluding bodies created for internal security purposes, like the European

[24] Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery, 'Network analysis for IR'.
[25] Interview with practitioner, 19 Dec. 2022.
[26] Fägersten, 'European intelligence cooperation'.
[27] See, among others, Richard Aldrich, 'International intelligence cooperation in practice', in Hans Born, Ian Leigh and Aidan Wills, eds, *International intelligence cooperation and accountability* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011) pp. 18–41; Fägersten, 'European intelligence cooperation'.
[28] Ben Jaffel, *Anglo-European intelligence cooperation in Europe*; Didier Bigo, 'Internal and external aspects of security', *European Security* 15: 4, 2006, pp. 385–404, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830701305831.

Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, Europol, and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex). The relevant actors and relations were selected by applying a positional criterion and a double reputational criterion. The positional criterion identifies nodes involved in EU flagship foreign intelligence-sharing or in EU-encouraged cooperation activities involving all national nodes. The double reputational criterion was met by first comparing my list of actors with those included in similar literature,[29] and then submitting the revised list to EU foreign policy experts in various workshops.[30] The following paragraphs identify which actors are included in this network (the nodes) and the type of interconnections among them (the ties).

The nodes

The nodes in this network comprise, first, all the EU member states, including the UK due to its membership until 2020. For simplicity, each country's various intelligence agencies are aggregated in one national node, referred to as its intelligence community. A second group of nodes are the EU's bodies with intelligence-related mandates in the CFSP: this includes primarily the EU's Intelligence and Situation Centre (IntCen) and the EU Military Staff's intelligence directorate (EUMS-INT). These bodies mirror each other as, respectively, the hubs for the analysis of civilian foreign intelligence and military intelligence. Neither has a mandate for intelligence-gathering; they receive intelligence from the member states and integrate it with open-source data, geospatial intelligence from the EU's Satellite Centre (SATCEN) and diplomatic reporting. From these sources, they produce analyses that they circulate to their stakeholders. These include principally the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the relevant committees of the Council of the European Union and the member states.[31]

While IntCen and EUMS-INT operate separately for the most part, a third node, the Single Intelligence Analysis Capability (SIAC), was created to overcome the EU's 'entangled and ill-defined links between the two basic types of intelligence, military and civilian'.[32] SIAC features in this network as a framework for joint analysis activities, where IntCen and EUMS-INT co-produce assessments.[33] The final EU node is SATCEN, the only EU agency tasked with intelligence collection. With its geospatial capabilities, it 'provid[es] products and services … essential for strengthening early warning and crisis monitoring

[29] Mai'a K. Davis Cross, 'A European transgovernmental intelligence network and the role of IntCen', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 14: 3, 2013, pp. 388–402, https://doi.org/10.1080/15705854.2013.817805; Artur Gruszczak, *Intelligence security in the European Union: building a strategic intelligence community* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Hoffmann, 'Circulation, not cooperation'.

[30] The author wishes to thank all participants at the NEXTEUK workshop in August 2022 and the UACES RELATE workshop in January 2023.

[31] Nicola Delcroix, 'Single intelligence analysis capacity (SIAC) and its role in supporting EU decision making', *IMPETUS*, no. 28, 2019, pp. 10–11; EU IntCen, *Factsheet*, 5 Feb. 2015; Davis Cross, 'A European transgovernmental intelligence network'; Gruszczak, *Intelligence security in the European Union*.

[32] Gruszczak, *Intelligence security in the European Union*, p. 19.

[33] Delcroix, 'Single intelligence analysis capacity'.

functions within the context of … CFSP'.[34] SATCEN's products feed into IntCen, EUMS-INT and SIAC, and are also circulated to the member states and to Common Security and Defence Policy missions.[35]

The network is completed by one final node, the Intelligence College in Europe (ICE), which is not an EU body but a multilateral initiative born under the auspices of the EU. Founded in 2019, it does not deal with classified intelligence; instead, it is a venue for sharing technical knowhow, training and organizational and operational best practices. Its goal is to harmonize national practices and thus contribute to the creation of a shared European intelligence culture.[36] All EU member states are involved in ICE activities, as full members or partners,[37] alongside the UK, Switzerland, Norway and Moldova. Hosting training and events for national intelligence practitioners and scholars, the ICE reinforces cultural connections among national nodes, the EU and the broader Europe-wide intelligence conversation.[38] This initiative features here not as part of the EU's formal architecture, but as an institution that builds upon the EU's intelligence socialization efforts and addresses the gaps in it.[39] Its inclusion in the network allows us to register developments that concern all national nodes and are rooted in the EU's security discourse but flourish outside the CFSP framework.[40]

Among these nodes, some clearly are hubs—nodes of higher importance due to their 'critical [role] for interconnectedness with multiple dimensions of a network'.[41] In this article, hubs are those nodes that act as 'sorting centres'. They are thus classified for having no intelligence collection capabilities but being forums where intelligence (or knowledge about intelligence) is analysed, re-elaborated and disseminated. Following this definition, this network presents four hubs: EUMS-INT, IntCen, the SIAC and the ICE.

The ties

As this article focuses on the UK's relations with the four EU hubs, it is important to consider the linkages that connect them. Here, a tie is any channel through which two nodes transmit either intelligence on foreign threats (intel-

[34] EU Council Decision 2014/401/CFSP, adopted by the Council of the European Union on 26 June 2014, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2014/401/oj/eng.

[35] Gruszczak, *Intelligence security in the European Union*; Simon Duke, 'Intelligence, security and information flows in CFSP', *Intelligence and National Security* 21: 4, 2006, pp. 604–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520600885764.

[36] ICE, *Letter of intent concerning the development of the Intelligence College in Europe*, 26 Feb. 2020.

[37] Ireland, Greece, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Moldova have chosen to retain partner status, thus joining only select activities.

[38] See Andreas Lutsch, 'Focusing on practices of intelligence analysis within the EU', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 33: 3, 2020, pp. 499–505, https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1754671.

[39] Artur Gruszczak, 'Intelligence College in Europe: fostering education and culture', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 38: 3, 2025, pp. 767–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2025.2460921.

[40] Extra-EU initiatives like the ICE are often born of political choices by EU leaders, who prefer for such delicate matters to remain strictly intergovernmental and outside the remit of the Brussels institutions.

[41] Gruszczak, *Intelligence security in the European Union*, p. 18.

ligence products) or knowledge regarding intelligence activities (expert knowledge). The former refers to classified intelligence assessments, since states avoid sharing raw intelligence materials that could reveal their sources or methods. The latter is instead non-classified information about intelligence, including technical knowhow, best practices, lessons learned, training methods and ways-of-doing. Observing these knowledge exchanges—increasingly recognized by the literature as crucially telling[42]—helps unveil these hubs' socialization dynamics; moreover, it offers key empirical advantages for overcoming issues of secrecy and denied access to classified materials.

Overall, the network[43] is a transgovernmental and cross-level arrangement, with ties linking member states to EU bodies, a non-EU initiative and one another. The absence of EU competence in national security and intelligence makes the network non-hierarchical and reliant only on voluntary contributions from the member states. Finally, the network is characterized by numerous redundant links, since intelligence-sharing happens simultaneously through the EU hubs and in a multitude of bilateral and minilateral settings. This redundancy in linkages—which is greater if one also considers NATO and other European multilateral intelligence-sharing groups, such as Maximator[44]—is expected to make the network resistant to changes.[45] It also offers multiple opportunities for socialization, multiplying the venues for interactions and exchanges of best practices and knowhow.[46]

The UK's role in the EU network before Brexit (June 2016–January 2020)

Between the Brexit referendum and its withdrawal from the EU, the UK continued to play a strong role in the network. Despite political tensions and some practitioners' disappointment at the referendum's results, interviewees recount positive relations and 'good work being done' in that phase.[47] The UK's ongoing influence was rooted in its past contributions: it has historically been a key partner for the EU and its members, praised for its intelligence capabilities and tradition. According to Duke, three-quarters of British intelligence-sharing was with EU countries before Brexit.[48] The UK had strong bilateral connections with the other member states, with which it shared intelligence products and expert knowledge they regarded highly.[49] It was similarly influential in the

[42] Van Buuren, 'Analysing international intelligence cooperation'; Hoffmann, 'Circulation, not cooperation'; Ben Jaffel, *Anglo-European intelligence cooperation in Europe;* Davis Cross, 'A European transgovernmental intelligence network'.
[43] For a graphic visualization of the network as described, see figures 1 and 2 at https://rb.gy/rerkcl.
[44] Bart Jacobs, 'Maximator: European signals intelligence cooperation, from a Dutch perspective' *Intelligence and National Security* 35: 5, 2020, pp. 659–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2020.1743538.
[45] Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery, 'Network analysis for IR'.
[46] Arcos and Palacios, 'EU INTCEN', pp. 72–94.
[47] Interviews with practitioner, 18 Nov. 2022, and diplomat 30 May 2023.
[48] Simon Duke, *Will Brexit damage our security and defence? The impact on the UK and EU* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 69.
[49] Interviews with practitioners, 18 Nov. 2022, 21 Nov. 2022 and 1 Feb. 2023, and with diplomat 1 June 2023.

EU hubs. In 2001, it was one of the seven founding members of IntCen's predecessor, the EU Situation Centre (SitCen), which it also largely populated when the member states were first asked to second intelligence analysts to the EU.[50]

The influence of British norms, standards and practices on the early days of SitCen/IntCen is recognized,[51] and attributed to the UK's strong intelligence analysis tradition. The first director of SitCen, the British diplomat William Shapcott, is often credited with shaping the organization, modelling its identity and functioning on the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee. While bringing in the British knowhow and ways-of-doing, Shapcott always recognized how SitCen was organically formed through the contributions of all member states.[52] This highlights the networked nature of EU intelligence, where the formation of a node is a network effect, 'a continuing series of transactions to which participants attach shared understandings, memories, forecasts, rights and obligations'.[53] Following IntCen's formation in 2012, British intelligence culture continued to play a key role: between 2013 and 2019, IntCen received training from British academic instructors.[54] Part of the British culture's allure was its global outlook and contacts: London's relations with the US intelligence community and with the Five Eyes network with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US made it rich in connections outside the European network.[55] This gave the UK unique social power: its global ties and proximity to crucial intelligence powers were unmatched in the EU.

Alongside organizational and cultural contributions, the UK also provided intelligence products to the EU. Scholars debate the scope of this sharing, with some estimating that British contributions made, at times, 40–50 per cent of IntCen assessments[56] while others doubt such figures but acknowledge the high quality of British materials.[57] What is unquestioned is the richness of the UK's intelligence products and sources. Glees describes these contributions as irreplaceable given that, in areas such as signals intelligence, British statutes are more permissive than those in many EU countries.[58] Thus, regardless of their quantity, publicly available information suggests the UK contributions were precious for the EU hubs.

Over the years, the UK had built strong connections bilaterally with other member states and with the EU hubs. This gave it profound influence in the CFSP, where decisions are taken by consensus and require all member states to

[50] Interviews with practitioners, 28 Nov. 2024 and 25 April 2025.
[51] José Miguel Palacios, 'Las consecuencias del Brexit para la inteligencia europea', *Global Strategy,* 11 Nov. 2016, https://global-strategy.org/consecuencias-brexit-inteligencia-europea; van Buuren, 'Analysing international intelligence cooperation'.
[52] Interview with practitioner, 1 Feb. 2023.
[53] Charles Tilly, 'Contentious conversation', *Social Research*, no. 653, 1998, p. 456, cited in van Buuren, 'Analysing international intelligence cooperation', p. 85.
[54] Palacios, 'Las consecuencias del Brexit'.
[55] Interviews with practitioners, 19 Dec. 2022 and 1 Feb. 2023.
[56] Anthony Glees, 'What Brexit means for British and European intelligence agencies', *Journal of Intelligence History* 16: 2, 2017, pp. 70–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/16161262.2017.1333680.
[57] Interviews with practitioners, 17 Nov. 2022 and 18 April 2023, and with diplomat, 30 May 2023.
[58] Glees, 'What Brexit means', p. 71. The author refers mainly to the Intelligence Services Act 1994.

share a strategic view of a situation. From a network analysis perspective, before Brexit the UK enjoyed conspicuous network power, in terms of frequency and substantiality of exchanges (degree centrality) and of sitting at the heart of IntCen and influencing its activities and culture (Eigenvector centrality). Since the intelligence products of SIAC are aimed at EU decision-makers, this also gave the UK influence over the priorities and enterprises undertaken in the CFSP.[59] British knowhow was widely appreciated and, when it was created in 2019, the ICE became another venue for the appreciation and circulation of British expertise.[60]

The UK could also leverage its external brokerage, having exclusive access to outside networks. Its unrivalled connections with the US and the Five Eyes gave it a social role as a bridge between the EU's capabilities and global allies. In network theory, these bridging ties are particularly relevant, as they expose a node to new information and knowhow, which it can circulate further.[61] These connections also afforded the UK multiple exit options. In fact, its membership in intelligence alliances like the Five Eyes and broader associations such as the Commonwealth constituted a unique asset, which it tried to use in the early Brexit negotiations to secure a good deal.[62] A minority in the British security community argued that the UK could easily replace the EU's intelligence-sharing frameworks with its global and Atlantic partnerships.[63] However, the use of its exit options to pressure the EU was foreclosed in February 2018, when Prime Minister Theresa May reinstated the UK's commitment to European and EU security.[64] Nevertheless, this commitment did not lead to a full-fledged security agreement, as a result of which the UK's role in the network was bound to drastically change.

The UK's position in the network after Brexit (February 2020–February 2022)

The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020. This was followed by a transition period, at the end of which the Trade and Cooperation Agreement was signed. While it clarified post-Brexit cooperation in fields such as customs, trade and internal security, the TCA did not mention external security. Consequently, this phase saw British staff leaving the SIAC, IntCen and EUMS-INT, and the

[59] Interviews with practitioners, 17 Nov. 2022, 19 Dec. 2022 and 18 April 2023, and with diplomat, 31 May 2023.

[60] Interviews with practitioners, 18 Nov. 2022, 9 Jan. 2023 and 25 April 2025.

[61] Mark S. Granovetter, 'The strength of weak ties', *American Journal of Sociology* 78: 6, 1973, pp. 1360–80, https://doi.org/10.1086/225469.

[62] Jennifer Rankin, 'Don't threaten to cut intelligence ties in Brexit talks, UK warned', *Guardian*, 27 Feb. 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/27/dont-threaten-to-withdraw-security-cooperation-in-brexit-negotiations-uk-warned.

[63] Interviews with practitioners, 9 Jan. 2023 and 15 March 2023; Dearlove, 'Brexit would not damage UK security'.

[64] UK Government, Prime Minister's Office and The Rt Hon Theresa May, 'PM speech at Munich Security Conference: 17 February 2018', 17 Feb. 2018, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-munich-security-conference-17-february-2018.

UK losing access to SATCEN products.[65] Although relations of trust persisted among British and EU officials, the latter received clear instructions not to share classified information.[66] Intelligence cooperation with the EU's institutions was frozen, and interviewees testify to having 'a very difficult time'.[67] A silver lining was the Security of Information Agreement, supplementing the TCA and also signed in 2020, with the parties agreeing to common rules and standards for any future classified information-sharing.

While it did not have an impact on its continuing bilateral intelligence relations with the member states, the UK's departure from the EU framework severed its connections to three of the EU hubs.[68] This had consequences for the network. IntCen, EUMS-INT and the SIAC are unique and important hubs for the analysis of intelligence that is consumed by, among others, EU policy-makers. They offer numerous benefits, including the anonymization of inputs from member states.[69] Importantly, by contributing intelligence to the assessments these structures circulate across the EU, member states can shape its perspective on an issue.[70] The UK's exit from these hubs has been disadvantageous not so much in terms of receiving intelligence assessments, but because it lost its seat at the table.[71] It lost a key channel to influence the EU's perception of foreign threats and, consequently, its external security policy.[72] While many argue that the UK can still influence EU decision-making through diplomatic channels, this remains to be proven.[73] One option is for London to rely on some member states to introduce its input in the relevant settings, such as the SIAC or the Foreign Affairs Council. This option, while viable and likely already used, leaves the UK dependent on the willingness of its EU friends and their persuasiveness in those venues.[74] It also does not compensate for the UK no longer contributing its expertise to the EU hubs. In network terms, this is a stark loss in centrality: the UK cannot influence the structure, operation and priorities of agencies like IntCen, which it had steered in the past.[75] Not only does this diminish the country's Eigenvector centrality; it also means lost opportunities for the EU. With British training no longer politically acceptable in the EU's most secretive bodies,[76] its hubs can no longer benefit from the UK's longstanding intelligence tradition.

[65] See figure 4 at https://rb.gy/rerkcl.
[66] Jim Brunsden and Mehreen Khan, 'EU staff warned not to share information with UK', *Financial Times*, 30 Jan. 2020, www.ft.com/content/406c24d6-43d3-11ea-abea-0c7a29cd66fe.
[67] Interview with diplomat, 20 March 2024.
[68] See figures 3 and 4 at https://rb.gy/rerkcl.
[69] Interviews with three practitioners, 17 Nov. 2022 and 19 Dec. 2022.
[70] Gerhard Conrad, 'Situational awareness for EU decision-making: the next decade', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 26: 1, 2021, pp. 55–70, https://doi.org/10.54648/eerr2021006.
[71] Interviews with four practitioners and three diplomats, between 18 Nov. 2022 and 7 Nov. 2023.
[72] Interviews with diplomats and civil society expert, 30 May 2023 and 21 March 2025.
[73] Interview with practitioner, 1 Feb. 2023; Ramses A. Wessel, 'Friends with benefits? Possibilities for the UK's continued participation in the EU's foreign and security policy', *European Papers* 4: 2, 2019, pp. 427–45, https://doi.org/10.15166/2499-8249/317.
[74] Interview with practitioners, 17 Nov. 2022 and 18 April 2023.
[75] Interview with practitioner, 25 April 2025.
[76] Interviews with civil society expert, 3 June 2024.

The UK's relationship with the ICE is different. British involvement in it did not change as it is not an EU institution. Moreover, being dedicated to circulating knowledge and not classified materials, it is a less sensitive venue. Publicly accessible information shows that the UK remains active in the ICE—contributing training, keynote lectures and knowhow—and therefore continues to influence the hub and circulate expert knowledge through it.[77] British training or knowhow, which was previously offered in EU channels, remains appreciated and is now redirected to the ICE.[78] This suggests a reorganization of the network: the exchange of expertise, requiring less formalized channels, is easier to rearrange around such a less EU-institutional node. Thus, while practitioners and scholars debate the ICE's value as a 'useful' hub,[79] its strength seems to lie in its function as a specialized non-EU venue for the circulation of knowledge. This also ensures that the UK is not excluded from the formation of a 'European intelligence culture', to which it remains a valuable contributor.[80]

The UK's network power was strongly reduced by Brexit. While it has reinforced many bilateral partnerships with member states since the 2016 referendum,[81] these cannot compensate for its lack of involvement in the EU hubs.[82] Bilateral connections cannot replace the access to the EU's intelligence analysis venues, where the UK's influence was powerful and direct.[83] Furthermore, the absence of arrangements for the UK to access SATCEN means that it no longer receives EU satellite imagery—an expensive and hard-to-replace resource. Moreover, the UK's external brokerage is curtailed: its global partners, especially the US, valued its access to SIAC reports as a way to gain genuine insight on 'the state of mind in IntCen and EUMS-INT *vis-à-vis* the Council'.[84] The UK's role as a broker now risks being eroded. Some interviewees suggest that Brexit led Washington to reinforce its connections with other European nodes, such as France.[85] This shows that emerging challenger nodes threaten the UK, which can no longer pose as the privileged broker between the US and the EU.[86] Finally, having exercised its exit options, the UK's credible threat to stop interacting with the EU is severely curtailed.

This new British position entails practical losses for both sides. The interrupted cooperation is disadvantageous for the UK, which lost access to SATCEN's

[77] Intelligence College in Europe, 'Activities', https://www.intelligence-college-europe.org/activities.
[78] Interview with practitioner, 18 Nov. 2022.
[79] Gruszczak, 'Intelligence College in Europe'.
[80] Interviews with practitioners, 17 Nov. 2022 and 18 April 2023, and with civil society expert, 21 March 2025.
[81] Glees, 'What Brexit means'; Adam D. M. Svendsen, 'Brexit: an agent of "disruptive change" for UK and European intelligence?', *Journal of Intelligence History* 16: 2, 2017, pp. 108–11, https://doi.org/10.1080/16161262.2017.1334355.
[82] Marianna Lovato, 'Cooperation after exit: how informality is sustaining EU–UK cooperation on sanction negotiations', *International Affairs* 102: 4, 2026, pp. 1159–79, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiag093.
[83] Interview with practitioner, 1 Feb. 2023.
[84] Interview with practitioner, 1 Feb. 2023.
[85] Interviews with practitioners, 17 Nov. 2022 and 1 Feb. 2023.
[86] For similar reflections beyond intelligence, see Tim Oliver and Michael John Williams, 'Special relationships in flux: Brexit and the future of the US–EU and US–UK relationships', *International Affairs* 92: 3, 2016, pp. 547–67, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12606.

materials and the ability to influence CFSP decisions. EU interviewees lament the loss of high-quality intelligence and of esteemed, well-trained personnel from the UK.[87] Relatedly, informal links and lightly institutionalized initiatives emerged as ways to compensate for these losses. Venues like the ICE ensure that the UK remains involved in expert knowledge-sharing. On one hand, this holds symbolic importance in keeping it involved in the growing, broader European intelligence culture. On the other hand, information-sharing about new technologies, best practices and mutually understood operational standards is essential to ensure that practitioners and organizations share an understanding on doing and sharing intelligence.[88] Thus, at the end of this second phase, the EU intelligence hubs had suffered the departure of a major player, while the UK grappled with its gravely reduced network power.

Responding to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (February 2022–May 2025)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a moment of existential threat that led the UK and the EU to seek renewed intelligence cooperation in new, informal channels. At the time, they were still adjusting to Brexit and the invasion was the first severe crisis that tested the intelligence network in that context.

Since late 2021, the intelligence agencies of the UK and US had shared with their allies classified intelligence about an impending invasion.[89] They had also declassified and publicly circulated information showing the accumulation of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine.[90] However, declassified materials omit crucial details and sensitive information so as to protect key sources and methods. This, alongside some 'less hawkish'[91] positions among member states, contributed to the EU not reacting to the information in the way the UK and the US had desired. The shared information was not considered sufficiently compelling by some member states and the European External Action Service, which still 'refuse[d] to buy it [the impending invasion]'.[92] This moment testified the UK's stark loss of influence on the EU's security apparatus. As a British interviewee commented, 'had we been in the room, we would have been able to persuade them. But there is only so much you can do from the outside.'[93]

[87] Interviews with three practitioners, between 17 Nov. 2022 and 1 Feb. 2023.
[88] Interview with practitioner, 20 April 2023.
[89] Huw Dylan and Thomas J. Maguire, 'Secret intelligence and public diplomacy in the Ukraine war', *Survival* 64: 4, 2022, pp. 33–74, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2103257; Shane Harris et al., 'Road to war: U.S. struggled to convince allies, and Zelensky, of risk of invasion', *Washington Post*, 16 Aug. 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war.
[90] Harris et al., 'Road to war'.
[91] Interview with diplomat, 20 March 2024; Kristian Gustafson et al., 'Intelligence warning in the Ukraine war, autumn 2021–summer 2022', *Intelligence and National Security* 39: 3, 2024, pp. 400–19, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2024.2322214.
[92] Gustafson et al., 'Intelligence warning', p. 404; Dylan and Maguire, 'Secret intelligence and public diplomacy', p. 49.
[93] Interview with diplomat, 1 June 2023. The EU's resistance to UK and US intelligence might also be explained by citing its reluctance to act against Russia. See José-Miguel Palacios, 'On the road to a Euro-

The first days of the invasion saw the EU and UK collaborate informally through their bureaucracies, where officials still knew their opposite numbers.[94] Given the absence of a formal arrangement on external security cooperation, the renewed cooperation was purely ad hoc. In the hours and days following the invasion, the importance of sharing intelligence for sanctioning Russian oligarchs and other individuals linked to Russia's military effort became obvious, and there was extremely close cooperation on targeted sanctions against the country's ruling elite.[95] Following this, intelligence was shared to coordinate support to the Ukrainian army, including on military equipment and training. Here, the UK security community's openness to sharing its expert knowledge with the EU was very well received, which led to more sharing in a virtuous circle of cooperation.[96] The UK appeared eager to resume its role as key contributor of intelligence and, in a mechanism similar to that observed by Lovato in this special section,[97] it did so by operating around the limitations posed by Brexit. Coordination remains strongly anchored in informal, ad hoc and non-institutionalized channels.[98] London shares Ukraine-related intelligence directly with IntCen and EUMS-INT.[99] While this was not the first time that the EU hubs received information from a non-member state, interviewees say this close cooperation is facilitated by the UK's intimate understanding of the SIAC as a former member.[100] The Security of Information Agreement of 2020 has also been crucial, with its mutual guarantees on the treatment, storage and usage of classified information.[101]

If, after Brexit, EU–UK intelligence-sharing was hindered,[102] practitioners now sprang into action and cooperated. Their informal interactions enabled immediate action but had important limitations. In the words of an EU diplomat: 'I wouldn't even call what we currently have a proper ad hoc cooperation: it's sporadic contact, rather … on security and defence. But it's not genuine cooperation, at least for the moment'.[103] In other words, Russia's war in Ukraine renewed cooperation, but it also exposed the UK's reduced network power.

The UK appears weakened and sidelined in the network—less influential in the key EU intelligence hubs, less persuasive in its threats to disengage from European security cooperation and less central in intelligence-sharing. Its inability, with the US, to persuade EU decision-makers of the severity of

pean Intelligence Agency?', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 33: 3, 2020, pp. 483–91 at p. 488, https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1754670. Yet, as the strategy towards Russia centred around sanctions (both in the EU's public diplomacy of late 2021 and historically since 2014—see Lovato, 'Cooperation after exit') the EU appeared aware and accepting of the key role it would have to play.

[94] Interview with diplomat, 20 March 2024.

[95] Interviews with two diplomats, 1 June 2023 and 20 March 2024.

[96] Interviews with diplomats, 1 June 2023 and 20 March 2024, and with practitioner, 5 Feb. 2025.

[97] Lovato, 'Cooperation after exit'.

[98] Figure 5 shows such informal ties as dotted lines at https://rb.gy/rerkcl.

[99] Interviews with two diplomats, 20 March 2024.

[100] Interview with diplomat, 20 March 2024.

[101] Interviews with two diplomats, 30 May 2023.

[102] Interviews with two diplomats, 30 May 2023.

[103] Interview with diplomat, 30 May 2023.

the Russian threat before the invasion and the realization that 'there is only so much you can do from the outside' are key indicators of the UK's curtailed influence on the key hubs (Eigenvector centrality). Moreover, the war revealed the geopolitical limits of the UK's exit options: after threatening to disengage in favour of other international partnerships, the UK had to admit that European security remains a crucial interest that demands coordination with the EU. While other groupings, including NATO, were also activated, the EU's role in sanctions, energy security and economic, humanitarian and military support to Ukraine made it an inescapable interlocutor for the UK. Lastly, the UK's external brokerage appears diminished in the context of the war. As the international coalition against Russia took a global form through avenues such as the G7, the EU appeared capable of coordinating intelligence flows with the US (for example, on sanctions) without the UK's facilitation. This has consequences beyond the intelligence sphere, as it shapes the UK's preferences on which formats to use with regard to European security.[104]

The Brexit-induced disconnection from the EU's intelligence network has had catastrophic security consequences. The EU's initial resistance to British and US intelligence resulted in it being almost taken by surprise by Russia's invasion.[105] Although some channels for intelligence-sharing were later used, pre-Brexit conditions have not been fully restored. Both sides lament the 'structural clunkiness' of the current cooperation[106] as well as the unpredictable extent, frequency and depth of intelligence-sharing.[107] Both note worsened conditions, from the EU's inability to include British inputs consistently to the UK's exclusion from EU intelligence assessments and satellite materials.

The experience of the UK and the EU jointly supporting Ukraine provides important policy- and practice-oriented considerations. It highlights the importance of informal channels and of shared expert knowledge. When in crisis-response mode, the EU and the UK relied on previous shared knowledge, such as knowing 'who to call' on the other side to coordinate sanctions,[108] or understanding each other's bureaucratic structures and using such knowledge to set up meetings. Consequently, the UK's involvement in venues such as the ICE cannot be understated as symbolic; it is a sign of its enduring commitment to shared knowledge and connections. However, relying on less institutional channels has downsides. Cultural initiatives cannot replace intelligence-sharing; nor is 'knowing the opposite number'[109] sustainable in the long term, as officials retire or their postings end. Moreover, these interactions are consistently presented as more demanding, 'clunky' and slower.[110] Ultimately,

[104]Catarina Thomson et al., 'European public opinion: united in supporting Ukraine, divided on the future of NATO', *International Affairs* 99: 6, 2023, pp. 2485–500, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiad241; Rees and Xu, 'US–UK–France relations'; Sus and Martill, 'There and back again'.
[105]Interview with three diplomats, 30 May 2023 and 1 June 2023.
[106]Interview with diplomat, 1 June 2023.
[107]Interview with diplomat, 20 March 2024.
[108]Interviews with two diplomats, 30 May 2023 and 1 June 2023.
[109]Interview with practitioner, 18 April 2023.
[110]Interviews with practitioner 7 Nov. 2023, and with diplomat, 25 April 2025.

the EU is clear about the fact that non-member states are outsiders and must be treated as such. Interviewees recollect the difficulties of organizing meetings with IntCen or EUMS-INT, and one confesses to these being 'less valuable' than the ones before Brexit.[111]

This leads to a final observation about the practical implications of the UK's changed position. The Ukraine war has demonstrated that the UK will not stop cooperating with the EU directly, alongside engaging in other forums like the G7 and NATO. The network has proven to be resistant to the Brexit changes, thanks to the redundancy in linkages (given the UK's relations with the member states) but also to its ability to reorganize in informal ways. However, because of its loss in social power, London must work harder to maintain its relations with the EU's intelligence network. Due to the rigidity of the network towards non-members, the onus is on the UK to find a role by initiating interactions and maintaining relations at the staff level.[112] The formal, structured and effective ties that existed before Brexit are gone. Informal connections partly substituted for them, allowing London to play a role in the concerted European response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some connections were rearranged through less institutionalized non-EU venues, such as the sharing of expert knowledge through the ICE. Others remain interrupted at the time of writing, causing losses on both sides (for example, the UK–SATCEN tie, or training opportunities). No matter how precious British intelligence is for the EU, the limitations of the informal channels continue to hamper London's attempts to cooperate with it. Faced with the EU's inflexible frameworks,[113] the UK must invest more effort and longer preparation times, and 'almost negotiate',[114] to reach a level of intelligence-sharing that still would not compare to the pre-Brexit one.

Conclusion

This article applies network analysis to understand the changes in the EU's intelligence network as a result of Brexit and then the war in Ukraine. In a longitudinal study, I mapped how the UK's network power and relations changed, and how the network adapted through informal interactions and less institutional venues. Brexit made the UK less influential in the EU's intelligence network, locking a competent actor 'outside' important venues[115] and curtailing the previous quick and efficient circulation of intelligence. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused a renewal of intelligence-sharing through ad hoc, informal channels, this cooperation remains subpar compared to what existed before Brexit.

[111] Interview with practitioner, 5 Feb. 2025.
[112] Interviews with practitioners, 7 Nov. 2023 and 5 Feb. 2025.
[113] About the calls for, and difficulties with, reforming the EU intelligence bodies, see Palacios, 'On the road to a European Intelligence Agency?'.
[114] Interview with practitioner, 5 Feb. 2025.
[115] Interview with diplomat, 1 June 2023.

With the UK less interconnected and excluded from key EU intelligence hubs, its diminished social power became evident in the lead-up to Russia's invasion, when London and the EU came to diverging conclusions over its likelihood. The UK has less power to shape the EU hubs' activities and decisions, less leverage on non-EU networks, and less credible alternative options. It can rely on the network's resistance to change due to bilateral ties and informal, cultural initiatives; however, it is aware that all other nodes in the network have more efficient connections to the EU intelligence hubs, which it can no longer access nor influence. Until the adoption of the SDP in May 2025, EU–British cooperation on Ukraine took place on an ad hoc basis, relying on shared expert knowledge and experiences. But even the SDP, with its periodic security dialogues,[116] cannot substitute for the daily interactions and the cultural and material exchanges before Brexit, and the Eigenvector centrality they entailed for the UK. Given the growing instability within NATO caused by President Donald Trump's threats to disengage the US from European security,[117] concerns emerge about whether informal, sporadic cooperation will be enough for the EU and the UK.

A threefold observation emerges about the EU's intelligence network and its adaptation to crises. First, bilateral relations remain resistant to changes and essential channels for intelligence cooperation. The EU member states' preference for bilateral exchanges ensures that operational and tactical intelligence-sharing with the UK continues at the periphery, outside the EU hubs. Second, informal channels for circulating expert knowledge give flexibility to the network and opportunities for the UK to engage at the cultural level.[118] Thus, hubs dedicated to knowledge circulation, such as the ICE, are precious for the UK to indirectly influence the culture of the EU network's nodes and to maintain solid trust relations with them.[119] Third, the EU hubs' resistance to intelligence contributions from non-member states is detrimental to cooperation. Not only did this contribute to the EU ignoring the warnings of the UK and the US about Russia; it continues to prevent closer, quicker and more meaningful UK–EU intelligence relations.

These observations reveal the importance of less-institutionalized connections for short-term intelligence cooperation but also their inability in the long term to replace structural channels between influential actors and key hubs. Policy-makers aiming to strengthen EU–UK intelligence-sharing should remember how cultural and personal relations are inexpensive to maintain and make the network resistant to changes, allowing socialization and influence to continue. Reforming the EU's intelligence hubs is complicated and

[116] Article 12 of the Security and Defence Partnership.

[117] 'Trump casts doubt on willingness to defend Nato allies "if they don't pay"', *Guardian*, 7 March 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/07/donald-trump-nato-alliance-us-security-support.

[118] Davis Cross, 'A European transgovernmental intelligence network'; Ben Jaffel, *Anglo-European intelligence cooperation in Europe*; Hoffmann, 'Circulation, not cooperation'.

[119] Nicolas Labasque, 'The merits of informality in bilateral and multilateral cooperation', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 33: 3, 2020, pp. 492–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1754684.

opposed by many member states. For this reason, the ICE and the SDP's unspecified promise of EU–UK secondments of personnel are positives as they ensure network resistance to change. Yet these are not long-term solutions and cannot replace strategic intelligence-sharing ties with the EU hubs. These reflections are not only useful for policy-makers planning future intelligence-sharing through the SDP; they also contribute to a broader scholarly conversation, partly addressed in this special section, exploring how the European and EU security architectures adapt to crises.[120] In keeping with Lovato's work,[121] this article stresses the importance of socialization mechanisms for an evolving security architecture. It also joins Bargués, Joseph and Juncos[122] in depicting a European security space that is increasingly fluid and flexible in its channels and venues.

Finally, a reflection on this article's methodological contribution. Applying a network lens to the EU's foreign intelligence framework allowed me to map its transformations with precision, overcoming issues of access to restricted data. Explanatory variables such as Eigenvector centrality and brokerage successfully detail the effects of a node's delinking from key hubs to analyse the practical impact of these changes. Recognizing the network dynamics of intelligence-sharing helps us make sense of the two sides' choices of venues for socialization and exchanges. Still, further research could expand on Brexit's effects by mapping the social relations between incumbent powerful nodes and emerging challengers, or by investigating the network's reorganization to overcome the gap left by the UK.[123] At the same time, the current geopolitical situation calls for more research on how European and global intelligence alliances adapt to crises. With new challenges, including the impact of Trump's second term as president of the US, understanding the full potential, and the limits, of the mutating European intelligence alliances is an imperative on both sides of the English Channel.

[120]See, among others, Christine Nissen and Jakob Dreyer, 'From optimist to sceptical liberalism: reforging European Union foreign policy amid crises', *International Affairs* 100: 2, 2024, pp. 675–90, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae013.

[121]Lovato, 'Cooperation after exit'.

[122]Pol Bargués, Jonathan Joseph and Ana E. Juncos, 'The transformation of EU and NATO security narratives: towards resilience and total defence?', *International Affairs* 102: 4, 2026, pp. 1119–37, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiag050.

[123]Hafner-Burton, Kahler and Montgomery, 'Network analysis for IR'.