EUROPEAN UNION INTELLIGENCE: A SHORT DESCRIPTION

Dimitrios Anagnostakis
(PhD Candidate in transatlantic relations, Department of Politics and International relations, University of Nottingham, UK)

Note: Dimitrios Anagnostakis received his MSc in Intelligence and Strategic Studies in Aberystwyth University, UK.

During the last years both academics and practitioners have argued for greater cooperation between the member states of European Union (EU) in the field of intelligence (Heinrich, 2006; Nomikos, 2005, p.201; Segell, 2004, p.82). The transnational nature of most of the current threats to European security (such as international organized crime, terrorism, illegal immigration and drug trafficking) implies that the member states should enhance their cooperation in areas which are placed at the heart of national sovereignty (Coosemans, 2004, p.6).

At a rhetorical level officials of the member states and of EU acknowledge the need for better intelligence cooperation (Walsh, 2006, pp.637-638). At a practical level however the results are meagre. The EU intelligence bodies[1] rely for secret information on the contributions of the member states and they do not have an autonomous covert intelligence capability. Several reasons have been raised as to why the intelligence cooperation at the European Union level has not been as deep as the danger from the current transnational threats would suggest: the reluctance of the national intelligence services to share sensitive information fearing that their sources and methods may be compromised, the unwillingness of some states to endanger valuable bilateral intelligence links (the most telling example being the "special" intelligence relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom) (Duke, 2006, p.614; Nomikos, 2005, p.197) and the preference for informal multilateral groups of countries over formal institutional arrangements.

In this context, two events are noteworthy. The first is the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the creation of the EU External Action Service (EAS) which could serve as an impetus for a more robust EU intelligence capability. The Joint Situation Centre (SitCen)[2] has now been integrated into the EAS, and, according to William Shapcott (former head of the SitCen), this allows for a better flow of information between the SitCen and the European Commission's delegations around the world.[3] The SitCen is planned to be merged with the Commission's Crisis Room and the Council's Watch-Keeping Capability (sub-directorate of the EU Military Staff) so as a "single crisis response centre" to be formed under the command of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (the post is currently held by Catherine Ashton) (Rettman, 2010). This restructuring does not address the above mentioned shortcomings and there are no thoughts or provisions about autonomous EU covert intelligence capabilities.

There is, however, the prospect that the proposed set-up may allow the High Representative to employ the current intelligence assets of the EU in a more efficient and centralized way, especially if she will be given the green light to task directly the forthcoming crisis response

centre (at the moment, the member states' diplomats in the Political and Security Committee should firstly hold a debate for the SitCen to be given a task) (Rettman, 2010).

The second development is the Commission's sponsorship of projects on open source intelligence (Osint). According to the news site EUobserver, the Commission has recently sponsored two projects on open source intelligence (Rettman, 2011). The first one, that is called the "Budapest Club", was launched in 2007 and it has brought together experts from the private sector and officers from the member states' intelligence services (Rettman, 2011).

The second project, Eurosint Forum, was founded in 2005 by private security companies and it holds meetings and workshops where delegates from member states' intelligence services, from the private sector and from the EU institutions exchange opinions. The Commission's interest in open source intelligence is worth noting. After the end of the Cold War the value and the quantity of open source intelligence have risen significantly (Lowenthal, 2006, p.102; Shulsky & Schmitt, 2002, p.141). In particular, Robert Steele (a former CIA officer and a proponent of open source intelligence) notes that there is nowadays a "*confluence of three distinct trends*": the development of internet technology, the "*information explosion*" and "*the collapse of formerly denied areas*" together with the emergence of non-traditional threats (Steele, 2007, p.132). From the perspective of EU, Osint has the advantage of not being acquired clandestinely through the use of illegal means. The industry of private open source intelligence companies has grown rapidly during the last years as part of the broader trend towards the privatisation and outsourcing of security services (Hayes, 2010, p.3). European Union is already taking advantage of this pool of open source intelligence experts enhancing thus its intelligence assets and capabilities, and this pattern is unlikely to cease in the future.

Although the above mentioned developments do not address the main shortcomings of European Union's intelligence machinery they constitute a small step towards a stronger intelligence capacity. A common European Union intelligence policy is, however, still far away.

ENDNOTES

[1] The formal intelligence bodies of the EU are the EU Satellite Centre, the Joint Situation Centre, the Intelligence Directorate of the EU Military Staff and Europol.

[2] Since 1999 SitCen is part of the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. It produces intelligence assessments based on the voluntary intelligence contributions of the member states and on information sent from the Commission's delegations abroad and from other EU bodies.

[3] Council of the European Union, Outcome of proceedings of CATS, 6557/10, 11 February 2010, p.4, available online at: http://www.statewatch.org/news/2010/feb/eu-council-cats-6557-10.pdf

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