

Call for Papers

Need to Know XV Conference 2026

Intelligence and Minorities Sønderborg/Flensburg, 26–27 November 2026

When does a societal group become a matter of intelligence and national security? This is a key question for intelligence services. When is someone becoming a threat and therefore a subject of surveillance and operations by intelligence agencies at home or abroad? A common pattern across many countries and political systems is that minority groups are more likely to be perceived as potential threats and therefore considered legitimate intelligence targets than a promising advantage and opportunity.

This year's *Need to Know* conference focuses on minorities, whether national, ethnic, political, or religious, in the eyes of intelligence and counterintelligence services. National minorities for example challenge both the concept of the nation-state and, at times, existing borders. As a result, they are often mistrusted by the intelligence services of their host states as potential separatists, or in some cases instrumentalized by their kin states. And both religious and ethnic minorities were subject to massive repression by communist regimes during the Cold War. They were surveilled at home and often felt the long arm of foreign intelligence services in the diaspora, where they continued to be monitored.

Many factors influence decisions on when minorities become intelligence targets. Authoritarian states decide differently than democracies. The degree of surveillance and the use of powerful intelligence tools against minorities may even serve as a measure of a state's democratic maturity. Minority rights today constitute a core European value, yet they remain contested and complex, not only, but also for intelligence and security practice.

We hereby invite submissions for papers or panel proposals for this year's *Need to Know* conference, which will take place in the heart of the Danish–German borderland—a region with a contested past. Intelligence has long played a role in national struggles over borders and in the surveillance of minorities. Although the region is now widely recognized as a model of peaceful coexistence, intelligence services on both sides of the border continued to monitor their respective national minorities well into the Cold War.

The *Need to Know* network welcomes submissions on this topic, especially empirically grounded studies addressing questions such as:

- Legitimizing minorities as intelligence targets — reasons and rationales
- Utilization of minorities by intelligence
- Surveillance operations against national, ethnic, political, or religious minorities
- Consequences of intelligence surveillance for minority communities
- Covert actions against minorities or in minority-related conflicts
- Intelligence operations abroad targeting minority representatives
- Coordination between foreign and domestic intelligence
- Differences between authoritarian and democratic systems in the handling of minority-related intelligence

- De-escalation or termination of intelligence operations

The conference is organized by the Center for Cold War Studies at the University of Southern Denmark in cooperation with the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation; the Research Department of the Danish Central Library for Southern Schleswig; the King's Centre for the Study of Intelligence, King's College London; and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War. The conference is in publication partnership with the Journals Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej and the International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence.

Accommodation and meals will be covered for presenters. The conference may also contribute to travel expenses upon application.

Deadline for paper proposals: 15 August 2026.

Submissions should include:

An abstract of 500–700 words in English

A biographical note (max. 250 words) listing major professional accomplishments

Young Researcher Table:

As part of the conference, the organizers also invite participants to discuss practices of intelligence research with a round table of junior researchers. The aims of the discussion are not finished projects or results but rather the ways and challenges of intelligence research. Presenting work in progress, the issues discussed will be differences of intelligence history to other historical topics, the challenge of finding adequate research questions and sources, and how the special conditions of intelligence research influence scholars.

The Conference Organizational Committee will notify selected speakers by **Mid-September**.

Please send your paper proposals to: elzbieta.pietrzyk@jpn.gov.pl