Supervision audit
Independent Oversight Authority for Intelligence Activities

Key facts

Established in 2017, the Independent Oversight Authority for Intelligence Activities (OA-IA) is a decentralised unit of the Federal Administration whose task is to review intelligence activities with regard to their legality, appropriateness and effectiveness. OA-IA employee numbers fluctuated significantly in 2021 and 2022. A new director took up her post in July 2022, and the team of nine is now almost complete (as at August 2023). The OA-IA budget for 2023 is CHF 2.3 million, with personnel costs accounting for more than 80% of operating expenses.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the OA-IA with a view to verifying compliance with the Intelligence Act, internal regulations and processes. The results were positive. The legal framework is respected and the organisation is appropriate. However, the SFAO recommended that the OA-IA make several improvements to enhance the effectiveness of its supervision.

Develop risk assessments

The risk analysis process focuses on the six areas of supervision defined by the OA-IA. All OA-IA staff are involved in defining and assessing the topics and risks to be covered in the annual inspection plan. In order to better assess risks and ensure an overall view, the OA-IA should not only have a map of overall risks in the intelligence areas, but also carry out a risk assessment for each entity subject to its supervision. Other risk criteria could be defined, such as those relating to the future development of intelligence, the organisation of tasks, the complexity of the legal basis or the cross-cutting nature of activities.

Adapt the inspection manual and making reports easier to read

The inspection manual offers considerable leeway in its application. It should be adapted to ensure consistency of approach, better traceability of documentation and better definition of the quality assurance process.

The Head of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport is the end recipient of the reports. The reports are generally too detailed and therefore relatively long. It is sometimes difficult to keep track of all the findings, assessments and recommendations. The SFAO recommended making the reports easier to read.

Review IT system security

Although it is already aware of the risks associated with its IT infrastructure and information processing, the OA-IA should conduct a critical review of the security documentation for its own systems. In order to fully assess the risks, it should request and consult the IT security documentation developed by its service providers and by the bodies that own the systems used for inspections. The documentation should be adapted and any inconsistencies corrected.

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