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InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of EU-China Relations, College of Europe,  
Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, Dijver 11,  
BE-8000 Bruges, Fax +32-50-477250, [www.coleurope.eu](http://www.coleurope.eu)

Professor Jing Men: [jing.men@coleurope.eu](mailto:jing.men@coleurope.eu), Tel. +32-50-477258  
Benjamin Barton: [benjamin.barton@coleurope.eu](mailto:benjamin.barton@coleurope.eu), Tel. +32-50-477257

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## THE EU-CHINA POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Jing Men\*

The framework of EU-China political dialogue was formally established in 1994 through an exchange of letters with the purpose of sharing views on issues of common concern. This was related to the EU's revised outlook of China's role in the world. The remarkable success of China's reform policy, implemented since the end of the 1970s, convinced the EU that China is a strong emerging power in the international scene. In the meantime, China was pleased to see the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty among the Member States and with the success of the EU's regional integration process. To a certain degree, the attraction was growing between the two.<sup>1</sup>

The dialogue was upgraded in 1998 when the first summit meeting was held, at which both sides agreed to hold such summit meetings on an annual basis. After a second exchange of letters in April 2002, China and the EU decided to formally update the framework of their political dialogue into a regular, structured series of meetings at several levels, which constitutes the legal basis for the current dialogue.

### *Framework of the EU-China political dialogue*

The EU-China political dialogue is composed of meetings at several levels, ranging from summit meetings to technical meetings of experts from different working groups. New types of meetings in this framework are added when both sides believe them to be necessary. This has gradually expanded the scope of EU-China political dialogue. For example, the human rights dialogue was normally included as part of the political dialogues held between the EU and third countries before the start of the 21st century. However, due to the fact that both the EU and China acknowledged the wide gap that existed in their respective positions on human rights and the ensuing necessity to establish a channel to facilitate exchange and communication, a separate EU-China human rights dialogue was established in 1995, which made China the first country to hold such a dialogue with the EU.

After the 30th anniversary of the establishment of EU-China diplomatic relations in 2005, both sides agreed to introduce a new dialogue – the EU-China Strategic Dialogue, held at the Vice Ministerial level. The first such dialogue was held in the beginning of December of that year, in London (the United Kingdom held the EU Presidency at the time), with the Chinese delegation led by Mr Zhang Yesui, Vice Foreign Minister. Since then, the dialogue has been held on a yearly basis until leaders from both sides agreed, in 2010, to upgrade it to a higher level dialogue on strategic and

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\* Prof. Dr. Jing Men is the InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of EU-China Relations at the College of Europe, Bruges. She also works for the Vesalius College, Brussels.

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed review of EU-China relations, please see Jing Men, "EU-China Relations: from Engagement to Marriage?", EU Diplomacy Papers (College of Europe), No. 7, 2008, <http://www.coleurope.eu/template.asp?pagename=EUDP>.

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foreign policy issues, for which both Lady Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission and Mr Dai Bingguo, her counterpart in the Chinese State Council, were present.

A very important meeting arrangement between the EU and China, the so-called “executive-to-executive,” which is listed by the EU side as part of the framework of EU-China political dialogue and specified as an annual meeting mechanism,<sup>2</sup> is understood by the Chinese side just as *ad hoc* meetings.<sup>3</sup> In April 2008, Commission President Barroso, led a high-level team of nine Commissioners to Beijing where they met Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. This meeting seemed to start a precedent – in January 2009, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao returned the visit to Brussels, with a group of State Councillors and at the end of April 2010, Mr Barroso visited Beijing again, together with a group of Commissioners. Nevertheless, there is no official agreement between the two sides that this mechanism should be maintained in the coming years – as the Chinese Premier Wen visited Brussels in early October this year for the ASEM meeting and for the EU-China Summit, it will be difficult to predict whether Mr Wen will come again next year, according to the timetable expected by his European counterpart.

As mentioned earlier, the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty has brought some changes to the EU’s political dialogue with the third countries. These changes also apply to its dialogue with China. Whereas in the past many meetings were undertaken by the Troikas at various levels, this is not the case anymore. Instead, the President of the European Council, the European High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) will represent the EU in the dialogue. Between the EU and China, there is a long list of meetings which fall into the framework of political dialogue. To name a few of them:

- Annual Summits, at the level of the Heads of State or Government, take place alternately in China and Brussels. The EU is represented by the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission, assisted by the European High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission;
- The newly upgraded political dialogue on strategic and foreign policy issues is held between the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission and the Chinese State Councillor responsible for foreign affairs;
- Meetings between the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission and the Foreign Minister of China will be organised when both sides find them necessary, in addition to annual meetings in the margins of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly;

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<sup>2</sup> See Delegation of the European Union to China, EU-China Political Dialogue, [http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu\\_china/political\\_relations/pol\\_dialogue/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu_china/political_relations/pol_dialogue/index_en.htm), accessed 22 August 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The author’s interview with a Chinese diplomat on 24 August 2010.

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- The EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission and the Ambassador of China to the European Union meet bi-annually;
- The Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Ambassadors from the European Union posted in Beijing meet bi-annually;
- EU and Chinese Political Directors meet annually. These alternate between Beijing and Brussels;
- The EU Director for Asia Pacific affairs and his or her Chinese counterpart on Asian and Pacific issues meet annually. These alternate between Beijing and Brussels;
- EU and Chinese experts on international security, arms control, non-proliferation and export controls issues meet at least once a year;
- EU and Chinese experts on the control of Small Arms and Light Weapons meet at least once a year.<sup>4</sup>

### *EU-China human rights dialogue*

The first EU-China dialogue on human rights was held in January 1996, but was interrupted by China due to the fact that Denmark together with nine other EU Member States tabled a resolution criticising China at the 1997 UN Commission on Human Rights. Later in 1997, China agreed to resume the dialogue.

As mentioned earlier, this dialogue was established against the backdrop that both sides came to realise the existence of a wide gap in their understanding of the human rights issue and instead of allowing for confrontation and conflicts, it was agreed that both sides should sit down to discuss the issue, exchange their views and to find a better way to communicate on this matter.

At the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Eastern European Countries changed colour overnight, China remained the only major communist country, isolated ideologically from the rest of the world. What happened in June 1989 on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, not only led to the sanctions against China, but also marked the start of a long wrestle between China and the West. From 1990 to 1997 (except 1991), a resolution criticising China's human rights record was submitted by Western countries at the annual session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

In 1997, when Denmark took the lead to submit the resolution to the UN, France, Germany, Italy and Spain decided not to join Denmark. The spokesperson for the French Government stated that instead of continuing with this confrontational approach, they would like to undertake a constructive dialogue with their Chinese counterparts on the issue of human rights.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> List adapted based on the information provided by the Delegation of the European Union to China, EU-China Political Dialogue, [http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu\\_china/political\\_relations/pol\\_dialogue/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu_china/political_relations/pol_dialogue/index_en.htm), accessed 22 August 2010.

<sup>5</sup> See Wu Jianmin, *Waijiao Anli (Case Studies in Diplomacy)*, Beijing: Renmin University Press, 2007, pp. 238-239.

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The EU stresses the universality of human rights. In all the China policy papers developed by the European Community, from the first one in 1995 until the most recent one in 2006, the objective of supporting China's transition to an open society based upon the rule of law and the respect for human rights remains unwavering.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1997, the dialogue has been held twice a year and undertaken by the EU Troika and their Chinese counterparts. As mentioned earlier, members of the EEAS will replace the Troika in the EU's political dialogue with third countries at senior official and expert level. As the human rights dialogue is regarded as part of the political dialogue, this change will also affect the EU-China human rights dialogue.

### *Impact of the EU-China political dialogue*

It is not an easy task to specify the impact of the EU-China political dialogue on the development of bilateral ties. Up until now, there has been no such evaluation published from either the European side or the Chinese side. This may be due to the following reasons:

Firstly, the framework of political dialogue covers a wide range of areas and is continuously growing. The flexibility and dynamism of this framework increases the difficulties of determining the precise boundaries of what should be considered as part of the political dialogue and of generalising the impact of such a dialogue. As mentioned earlier, the EU-China executive-to-executive meeting, started in 2008, is listed by the European side as a regular dialogue organised on a yearly basis, but the Chinese interpret it in a different manner. Concerning the evaluation of the political dialogue, whether this should be included or not will then remain questionable. The EU-China High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) was decided upon by the respective leaderships of the EU and China at the 2007 summit meeting. The summit itself is regarded as the most important political dialogue between the EU and China, but the HED is normally interpreted as a dialogue in the field of economic and trade cooperation. However, if the HED is purely understood as a dialogue outside the framework of political dialogue, it is not completely accurate. Vice Premier Wang Qishan, on behalf of the Chinese Government, is to meet with his counterpart in the European Commission in the framework of the HED. Such a high level official will certainly not limit the dialogue purely to the specific economic and trade issues – understandably, the dialogue can also have strategic and political impacts on bilateral relations.

Secondly, and in relation to the first point, there are differences between the EU and China on how to categorise the dialogues that were established in these past years. For the EU, human rights dialogue is considered as a branch of political dialogue and used to be included in the general framework of political dialogue.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, in the

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<sup>6</sup> For all the EU policy papers towards China, please consult:  
[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/china/policy\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/china/policy_en.htm).

<sup>7</sup> See European Commission, "Current Architecture of EU-China Relations Political Dialogue", <http://www.eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/architecture.pdf>, accessed 22 August 2010. This is, in fact, an outdated list of frameworks, dated from 1 December 2005.



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Delegation of the European Union to China's updated website, the human rights dialogue is not included under the framework of political dialogue. Whether it indicates that the EU accepts the Chinese position on the human rights dialogue or that it is separate from the general political dialogue or not, is unclear. Between the EU and China, a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is in the process of negotiation. The original motivation from the Chinese side was to renew the legal document of the economic and trade cooperation agreement dating back to 1985. Yet, the Europeans insist on including political articles on questions such as human rights and other key issues of concern and thus turn it into a comprehensive agreement. Without doubt, the rapid development of relations between the EU and China over the past 35 years makes the framework increasingly extensive, yet more difficult to evaluate as well.

Thirdly, the dialogues are participated in by many of the European and Chinese institutions at various levels. Those institutions involved may have different impressions and assessments of the same dialogue, thus not only permitting for different European institutions at different levels to disagree with one another, but also for different Chinese institutions to struggle to reach consensus on certain issues. Such differences between institutions may even be magnified when the dialogue is evaluated at the EU-China level. Pragmatically speaking, without a general evaluation of the dialogue, both sides are happy to engage with each other. However, if an evaluation is produced which indicates some notable differences between the EU and China across institutions, it may somehow hamper the constructive environment necessary for the dialogue's success.

Nevertheless, the difficulties mentioned above do not prevent us from positively analysing the outcomes of the EU-China political dialogue. First of all, the framework of the dialogue offers an important channel for both sides to be aware of each other's major concerns and respective positions on key issues, which will help both to shorten the gap in terms of their differences and thus facilitate the process of reaching common understandings. EU-China official relations started in 1975. During the two decades between 1975 and 1995, the relationship did not evolve as rapidly as in the past fifteen years. Apart from the two major agreements signed in the field of trade and economic cooperation, the EU and China were more focused on their domestic agenda and on their relations with other partners. Marked by the establishment of the political dialogue in 1994 and of the reopening of human rights dialogue in 1997, stimulated by the EU's series of policy papers towards China and China's policy paper towards the EU, the two sides have witnessed remarkable progress in terms of bilateral cooperation and partnership.

The human rights dialogue has been running for a dozen years. However, according to certain Europeans, the dialogue has achieved no tangible results in China's human rights behaviour. There is a pervasive dialogue fatigue among the officials who are engaged in the dialogue with



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the Chinese.<sup>8</sup> Philip Baker has complained that the human rights dialogue is exploited by the Chinese diplomats as a convenient tool to deter European criticism on China's stance on human rights in international regimes. On the other hand, Europeans are somehow tied to the dialogue because without it, the EU Member States would have even less impact on human rights in China.<sup>9</sup> It needs to be pointed out that the dialogue offers an important channel for the EU to voice its concerns as well as to raise individual cases to its Chinese counterpart.<sup>10</sup> The framework of the dialogue has no doubt contributed to the impressive achievements made in EU-China relations. Without these dialogues, the two sides would have had no direct channel of communication and the achievements made would never have been imaginable.

Furthermore, the leaderships on both sides attach great importance to the further development of EU-China relations – the direct dialogue, held at the highest decision-making level, helps maintain the strong momentum in strengthening contacts and increasing bilateral cooperation. As early as the first summit held between the European and the Chinese leaders in 1998, they had exchanged respective views on the understanding of world order and also discussed multipolarity and multilateralism.<sup>11</sup> The EU's adherence to its multilateral approach and its successful experience in this respect, seemed to exert influence on the Chinese leaders who, based on their accumulated diplomatic experience, tend to use "multilateralism" more in the documents jointly issued with the EU and its Member States, in the 21st century. For example, in the joint declaration produced between China and France in January 2004, the two sides explicitly promoted multilateralism in international relations.<sup>12</sup> The concept has been used in many other Chinese foreign policy declarations thereafter. Many of the new developments in EU-China relations are a result of the annual summit meetings. The negotiation of the PCA was a decision taken by the leaders when they met at the end of 2006 and as mentioned earlier, the decision to establish the HED was made at the summit meeting in 2007. At the end of each summit meeting, the joint declarations reveal the new agreements reached between the two sides, which draws the blueprint and directs further the future development for EU-China relations.

Needless to say, the summit meetings are not only occasions for both sides to issue joint declarations and reach joint positions. They also serve to clarify each other's core interests and key concerns. Furthermore, they are used to send strong and public diplomatic signals that sometimes shock, but do not break the relationship. A prominent example was the Chinese

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<sup>8</sup> Yves Dumas, "European NGOs calls on EU to Ensure Human Rights in China Before 2008 Olympics", *The Epoch Times*, 15 May 2007, <http://en.epochtimes.com/news/7-5-15/55349.html>, accessed 15 August 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Baker, "Human Rights, Europe and the People's Republic of China", *The China Quarterly*, 2002(1), p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> William Schabas, "Human Rights, Capital Punishment and the EU-China Relationship", *EU-China Observer*, 2009(6), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> The author's interview with a Chinese diplomat on 25 August 2010.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas G. Moore, "Chinese Foreign Policy in the Age of Globalisation", in Yong Deng and Feiling Wang (eds.), *China Rising*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005, pp. 121-158.





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decision, at the end of 2008, to cancel the summit due to the planned meeting between French President Sarkozy (France held the EU Presidency in the latter half of 2008) and the Dalai Lama. China's decision shocked EU leaders but also sent them a clear message on China's core interests. Based on their pragmatic attitudes, the two sides soon scheduled an extraordinary summit in Prague in May 2009 when the Czech Republic held the EU Presidency.

In EU-China relations, political dialogue has also been used to provide the European side with a much better understanding of China's diversity. Some of the high-level meetings between the EU and China, when hosted in China, did not occur in Beijing, the capital city of the country. For example, the 12th EU-China summit was held in Nanjing in November 2009. The strategic dialogue between Lady Ashton and the Chinese Councillor Dai Bingguo was held in Guiyang, Guizhou Province in September 2010. These meetings not only create opportunities for both sides to better get to know each other's viewpoints and positions, but also allow the participants to see more of each other's development achievements and existing problems. In China, if Europeans go to Beijing or Shanghai, they will be impressed by the modernisation of the cities – this will somehow lead to a misperception that China has developed to such a degree that it should not be counted as a developing country anymore. However, if Europeans visit inland China, such as Guizhou Province, they will be surprised to see the development gaps that exist between the East and West of China – their physical presence in these areas will help them to better understand the current stage of China's development process.

All in all, although the flexibility and dynamism of the EU-China political dialogue make it somehow difficult to specify the exact impact of the dialogue itself, such features indicate in themselves the importance of the existence of the dialogue. If the dialogue does not play a role in facilitating bilateral relations, the scopes and depth of the dialogue would not have been steadily increased during these years. When the political dialogue was established in 1994, the topics up for exchange and discussion were rather limited. Nowadays, the dialogue has steadily developed to cover such far reaching issues from world politics to the security situation in Asia, from non-proliferation to the control of small arms and light weapons, from global warming and climate change to the fight against illegal migration and trafficking in human beings – many global, regional and bilateral concerns have thus been added to the list of topics on the dialogue's agenda, which enriches the content of exchanges and permits for both sides to remain better informed about their respective positions.



## EUROPE'S RELEVANCE FOR STABILITY IN EAST ASIA: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Frans-Paul van der Putten\*

### *Introduction<sup>1</sup>*

This article approaches Europe's relevance for East Asian stability from a global perspective. Only when taking into account both direct (bilateral) and indirect (global) factors, is it possible to see a more or less complete picture of the relationship between Europe and stability in East Asia.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Europe is not a major security actor in East Asia in a direct sense does not mean that it is entirely irrelevant. Together with the United States (US) and China, Europe is among the three leading actors at the global level. This is relevant for the regional East Asian level. However modest its role may be, Europe will be a factor in many of the issues that are central to East Asian stability as long as it is a security actor at the global level.

To see Europe's relevance for East Asia merely in terms of its bilateral relations with the region leads to an incomplete understanding, not only because this blurs the perception of Europe as a potential variable in East Asian regional security but also because this undermines the more general elements that also play a role in the region's security implications.<sup>3</sup> A recent article by the European Council on Foreign Relations argues that Europe needs a "global China policy," meaning that it should look at its relationship with China not from a traditional bilateral perspective, but rather from a global perspective that takes into account indirect effects through third countries or regions.<sup>4</sup> This article takes a similar approach and aims to position Europe and East Asian stability in a broad global context and to assess in

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\* Frans-Paul van der Putten is a Research Fellow for Asia and International Security at the Clingendael Institute, The Hague.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the Defense Forum on Regional Security: "Promoting Cross-Strait Peace and Maintaining Regional Stability", organised by the Taiwanese Ministry of Defence, Taipei 27-28 July 2010.

<sup>2</sup> In this article East Asia refers to China, Taiwan, Japan and North and South Korea.

<sup>3</sup> On the global perspective on how Europe as a security actor relates to China: See Frans-Paul van der Putten and Chu Shulong, "Introduction", in F-P. van der Putten and S. Chu (eds.), *China, Europe and International Security*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010. On EU-China relations in a broader international context see also Volker Stanzel, "The EU and China in the Global System", in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong (eds.), *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects*, London: Routledge, 2008; Liselotte Odgaard and Sven Biscop, "The EU and China: Partners in Effective Multilateralism?", in David Kerr and Liu Fei (eds.), *The International Politics of EU-China Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Alyson J.K. Bailes and Anna Wetter, "EU-China Security Relations: The 'softer' side", in David Kerr and Liu Fei (eds.), *The International Politics of EU-China Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Marcin Zaborowski, "Security Issues", in Stanley Crossick and Etienne Reuter (eds.), *China-EU: A common future*, Singapore: World Scientific, 2007, pp. 43-44; Xing Hua, "Security Issues: China perspective", in Stanley Crossick and Etienne Reuter (eds.), *China-EU: A common future*, Singapore: World Scientific, 2007, pp. 47-55; Gustaaf Geraerts, Chen Zhimin and Gjovalin Macaj, "The Reform of the UN", *Asia Paper*, 2(6), 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Francois Godement, "A Global China Policy", *ECFR Policy Brief 22*, London, June 2010.

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which ways Europe is or can be a relevant factor for security relations in East Asia.

Regional stability can be strengthened by cooperative mechanisms, shared interests and mutual trust between these countries, as well as by increased political stability at the domestic level. It is weakened if developments take place that run counter to these four elements. Various longer-existing issues have a great impact on regional stability. The most important of these regional security issues are: the cross-Strait issue between Taiwan and China, the division of the Korean Peninsula, the North Korean issue, the Tibet and Xinjiang issues (and – to some extent – overall political stability) in China, the territorial dispute between China and Japan over the East China Sea and the balance of power between China and the United States.<sup>5</sup> Given this context, it is likely that any major security crisis in East Asia would involve China.

That Europe has an interest in peace and security in East Asia is evident. Two aspects are particularly relevant. Firstly, a decrease in regional stability would affect international trade and investment and have a negative impact on the European economy. China plays a central role in the economic relationship between Europe and East Asia. A regional security crisis that would involve China constitutes the greatest danger to European economic interests. Involvement of Japan would also have a major impact. The same applies to South Korea and Taiwan. Secondly, a regional security crisis that would lead to major tensions between China and the US would also damage Europe's interests. Given Europe's close economic and security ties with the US, it would be under strong pressure to give support to the American side. However, this would harm Europe's economic interests in its relations with China. In such a scenario, Europe would have very little diplomatic space in terms of taking measures to protect its interests.

As China – like the East Asian region as a whole – is becoming more prominent in international economic and diplomatic affairs, the stakes are increasing for Europe. A security crisis involving China would be problematic, but a confrontation between China and the US constitutes the greatest danger for Europe. Such a conflict would stifle processes of global governance. A potential Sino-US confrontation may originate in and remain confined to East Asia – as was the case with the Korean War. Although it is increasingly possible that a destabilisation of relations between the US and China would not be exclusively related to East Asia, this region still plays a key role in security relations between these two great powers.

For Europe, the most relevant security issues in East Asia are those that involve China, either with or without the US. The following four issues stand out: the Taiwan issue, the Sino-US military balance of power, the Sino-Japanese territorial dispute and domestic stability in China. While it is important for Europe to look for ways in which it can contribute to regional stability, these four issues are of particular interest for the EU and its Member States.

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<sup>5</sup> The territorial disputes between China and several Southeast Asian countries over the South China Sea is not included in this list because it involves not just East but also Southeast Asia.

**InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of  
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Europe is a security actor at the global level in several ways. In the first place, it plays a prominent role in global governance. European countries are firmly established within global organisations – such as the United Nations Security Council – and they derive prestige from the fact that many norms for current-day international relations originated in Europe. Moreover, Europe also plays an active role in exporting its political norms, which it regards as having a universal validity. Secondly, Europe is a key security partner for the US. In instances where Europe cannot give direct military support to the US, it can do so indirectly by (temporarily) taking over American military tasks that free up US troops for deployment elsewhere. Thirdly, Europe is a major economic actor, both through the EU and through the larger European countries. Economic influence carries the potential to affect security issues, for instance through the use of economic sanctions or the selective distribution of economic benefits. European economic power – which includes the capacity for development cooperation with developing countries – underpins its diplomatic influence in Africa and the Middle East. And fourthly, Europe is still an important military actor. While it is true that, compared with those of the United States, European military capabilities are limited, decreasing and not used as the primary tool in European external relations, they are still a factor in international relations. The key element is Europe's technological capability. Europe has both a technologically advanced defence industry and many civilian industries that are relevant to military capacity-building. European countries can export arms and defence technology or impose embargoes on such exports to specific countries.

***The direct relevance of Europe for security issues in East Asia***

In a direct sense, Europe is a security actor in East Asia only with regard to its arms export policy and its human rights policy. With regard to arms exports, European countries or companies do not sell arms to Taiwan in order to avoid diplomatic and economic retaliation by China. At the same time, due to the EU arms embargo that was initiated in response to the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, Europe sells only a limited amount of defence technology to China. Given the fact that Taiwan is fully dependent on the US for its arms imports and that China has no other major arms supplier apart from Russia, the European position clearly affects security in East Asia. However, in the foreseeable future, it seems unlikely that Europe will substantially alter its policy on arms exports to East Asia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Among the factors that keep the EU embargo against China in place, is the fact that the human rights situation in China has not substantially changed since 1989 and that the United States maintains strong pressure on the EU not to change the current policy. On the EU arms embargo, see: May-Britt U. Stumbaum, *The European Union and China: Decision-making in EU foreign and security policy towards the People's Republic of China*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009; Nicola Casarini, "The Evolution of the EU-China Relationship: From constructive engagement to strategic partnership", *EU ISS occasional paper 64*, Paris: EU ISS, October 2006; May-Britt U. Stumbaum, "Risky Business? The EU, China and dual-use technology", *EU ISS occasional paper 80*, Paris: EU ISS, October 2009; Frans-Paul van der Putten, "The EU Arms Embargo against China: Should Europe play a role in East Asian security?", *Social and Cultural Research paper series*, Hong Kong: Shue Yan University, January 2009.

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In terms of human rights, Europe is a more active player. This relates specifically to Europe-China relations and to domestic stability in China. European governmental and non-governmental actors are highly critical of the way in which the Chinese government deals with human rights. This criticism is to a large degree decoupled from Europe's economic relations with China: European governments do not use their economic influence to put pressure on China with regard to human rights. Nevertheless, some leverage does exist on the European side as the Chinese government is concerned with its public image abroad. In addition, the capacity of European countries to provide a public platform for those who oppose the Chinese government and who have a (potential) base of supporters inside China is another important element. With regard to high-profile individuals, such as the Dalai Lama,<sup>7</sup> as well as former Guantanamo detainees who are ethnic Uyghurs,<sup>8</sup> the pressure from Beijing on European countries to stay within certain limits is very strong. However, unlike the issue of arms sales to Taiwan, there is still some space left in which Europe can manoeuvre. In other words, Beijing is not able to completely block the public appearance of Chinese dissidents and political leaders in exile in Europe, or to keep European countries from giving residence permits to Uyghurs released from Guantanamo.

Europe's role in this regard potentially affects Chinese domestic stability. The most complicated issues in this context concern the Tibetan and Uyghur minorities, due to the political instability present in Tibet and Xinjiang. Besides countries such as the US, India and Australia, EU Member States also play a role in Tibetan and Uyghur strategies towards greater autonomy. Given Europe's interest in a stable China, as well as its interest in avoiding having to choose between damaging its relationship with China and abandoning basic principles of political openness, European governments might increasingly be forced to contribute to improved relations between China and exiled ethnic leaders. This runs counter to the Chinese desire not to "internationalise" domestic issues, but like the Taiwan issue, a certain degree of internationalisation is already in place.

### *The indirect relevance of Europe for security issues in East Asia*

In an indirect sense, Europe's relevance for East Asian security is less visible, but remains nonetheless, at the same time, more fundamental. To begin with, Europe is an important provider of legitimacy. Through its prominent membership of international organisations and its prestige as the source of numerous political norms and ideas on international relations, other security actors can derive a degree of legitimacy for their actions with European support. In East Asia, the US and China need to take into account not only regional "audiences" (the other countries in East and Southeast Asia), but also global audiences, among which Europe is a very important member.

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<sup>7</sup> "China Forced to Act over Sarkozy-Dalai Lama Meeting: Spokesman", *EUbusiness*, 29 November 2008, <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/1227899822.88>.

<sup>8</sup> "China Attacks Guantanamo Uighurs' Asylum in Switzerland", *BBC News*, 4 February 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8497532.stm>.

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As a key ally of the United States,<sup>9</sup> Europe is a factor in the Sino-American security relationship. European military units can help the US free up military assets for deployment in East Asia by taking their place in other parts of the world.<sup>10</sup> A clash between China and the US would undermine the main global governance organisations, but Europe could still give Washington diplomatic support in the way that it did during the Cold War. It could use its influence in an attempt to strengthen the US position and weaken that of China in the developing world. So the degree to which Europe is willing to stand by America's side affects the latter's strength in relation to China. This is relevant for both the Taiwan issue and the Sino-US balance in Asia.

The European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) are important for the way in which this organisation develops. After NATO's experience in Afghanistan, it seems that NATO will confine its role more specifically to Europe and its environment.<sup>11</sup> Still there remains a potential for NATO to develop closer relations with the two main Asian allies of the US, namely Japan and South Korea. Should this happen, this could improve military and strategic relations between Europe, Japan and South Korea. As such, it would give the two Asian countries greater international leeway. It could also involve the risk of a Chinese reaction against a perceived encirclement strategy that brings new tensions and an accelerated military build-up.

In the economic sphere, Europe is a major promoter of economic liberalism. As such it may be heading – together with the US and Australia – for a confrontation with China's statist economic model.<sup>12</sup> European governments and the EU are likely to keep supporting international norms that are not fully compatible with state actors being closely involved in important international investments. European governments seem to be somewhat unsure as how to respond to Chinese state-controlled investors acquiring shares in Western businesses. Yet in the long run, it is not unlikely that Europe

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<sup>9</sup> On the EU-US-China relationship, see Bates Gill, "The United States and the China-Europe Relationship", in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong (eds.), *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects*, London: Routledge, 2008; Ruan Rongze, "China-EU-US Relations: Shaping a constructive future", in David Shambaugh, Eberhard Sandschneider and Zhou Hong (eds.), *China-Europe Relations: Perceptions, policies and prospects*, London: Routledge, 2008; Andrew Small, "The US Factor", in Stanley Crossick and Etienne Reuter (eds.), *China-EU: A common future*, Singapore: World Scientific, 2007; Marcin Zaborowski, "US China Policy: Implications for the EU", *EU ISS analysis paper*, Paris: EU ISS, October 2005; Bates Gill and Gudrun Wacker (eds.), *China's Rise: Diverging US-EU perceptions and approaches*, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2005; Chu Shulong and Chen Songchuan, "US-China-Europe Security Relations: The global security structure and order in the twenty-first century", in F-P. van der Putten and S. Chu (eds.), *China, Europe and International Security*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> To a certain degree, they are already doing so. This applies not just to European contributions to the US-led military operations in Afghanistan, but also, for instance, to international counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden.

<sup>11</sup> A NATO advisory group recently concluded that NATO should remain a regional organisation, rather than become a global one. See "NATO 2020: Assured security; dynamic engagement", Brussels: NATO, 17 May 2020, [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2010\\_05/20100517\\_100517\\_expertsreport.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2010_05/20100517_100517_expertsreport.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> On this confrontation, see Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's authoritarian model will dominate the twenty-first century*, New York: Basic Books, 2010.

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will mobilise its influence in global economic governance institutions and its position as a major aid donor to defend its interests in liberal norms. For China, close government involvement in major firms is a fundamental political issue and external business expansion is a key element in its economic development strategy. Should China's involvement in the global economy induce Beijing to decrease the state's control of its leading companies, then this would have an impact on the country's political development. As such, this process, in which Europe is potentially one of the leading actors, can be relevant for China's political stability.

Finally, in terms of military capabilities, Europe can have an indirect impact on East Asian security through its activities in other parts of the world. The main example is the European response to Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden, where four of six security actors in East Asia (the US, China, Japan, South Korea) are also engaged. Europe – through both the EU and NATO – has a significant naval presence in the Gulf of Aden. Europe also plays a central role, with the US, at the international level. The two main mechanisms for this are the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor in the Gulf of Aden and the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction meetings in Bahrain. European countries are also highly involved in the working groups of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, the main political-level platform for international interaction on this issue.<sup>13</sup> Due to its extensive naval deployment in the area, its leading role in international coordination and the fact that it is *not* a major actor in East Asian security, Europe (in particular the EU) is well-positioned to take initiatives towards greater maritime security governance in the Indian Ocean.<sup>14</sup> This could benefit regional stability in East Asia, as it could involve new mechanisms for navies in the entire Asian region to communicate and operate jointly, acting as a new multilateral platform to address maritime legal issues and sea lane security. At the very least, the situation in the Gulf of Aden provides the East Asian security actors with an extra perspective on each other's naval activities and stimulates interaction amongst themselves at an operational level.

### **Conclusion**

Only when taking into account both direct (bilateral) and indirect factors, is it possible to see a more or less complete picture of the relationship between Europe and stability in East Asia. Although the relevance of Europe for peace and stability in the region remains limited, taking into account the bigger picture is a first step for the European Union and its Member States towards creating more focused and coherent policies towards this particular region. In East Asia, Europe has an interest primarily in the Taiwan issue, the Sino-American military balance, the Sino-Japanese territorial dispute and Chinese domestic stability. Consequently, it is most likely that it will look for leverage to

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<sup>13</sup> Susanne Kamerling and Kees Homan, "Operational Challenges to Counterpiracy Operations off the Coast of Somalia" in B. van Ginkel and F.-P. van der Putten (eds.), *The International Response to Somali Piracy: Challenges and opportunities*, Martinus Nijhoff, 2010 forthcoming.

<sup>14</sup> Susanne Kamerling and Frans-Paul van der Putten, "Europe Sails East, China Sails West: Somali piracy and shifting geopolitical relations in the Indian Ocean" in F.-P. van der Putten and S. Chu (eds.), *China, Europe and International Security*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.



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contribute to increased stability in these four areas. If it is true that China will rise to dominance in East Asia, the key issue then is for this transition to occur without leading to international conflicts. This involves finding ways that help Taiwan, Japan and the US to safeguard their security interests, while at the same time allowing for China's emergence as a leading power. The second issue is that China is set to remain a politically unstable country for some time to come. However modest its role will be, Europe is likely to play a certain role in these issues as long as it is a security actor at the global level. As China becomes larger and the world becomes smaller, it is less relevant whether Europe has troops and alliances in the region. At some point, the fact that Europe does not have such troops and alliances in place could even permit Europe to make a stronger contribution to regional stability in East Asia.





## EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS: EVOLUTION OF A CONCEPT, FROM AMSTERDAM TO LISBON

Thomas Renard\*

Last September, Herman Van Rompuy, the President of the European Council, called his first meeting of EU Heads to discuss EU foreign policy matters since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Symbolically, in a multipolar world where the EU struggles to find its place on the global chessboard, the meeting was focused mainly on EU strategic partnerships. This debate was welcomed as this topic had been ignored for too long by EU policy-makers and academics alike and a need for clarification on this matter has become more than apparent. It should also be mentioned that the debate came just ahead of a long series of summits with strategic partners to take place in the final months of 2010 (with China, South Africa, India and the US, notably). This article proposes an overview of the evolution of the concept of strategic partnerships, from its origins to last September's extraordinary European Council meeting.

### *From "Common Strategies" to "Strategic Partnerships"*

The term "strategic partner" was first used at the highest EU level in 1998, in the European Council conclusions which reaffirmed "Russia's importance as a *strategic partner* to the Union."<sup>1</sup> Six months later, the European Council was announcing a Common Strategy on Russia which was meant to "strengthen the *strategic partnership* between Russia and the European Union."<sup>2</sup>

The same European Council also announced a strategic partnership to be signed with Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen "the political, economic and cultural understanding between our regions."<sup>3</sup> Hence, it seems fair to assume that the concept of strategic partnership, in its origins, was related to the "common strategies" *vis-à-vis* third countries and regions, foreseen by a provision in the Amsterdam Treaty. Nonetheless, whereas the so-called "common strategies" have been lost in EU history, the strategic partnerships have somehow survived to this day.

Russia was clearly the first country with which the EU ventured into the strategic rhetoric. No other countries were yet described as strategic partners in the late 1990s. The transatlantic partnership was depicted as "the leading force for peace and prosperity for ourselves and for the world"<sup>4</sup> but was not yet granted the strategic qualifier. The relationship with Japan was not yet

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\* Thomas Renard is a Research Fellow for the Europe in the World Programme, at Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations, a Brussels-based think tank. For contact: t.renard@egmontinstitute.be.

<sup>1</sup> Personal emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions*, Cologne: Council of the European Union, 1999. Personal emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See *The New Transatlantic Agenda*, Madrid: EU-US Summit, 1995.

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dubbed strategic either, but already went beyond mere bilateral issues as both parties were:

aware of the importance of deepening their dialogue in order to make a joint contribution towards safeguarding peace in the world, setting up a just and stable international order in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and taking up the global challenges that the international community has to face.<sup>5</sup>

Since the late 1990s, however, as Brussels was granted more powers by the EU Member States, the EU has become increasingly interested in global issues. The EU has now more cards at hand with which to play globally. This “emergence” of the EU was concomitant with a major geopolitical shift resulting from the rise of new global powers, especially China, with which the EU had developed growing interactions.

Recognising the increasing role for the EU in a new world order, the European Security Strategy (ESS) was the first document to envision a strategic use for the strategic partnerships:

There are few if any problems we can deal with on our own. The threats described above are common threats, shared with all our closest partners. International cooperation is a necessity. We need to pursue our objectives both through multilateral cooperation in international organisations and through partnerships with key actors.<sup>6</sup>

The ESS mentions six strategic partners: it singles out the US (“the irreplaceable partner”) and Russia (with whom we should work “to reinforce progress towards a strategic partnership”), then adding as one group Japan, China, Canada and India (with whom “we should look to develop a strategic partnership”). This last grouping appears particularly odd as all four countries have little in common. In fact, as noted by some scholars, “the criteria to evaluate who qualifies as a potential partner are left virtually unspecified.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, confusion remains regarding the specific list of our strategic partners.

Following the recommendations of the ESS, the EU started elaborating a new kind of document, specifically called “strategic partnership” and apparently directed exclusively towards emerging powers, starting with China and India, soon followed by South Africa, Brazil and Mexico.<sup>8</sup> These

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<sup>5</sup> See *Joint declaration on relations between the European Community and its member states and Japan*, The Hague: EU-Japan Summit, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Council of the European Union, *A secure Europe in a better world – European Security Strategy*, Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Roberto Menotti and Francesca Vencato, *The European Security Strategy and the partners*, in S. Biscop and J.J. Andersson, *The EU and the European Security Strategy*, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *A maturing partnership: shared interest and challenges in EU-China relations*, (COM 533), Brussels: European Commission, 2006; European Commission, *An EU-India strategic partnership*, (COM 430), Brussels: European Commission, 2004; European Commission, *Towards an EU-South Africa strategic partnership*, (COM 347), Brussels: European Commission, 2006; European Commission, *Towards an EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership*, (COM 281), Brussels:

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documents launched a new dynamic in which the Commission initiated the strategic partnerships with third countries, through a “Communication” subsequently endorsed by the European Council. The Commission had thus replaced the Council in the driving seat for dealing with strategic partnerships, giving them more substance on paper, but not quite yet in practice or in terms of strategic thinking.

### *Old concept, new thinking*

This short historical perspective on EU strategic partnerships tells a lot about the concept, but also about the EU itself. To begin with, there is no official definition of so-called strategic partnerships. There are indeed some elements of definition appearing here and there in various European Commission documents, but nothing close to a definition, raising a certain amount of questions, mainly one question in particular: What difference does it make for the EU and the third country to have a strategic partnership?

In this conceptual fog, it is difficult if not impossible to identify a sense of purpose for the strategic partnerships, as the problems of definition and objectives of the partnerships are intimately connected. Hence, so far, strategic partnerships have been used mainly for political reasons, to reward a partner or highlight the importance of a relationship, rather than for seeking to achieve strategic goals.

As a result, strategic partnerships have taken many different forms and received different meanings. They have also been negotiated with many different partners with no strategic rationale guiding those choices. Until very recently, there was no consensus on the list of EU strategic partners, although discussions at the European Council in September seem to have confirmed the list compiled by this author.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore now widely accepted that the EU has nine strategic partnerships with third countries: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and the United States.<sup>10</sup> There is still no agreement nonetheless on whether and to whom the EU should grant the strategic partner status in the future, although it now appears that South Korea will become the tenth strategic partner soon.<sup>11</sup>

Year after year, summit after summit, the strategic partnerships proved to be “empty boxes” with no particular meaning. Herman Van Rompuy touched the core of the problem in a strikingly pertinent formula: “we have strategic partners, now we need a strategy.”<sup>12</sup> Empowered by the Lisbon

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European Commission, 2007; European Commission, *Towards an EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership*, (COM 447), Brussels: European Commission, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Thomas Renard, “A BRIC in the world: Emerging powers, Europe, and the coming order”, *Egmont Paper 31*, Brussels: Egmont Institute, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> The EU also has five strategic partnerships with two regions and three organisations: Latin America and the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the UN, the African Union and NATO.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Rettman, “Ashton designates six new 'strategic partners'”, *EUObserver*, 16 September 2010.

<sup>12</sup> See *EU External Relations: “We have strategic partners, now we need a strategy”*. Video message from Herman Van Rompuy. 14 September 2010. Accessed: <http://vloghvr.consilium.europa.eu/?p=2377>.

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Treaty, the EU and more particularly its President are now showing a renewed interest for the partnerships.

The reasons for this new attention to the concept are manifold. Firstly, the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty gave a new impetus to EU foreign policy by allowing for more continuity thanks to the creation of a position of semi-permanent President of the Council. In this new configuration, Herman Van Rompuy saw the role of the Council as to “establish a shared sense of direction”<sup>13</sup> for EU foreign policy.

Secondly, EU foreign policies are now more integrated and more coherent thanks to the Lisbon Treaty and particularly to the establishment of the External Action Service, which will have a very important role to play in terms of prospective thinking and implementation of strategic partnerships. As the latter sits precisely at the intersection of all dimensions of EU foreign policy, from economics to politics, as well as from regional issues to global challenges, the Lisbon Treaty bears the potential to give full meaning to the concept. EU leaders now need to turn this potential into something more concrete.

Thirdly, the Copenhagen conference operated as a wake-up call for the EU in demonstrating the limits of the EU’s global influence in a new world order dominated by power politics.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in Copenhagen, despite a strong common position, the EU was sidelined by its own strategic partners – the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), who eventually supported the US’ position. In another symbolic blow of fate, two days before the extraordinary European Council dedicated on the strategic partnerships – the EU was again reminded that its strategic partnerships are still a hollow concept. On 14 September, in a vote at the UN, six of its nine strategic partners voted against the EU’s resolution to enhance its status within the UN General Assembly.

In February 2010, Herman Van Rompuy opened the way for a new reflection on strategic partnerships. In his first major foreign policy speech, he mentioned the strategic partnerships as a key priority of the EU in terms of foreign policy. He stated the following: “We need to review and strengthen our relationship with key partners.”<sup>15</sup>

Catherine Ashton followed in the steps of Van Rompuy and declared the strategic partnerships as one of her main priorities for 2010 and beyond:

In this world I have described where problems are global, and where power is shifting, we need to invest in partnerships, keeping up the work with our “established partnerships” such as the US, Russia, Japan and Canada, and focusing too on developing our relationships with powers that are emerging or have emerged, China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Herman Van Rompuy, *The challenges for Europe in a changing world*, Speech at the College of Europe, Bruges, 25 February 2010, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Renard, *Le Syndrome de Copenhague*, *Revue Défense Nationale*, n°731, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Herman Van Rompuy, *op. cit.*, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Ashton, *Europe and the world*, Speech at Megaron “The Athens Concert Hall”, Athens, 8 July 2010, p. 7.

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Interestingly, her list slightly differed from Van Rompuy's, as she included South Africa and Indonesia, indicating that there was still no agreement on the list of EU strategic partnerships in the Summer 2010.

Finally, on the occasion of his first-ever "State of the Union" speech, on 7 September 2010, José Manuel Barroso defined the strategic partnerships as crucial for the EU to pull its weight on the global stage: "Our partners are watching and are expecting us to engage as Europe, not just as 27 individual countries. If we don't act together, Europe will not be a force in the world, and [our strategic partners] will move on without us."<sup>17</sup> Yet he also highlighted their crucial importance for the EU domestically: "In our globalised world, the relationships we build with strategic partners determine our prosperity."<sup>18</sup>

### *Towards a strategic debate*

If strategic partnerships were mentioned among the priorities of some prominent EU figures from early 2010 onwards, the debate on the issue remained entirely below the radar until the end of summer recess. Indeed, in June 2010, Herman Van Rompuy called for an extraordinary European Council, to be held in September, dedicated to foreign policy with a special focus on strategic partnerships.<sup>19</sup> However, a loose agenda for the meeting coupled to a very fuzzy topic turned out to be a perfect recipe for chaotic preparation, as it was left out to the Member States and to the EU institutions to sort out the agenda for this meeting and to prepare their positions accordingly.

In order to give more substance to the Leaders' meeting, it was decided in July that a Gymnich would precede the Council on 10-11 September and that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs would later attend the European Council to ensure a continuity of debates. The level of preparation varied greatly from one Member State to the other in conjunction with their respective interest for the topic. Nonetheless, a number of Member States, including some of the larger ones, shared several key ideas ahead of the Gymnich via an exchange of letters, in which some of the core elements of the Council's conclusions were already drafted.

The Gymnich tackled the strategic partnerships among four topics on the agenda (the others being Pakistan, Turkey and the working methods of the Foreign Affairs Council). Regarding the discussions on strategic partnerships, interestingly, EU Commissioners for economic and financial issues (Olli Rehn), climate (Connie Hedegaard) and trade (Karel De Gucht) had been invited to present their views, indicating that Catherine Ashton truly envisioned strategic partnerships in a comprehensive manner, but also to better understand how they operate in various policy dimensions. In order to focus on the debates, Ashton invited the member states to focus on China as a template for strategic partnerships.

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<sup>17</sup> José Manuel Barroso, *State of the Union 2010*, Speech to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 7 September 2010, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Honor Mahony, "Van Rompuy planning 'foreign policy' summit", *EUObserver*, 11 June 2010.

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What emerged from the discussions is a convergence of views on the fact that Europe is still punching below its weight and that it is only when acting together that the EU can hope to become a true strategic partner for those countries with whom it has agreements. There seemed to be a convergence of views as well on the strategic approach towards our partners: the EU needs first to identify its own priorities and interests, then to determine what it wants from each partner and what each partner expects from the EU in each policy dimension. The EU can then operate some trade-offs across policy dimensions in order to obtain the most out of its strategic partners. As a matter of fact, Catherine Ashton was tasked to investigate these questions *vis-à-vis* each partner in the coming months.

The European Council, on 16 September, turned out to focus mainly on European coordination mechanisms in order for the EU to become more strategic in its approach to strategic partners. More specifically, the following elements were discussed:<sup>20</sup>

- How to make sure that what is decided and undertaken from Brussels and from the capitals follows the same line;
- How to better coordinate amongst the different actors in Brussels;
- How to bring together the different aspects of the EU's relationships with partners, for instance during summits, in areas such as the economy, climate change, values and security.

These discussions resulted in the adoption of "internal arrangements to improve the European Union's external policy" as an annex to the Council's conclusions. This resulted in coordination mechanisms within the EU:

Close and regular coordination between all the different institutional actors involved in the definition and implementation of the European Union's external relations is necessary to ensure that EU representatives can defend coherent positions on the whole range of the strategic interests and objectives of the Union.<sup>21</sup>

The arrangements also foresee essential coordination mechanisms between the EU and its Member States:

Synergies need to be developed between the European Union's external relations and Member States' bilateral relations with third countries, so that, where appropriate, what is done at the level of the European Union complements and reinforces what is done at the level of the Member States and vice versa.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Herman Van Rompuy, *Remarks by Herman Van Rompuy President of the European Council at the press conference following the meeting of Heads of State or Government*, (PCE 188/10), Brussels, 16 September 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Council of the European Union, *European Council conclusions on 16 September 2010*, Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

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In his personal conclusion to the Summit, Van Rompuy highlighted several key points of the Council's discussions.<sup>23</sup> The three following were stressed as particularly important:

- This extraordinary European Council was only the beginning of a longer debate on EU foreign policy. Catherine Ashton was tasked "in coordination with the Commission and with the Foreign Affairs Council, to evaluate the prospects of relations with all strategic partners and set out in particular our interests and possible leverage to achieve them;"<sup>24</sup>
- Reciprocity was mentioned in the discussions, although several Member States had been reluctant to use that term before. It even appears in the preamble of the Council's conclusions, although not in the main text;
- Finally, it was confirmed that in terms of foreign policy, the mandate would be issued by the European Council, but prepared and implemented by the Foreign Affairs Council, the Commission and the High Representative. In other words, the idea is that during summits with EU strategic partners the latter is convinced that EU messages "have a political backing of all EU 27 at the level of Heads and are not only a product of the Brussels institutions."<sup>25</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The strategic partnerships emerged at a time when the EU was granted more power in external policies, while the influence of Europe in the world was slowly decreasing in relation to the rise of emerging powers. In this new configuration, a rethinking of the EU's relationship with established and emerging powers was more than necessary. As a result, strategic partnerships seemed to be the obvious route forward, but they quickly turned out to be void of meaning and significance. The revival of the concept by the ESS in 2003 was another lost opportunity to provide the EU with further strategic guidance and thus add substance to the concept.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has shown a renewed interest for the concept, while the European Council sits anew in the driving seat, after it was left to the Commission to deal with this issue in spite of the fact that strategic partnerships are clearly a matter in which the Commission cannot act alone, as it needs the support of the 27 Member States.

Future summits with strategic partners will provide a strong indication as to whether the EU is becoming more strategic in its approach to foreign policy, although concrete results should not to be expected too soon (i.e. in this year's summits). The EU is still in the (very) early stages of a new reflection on its foreign policy but the good news is for all to bear witness: the fact that discussions have resumed on this issue is already a positive step forward.

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<sup>23</sup> Herman Van Rompuy, *op. cit.*, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Council of the European Union, *European Council conclusions on 16 September 2010*, Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Herman Van Rompuy, *Invitation letter by President Herman Van Rompuy to the European Council*, (PCE 187/10), Brussels, 14 September 2010.



## BOOK REVIEW

Robert S. Ross, Øystein Tunsjø and Zhang Tuosheng (eds.), *US-China-EU Relations: Managing the New World Order*, Abingdon: Routledge Asian Security Studies, 2010, 306pp, £80.00.

Michael Smith\*

Analysis of EU-China relations very rapidly exposes the “American dimension” to any attempts to frame strategies or resolve the inevitable tensions that occur in dealing with major emerging powers. The EU has made persistent efforts to develop a structured relationship with China, both as a dominant trade partner and as a broader challenger to “European” conceptions of regional or world order and at almost every turn it has discovered not only that the complexity of the challenge is daunting and dynamic, but also that Washington is intimately engaged in a series of overlapping policy processes and diplomatic initiatives.

The book under review here draws upon this unavoidable and existential state of affairs to provide a wide-ranging evaluation of the ways in which the US-China-EU “triangle” works. The editors, in their introduction, advance the notion that US-China-EU relations constitute a form of “diplomatic triangle” in which the three power centres interact with the possibility of gains for each of them and with a complex mix of cooperation and conflict as the *leitmotif*. Such a “diplomatic triangle” is to be distinguished from “strategic triangles,” such as that which existed between the US, the USSR and China in the later stages of the Cold War, which imply mutual threats and a form of “zero sum” competition in which one or two might gain at the expense of the other(s) in the relationship.

This is an intriguing argument, although to my mind it is not unprecedented – think for example of the arguments about US-Japan-EC relations in the 1980s and early 1990s, or about a number of other potential “triangles” in the post-Cold War world. The test of its power lies in the extent to which the wide range of contributions to this volume are framed by the general argument and the ways in which these contributions allow the editors to arrive at some overall conclusions and evaluations using their framework. There is no doubt that the contributors provide a substantial amount of (generally) up-to-date information about the component parts of the “triangle:” the book brings together a dozen chapters by a distinguished set of authors, grouped in four substantive parts, dealing respectively with US, Chinese and EU conceptions and roles in the “new world order,” with bilateral relations within the “triangle,” with “Western” approaches to China and Chinese responses, and with the impact of the rise of China on transatlantic relations. The logic of the divisions between these parts is not always clear

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\* Prof. Michael Smith is a Jean Monnet Professor of European Politics from Loughborough University, United Kingdom. This review was provided for by the *EU-China Observer's* book review co-editor, Prof. Georg Wiessala.



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and there is substantial overlap between (for example) the material on world order approaches and the contributions dealing with mutual perceptions, but the overall coverage is nonetheless wide-ranging and often stimulating. In particular, the chapters provide insight into the multi-dimensional nature of EU policy-making, the internal nuances of Chinese perceptions and approaches and the contrast between both EU and Chinese approaches and the US focus on “grand strategy” and “hard power.”

There are, however, a number of “gaps” in the coverage of the issues and in the application of the initial framework. In particular, although there are three chapters on EU Member State policies – and these provide valuable material to remind us that with regard to China, Member States are often the key drivers of “European” policies – there is no chapter dedicated to an evaluation of the attempts to frame “European” strategies. The chapter on Germany, by Gudrun Wacker, is impressive both in its treatment of German policies and in attempting to put these within a “European” context, but despite its excellence, it is not enough to give a rounded impression of the successive efforts to construct an EU strategy towards China. Another area in which one might have wished to see a more rounded treatment of the issues is that of the political economy of the relationship: there is a feeling that what most authors are really interested in is the “high politics” of US-China-EU relations and that the economic dimension (where there really is a “triangle”) is not fully integrated into the overall arguments. There are impressive and valuable chapters by Andrew Walter (on the “triangle” of currencies) and by Bates Gill (which covers amongst others the EU arms embargo), which raise the political-economic linkages, but these are not part of a sustained approach to the issues.

When it comes to the application of the “diplomatic triangle” perspective, the treatment again strikes me as uneven. A number of chapters raise questions or present evidence that would be grist to the mill of this approach, but the connections are not made in the chapters themselves. For example, Rosemary Foot does an excellent job of reviewing US and EU responses to the rise of China, but does not follow through to relate this to the “diplomatic triangle” concept. Equally, the chapters that deal with Chinese perceptions and concepts of world order do not explicitly address the implications of these for the “diplomatic triangle” idea – and as noted above, there are many points at which this might have been done. One is left with the impression that the idea of the “diplomatic triangle” is almost an attempt to rationalise the chapters *ex post*, rather than acting as a framing device for the volume. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the conclusions by the editors, review ideas emerging from the preceding chapters without fully deploying the “diplomatic triangle” framework; when this framework is deployed towards the end of the conclusions, it provides further evidence that its more consistent application would have generated valuable insights and gives a strong steer towards mechanisms through which “triangular convergence” could be stimulated and consolidated. Oddly, the conclusions also present the “new world order” as a question or a possibility, rather than as the established fact implied by the title of the book; I happen to agree



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that there should be a question-mark after the phrase, but the editors appear to be in two minds.

Whilst it is possible to point to gaps and unevenness in the coverage and the analysis provided by this book, it provides a very solid introduction and review of a number of key issues and should be strongly recommended. There is much food for thought here, not least for EU policy-makers faced with the need to develop some consistency and a stronger “European” dimension in their approach to their mutual relations with the US and China.



## BOOK REVIEW

Jing Men and Giuseppe Balducci (eds.), *Prospects and Challenges for EU-China Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*, Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010, 262pp, €44.50, Paperback.

Benjamin Barton\*

EU-China relations have a history that stretches over 35 years. After the European Community's diplomatic recognition of Beijing in 1975, bilateral ties have increased to the point where it is difficult to find areas that have no institutional arrangement or accord between the two. The depth and form of relations have surpassed the expectations set in the 1985 agreement on trade and economic cooperation to such a degree that both partners expressed, in 2007, the desire to revamp that agreement with an all-encompassing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that will better reflect their level of interdependence. However, negotiations have proven to be a complex affair and, as of yet, no real breakthrough seems to have been made. To a certain extent, this lack of progress has been matched by the lack of academic attention drawn upon this topic. Therefore, there are surprisingly few works that have sought to better comprehend this current impasse, which could be crucial for the future of EU-China relations.

In this respect, Professor Jing Men and Giuseppe Balducci's edited volume serves as a timely analysis. In effect, this book not only provides the explanation to the inertia visible in EU-China relations, but also offers credible solutions, across a wide-range of fields and sectors. The volume, by covering topics as far afield as human rights, Corporate Social Responsibility or textile trade disputes, demonstrates that the two sides are inter-locked into a seemingly endless negotiation process, where agreement on one issue no longer guarantees success across the board. The negotiations, as clearly explained in the book's introduction, signify that each issue on the agenda cannot individually be taken for granted – the total package (both economic and political) has to be accepted by both sides.

In addition, this further outlines the innovative character of this volume. The PCA, to this day, remains a mystery for all those not involved in the negotiation process. As a replacement for the successful 1985 Trade and Economic Cooperation agreement, which has allowed for the exponential growth in bilateral ties, the PCA is perceived as fitting the modern-day needs of this bilateral partnership. The lack of transparency is not aided by the secrecy of the talks, compounded by the little information provided by the two parties. Therefore, this is where the origins of the book's added-value are to be found. Moreover, at present, this work provides the most updated version of academic analysis on the EU-China PCA deadlock, thus presenting a welcome addition to the growing literature on EU-China relations. This

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\* Benjamin Barton is Research Assistant for the InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of EU-China Relations, College of Europe, Bruges.

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innovative character is furthered by the numerous suggested solutions, found throughout the book, which are provided to the current political obstacles besetting the PCA negotiations. Thanks to the diversity of fields covered and to the diversity of opinions and expertise (whether Chinese or European), this volume provides practical potential remedies across a wide array of subject-matters, thus leaving the readers with the impression that an agreement between the EU and China is still possible, despite the minefield of intersecting areas present on the negotiating table (i.e. human rights and intellectual property rights).

This book is not, however, solely destined for the PCA negotiators. To the contrary, it is aimed at a wide academic audience, stretching from undergraduate to postgraduate students, researchers and specialists. More than simply providing *avant-garde* analysis and credible solutions to short-term negotiation blockages, this volume is also a timely reminder of the necessity for the EU and China to push forward with their common objectives, by putting aside the differences currently undermining the relationship. The volume is useful in this respect, as many of the different chapters provide detailed or theoretical explanations on the internal or external variables preventing progress.

As aforementioned, the composition of this volume reflects the variety of scope and the slightly *ad hoc* nature of the negotiations: there is no predefined structure to the book as with the negotiations, yet each individual topic cannot be dissociated from the other. After the foreword and introduction have set the necessary complimentary basis needed for the reader's comprehension of the context to the PCA negotiations, Chapter 1 differs in relation to the ensuing chapters, by acting as a foreseer. This chapter tests the different possible scenarios for the evolution of EU-China relations in conjunction with the progress made during the negotiations, ranging from status quo to outright confrontation or true partnership. A valuable addition to the volume, it sets the tone for the remainder of the book and underlines the necessity of reaching a mutually beneficial agreement. Chapter 2 pursues with this introductory tone by integrating analysis on the current and prospective legal foundations of the PCA.

The following seven chapters cover, as previously exposed, a wide variety of issues, each of paramount significance to the negotiations. They concern labour standards, intellectual property rights, bilateral investment treaties, trade policy, climate change and human rights. Even though this may not encompass the totality of the problematic areas, this is a fair reflection of the most crucial stumbling blocks present in current-day EU-China bilateral relations. This book's close reflection to the negotiation process in itself, is interestingly reinforced by the fact that these topics also rule out the separation of the purely economic and legal aspects to the more politically-minded issues – which, above all, constitutes the primary spoke in the wheels in terms of the PCA's agreement and ratification. The final chapter provides an interesting analogy to the current state of play, by establishing a comparison between the EU's PCA negotiations with China and Portugal's separate PCA with China. As the closing chapter to the book, it serves its purpose by reminding the readers not only of the importance for the EU, in



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itself, to conclude the PCA with China, but also to ensure that this agreement is mutually beneficial.

All in all, the presentation of this volume not only brings readers closer to the negotiation process, but simultaneously exposes how far both actors have come in building a profound relationship that encompasses virtually all aspects of public policy. It is the objectiveness of this book which serves this volume best: only by overcoming respective bias, will negotiations towards a truly win-win situation be made possible.



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## CALL FOR PAPERS

### International Conference: "The EU, the US and China: Towards the New International Order?"

22-23 April 2011, College of Europe, Bruges, Belgium

International Conference organised by the InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of European Union-China Relations, Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium, on Friday and Saturday, 22-23 April 2011.

Several decades ago, when Japan was a rising power in Asia, people talked about the EU-US-Japan Triad. The international situation is changing so rapidly in the 21st century that China is now regarded as an emerging power whose rise will have a huge impact on international relations. Indicated in its title, the conference focuses on the latest changes in the world and examines how important the interactions between the EU, the US and China are to the future of global governance. This conference addresses this vital issue and invites participants to exchange their research results by answering the following questions: How do the three players interact with each other in the international political and economic organisations? Do they regard each other as competitors or partners in strategic and security issues? What are their models of development and how do they promote such models in the developing world? Do norms and culture matter in their relations? These topics are based on multidisciplinary research, which includes studies in the field of international relations, economy, security, law and culture. The conference will bring together the European, American and Chinese perspectives on these issues in order to foster greater exchanges of objective analysis on these developments at hand.

In order to address these questions, the InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of European Union-China Relations at the College of Europe will organise, on the 22 and 23 April 2011, a two-day international conference on the future implications for this most crucial and interdependent international relationship. It is open to European, Chinese and American scholars, Ph.D. researchers, journalists, policy practitioners and NGO representatives. This international conference will offer the possibility to examine the dynamics of the EU-US-China relationship and which impacts this has on global governance and international affairs at large.

We therefore call for papers on the development of this trilateral dynamic that will contribute to the debate with original research from European, Chinese or American perspectives. Contributions will be presented in plenary panel sessions and should cover one or more of the following dimensions from the perspective of EU-US-China relations:

- Multilateral Forums: G2, G3, G20
- The EU, the US, China and the UN



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- Geostrategic and Security Considerations
- The EU, the US, China and the WTO
- The EU, the US, China and the International Political Economy
- The EU, the US, China and Models of Development
- The EU, the US and China: Do Norms Matter?

The organisers will select three papers for each dimension ideally presenting the respective European, Chinese and American perspectives. There is no participation fee and the College will cover meals during the Conference.

The conference aims at producing one edited book after the conference. Apart from the paper contributors, high-level key-note speakers will address the trilateral relationship from the European, Chinese and American viewpoints.

Please submit paper proposals of approximately 500 words along with a brief CV to both Professor Jing Men ([jing.men@coleurope.eu](mailto:jing.men@coleurope.eu)) and Mr Benjamin Barton ([benjamin.barton@coleurope.eu](mailto:benjamin.barton@coleurope.eu)) no later than 15 December 2010. All proposals will be reviewed and the organisers will confirm acceptance by 31 December 2010. Participants are expected to provide complete copies of their papers, which should be around 8,000 words, in electronic form, by 1 March 2011.

Contact information:

InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of European Union-China Relations  
EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies  
College of Europe  
Dijver 11  
BE-8000 Bruges  
Belgium  
Fax: +32-50-477250  
Tel. +32-50-477.258 / 257  
[jing.men@coleurope.eu](mailto:jing.men@coleurope.eu)  
[benjamin.barton@coleurope.eu](mailto:benjamin.barton@coleurope.eu)