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# An Assessment of EU-China and EU-Japan Political and Security Relations :

## Moving the ‘Strategic Partnerships’ Beyond the Rhetoric Trap

Just Castillo Iglesias\*

### Abstract

The European Union’s (EU) relevance in East-Asian political and security issues, having been developed for the last two decades, remains limited and low-profile. Keeping focus on assessing the EU’s ‘Strategic Partnerships’ with the People’s Republic of China (China) and Japan from the aspect of political and security relations, this article will first discuss the different elements leading to the parallel development of a series of gaps between the objectives set for cooperation and their materialization into actual action or joint-policy; and secondly, address the question of whether due to the lack of a European ‘umbrella’ strategy for East-Asia and the fact that both Strategic Partnerships are dealt with in isolation, the EU’s involvement in the region is most likely to remain low unless a different standpoint is adopted.

Furthermore, and considering the nature and causes of such gaps, this article will discuss the upcoming challenges in the analysis of the EU’s engagement with East Asia today, which can be summarized in two main aspects: first, that the perceptions that the EU generates in each of the Partners should not be considered a minor aspect of such relations but a crucial one to understand its dynamics and complexities; and secondly, the fact that Japan-EU and China-EU Strategic Partnerships might be better understood through the lens of inter-regionalism instead of being seen as ‘normal’ bilateral relations, as is the case with most of the existing literature.

**Keywords** : EU, CFSP, Japan, China, PRC, Strategic, Partnership, rhetoric, security

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## INTRODUCTION

With the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) with the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the later formulation of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003, through which the Member States articulated a common vision for the EU as an international actor, and the most recent creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has been consolidating its emerging role as a global political and security actor.

The EU's Foreign Policy vision is based on the promotion of effective multilateralism and of what the Union considers as universal public goods for the objective of human security: good governance, integration in a wide range of international organizations, fora and regimes, respect for human rights, democracy, promotion of peace and development. For the advancement along these objectives, the EU primarily adopts a value-based diplomacy, i.e. the promotion of European values as universally applicable and desirable, making use of conditionality mechanisms, most notably with the incentive of aid in its relations with the ACP<sup>1)</sup> countries and with the prospect of membership in the case of its neighborhood. In relation to third countries considered of high relevance, the EU envisages so-called 'Strategic Partnerships', with the same objective of consolidating its bid for effective multilateralism and an institution- and norm-based international community. The term 'Strategic Partnership', due to its political character, does not have on the EU side a settled established definition and it differs case by case. However, it is understood that it implies the engagement with third countries in terms of equality in order to jointly address and have close collaboration on issues of common and global interest, maintaining a positive and permanent dialogue in all dimensions of foreign policy, systematic policy coordination, establishment of joint initiatives, et cetera. Moreover, such 'Strategic Partnerships' are considered by the EU as vital elements to implement its foreign and security policy vision: preventing conflict, promoting security and development (Odgaard & Biscop, 2007, pp. 54, 60).

Nevertheless, and in spite of the advances in terms of effectiveness and clarity achieved with the Lisbon Treaty and EEAS, the EU's foreign policy continues to be formulated through a complex *sui generis* mechanism in which the decision power is largely at the hands of the Member States and consensuses are required. Member States have agreed in the need for a more coherent EU foreign policy, and in the need to solve the punctual difficulties to reach common agreements on crucial policy issues.<sup>2)</sup> However, the CFSP continues to be predominantly an intergovernmental policy instead of a supranational one, requiring the agreement of the Member States to determine the EU's stand vis-à-vis international issues, rather than this

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1) African, Caribbean and Pacific states (ACP).

2) A recent illustrative example of the difficulty to reach a common EU voice on foreign policy issues can be found in the divergence of standpoints among EU Member States vis-à-vis the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. While Member States such as the UK, Italy or Spain supported the US-led coalition, Germany, France and the Nordic countries strongly opposed giving support to any intervention without the UN Security Council's mandate; meaning that no official EU position was reached.

being decided within the EU institutions properly. Despite this, the EU's foreign policy continues to be motivated by a twofold objective. The first, of an internal EU nature, obeys to the logic that effectively developing relations with State and non-State actors globally contributes to the consolidation and the progressive formation of an EU 'own' standpoint and character in global affairs. The second, of an external nature, is a response to the rapidly changing global balances of power, progressively less Western-dominated, by which the EU sees the need for seeking partners and engaging actively with relevant actors across the globe in order to consolidate its role as a global player.

In the case of East-Asia, the EU's involvement and relevance in this region's political and security issues remains relatively weak and low-profile. However, this being a region identified by the Union as a priority given its unprecedented rapid changes, the emergence of China as a major regional and global power and its economic dynamism, the EU has established 'Strategic Partnerships' with both China and Japan. The importance of these two countries in global affairs is self-evident, not only because both are among the major economies in the world, but also due to their presence in international organizations, fora, and multilateral institutions.

Contrasting with the EU's relations with other strategic partners (most notably the US and Canada), the political and security relations with both China and Japan have been constantly characterized by a recurrent gap between the discourse or rhetoric level, i.e. the objectives envisioned for such Strategic Partnership; and the outcomes, i.e. the actual materialization of such objectives into concrete action or policy. Besides the *sui generis* character of the EU's CFSP, the emergence of such gaps in EU-China and EU-Japan relations needs to be assessed considering the different characteristics of each of these partners, the complexity of intra East-Asian relations, identities, perceptions and formation of preferences and interests, as crucial determinants for the course and future of the Partnerships. Moreover, the peculiarities of the CFSP call for considering analyzing the EU's relations with these two countries as part of a larger network of inter-regional relations rather than as 'conventional' bilateral relations. Considering this, the subsequent chapters of this paper will, first, review the historical formation and current state-of-affairs of the EU-China and EU-Japan Strategic Partnerships, and secondly, assess the role that perceptions, objectives and expectations as well as structures play in offering explanations of the EU's low profile in East Asian affairs.

## **EU-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

The EU and China have maintained bilateral relations for over three decades. Following the common pattern observable in the EU's relations with third States, contacts were initiated by an increased interest in enhancing bilateral trade and economic ties, while political-and security-related aspects were excluded from any bilateral dialogue. In the context of the end of the Cold War, the EU did not have such a particularly strong interest in

deepening its relations with China as in continuing to develop its relations with Japan or other Western partners. Nevertheless, with the progressively increasing importance of China in the international arena after end of the Cold War coupled with a growing interest in multilateralism fruit of the new context and ‘multipolar moment’ that emerged with the collapse of the USSR, the EU helped ease out Chinese isolation and initiated the move towards a more comprehensive, deep and far-reaching collaboration with China.

The first decade of EU-China relations was limited to commercial and economic issues under the framework of the 1978 and 1985 trade agreements. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 the relations worsened considerably, leading to significant political stalemates which would repeat with the missile tests in the Taiwan Strait in 1995 and 1996. In such context, the EU sought to reinforce and emphasize the diplomatic dimension of its ties with China, outlined in the EC’s Communications “A long-term policy for China-Europe relations” of 1995 and “Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China” in 1998. These efforts on the EU side led to a significant development of the political relations and ultimately meant a functional expansion of the policy-areas and issues covered in EU-China relations, from merely commercial and business issues to political and military areas, materializing in the annual Bilateral Summit, subsequent diplomatic visits, the Ministerial Troika meetings,<sup>3)</sup> the Human Rights Dialogue framework as well as the establishment of sectorial working groups and dialogues in over 20 subject areas. After this new bilateral engagement, the punitive measures initially adopted, however, soon were deemed temporary and lifted, with the exception of the arms embargo that remains in place to date. Yet, despite the positive impact that this turn has had in the overall course of EU-China relations, the renewed EU diplomatic assertiveness has not been always welcome by the Chinese side, whose official line has considered the EU’s approach to be, in some occasions, an intromission in Chinese internal affairs as it will be discussed later in this chapter.

Since 2003, after setting up an agenda for pushing forward and deepening their political relations, the EU and China mutually recognized each-other as ‘comprehensive strategic partners’. From the EU perspective, the envisaged objectives for the Strategic Partnership with China are defined in the following five points:

1. engaging China further in the international community through an upgraded political dialogue;
2. supporting China’s transition to an open society based upon the rule of law and respect for human rights and democracy;
3. integrating China further in the world economy by bringing it more fully into the world trading system and by supporting the process of economic and social reform under way in the country;
4. making better use of existing European financial resources; and

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3) The Troika Meeting is generally attended on the EU side by the President of the EU General Affairs and Foreign Relations Council (Foreign Minister of the Member State holding the rotating Council Presidency), the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy; and by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs.

5. raising the EU's profile in China (European Commission, 2003).

In its updated Communication of 2003, the European Commission focused its action towards China in developing 'shared responsibilities in promoting global governance', since, according to the Commission, China could play a fundamental role in reconciling the interests of developing and developed countries, and in promoting peace and stability in Asia (ibid.).

In regard to the strategic dialogue, the EU has designated as well as series of ambitious core areas in which it aims to develop joint action with China. Such issue areas are:

1. human rights concerns;
2. combating illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings;
3. combating organized crime;
4. regional issues (reconciliation between the two Koreas, cooperation with regard to Burma, negotiated solution to the territorial claims in the South China Sea, the Taiwan issue);
5. disarmament and limiting arms proliferation and exports; and
6. promoting multilateral dialogue on security (preventing conflicts at regional and international level).

While this gives the Strategic Partnership a solid basis to develop, some of these issues are far beyond the acting capacity of the EU in Asia (case of Taiwan and the Koreas), and beyond the interest of China in its foreign action, which is strongly positioned against intervention in what it considers other countries' internal affairs (cases of Burma and the Koreas).

From the EU perspective, the engagement with China is seen positively, and the country is not perceived as a threat since both do not have opposed strategic interests (Scott, 2007, p. 18). However, arguably, the relations with China pose for the EU a notable dual challenge. On the one hand, given its geopolitical and economic importance, and as a major global player, particularly taking into account China's Permanent Membership at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a core institution for the effective multilateralism and rule-based global order that the EU aims at promoting, China is not only one more among third-country partners for the EU, but one with whom a fully functional 'Strategic Partnership' is *conditio sine qua non* for consolidating the EU's global actor role as well as for the achievement of the EU's foreign policy vision of effective multilateralism (Odgaard & Biscop, 2007, p. 61). On the other hand, among the Strategic Partners, China is the one that most directly challenges the EU's norm-based diplomacy and the universal validity of European values.

Arguably, divergences along these points and the fundamental difference in values give place to misperceptions, gaps of mutual understanding, and to a great extent become obstacles for moving the

Strategic Partnership towards more action-oriented collaboration. On the one hand, this problem is widely recognized by Chinese academia, who in numerous occasions have determined that the EU should “give up its ambition to ‘teach China’ how to behave,”<sup>4)</sup> stop aiming at imposing European political values and system to China, and that the EU must “stop clinging to its Eurocentric concepts on ideological and political issues such as human rights, humanitarianism and ‘universal values’”(Cui, 2010, p. 397; Ding, 2009). On the other hand, the EU’s diplomatic mission to China recognizes the Chinese advances in areas such as human rights or environmental protection although it perceives that such advances are an evidence of the fact that China is progressively converging towards the European values.<sup>5)</sup>

From the Chinese perspective as well, the Strategic Partnership with the EU is a crucial element to implement the Chinese ambition of multilateralism, aimed at creating a peaceful, stable and prosperous environment in which to develop, update its capabilities, reap the benefits of globalization and ultimately realize its potential as global power (Odgaard & Biscop, 2007, p. 68; Zhang, 2009). For China, the EU is seen as an attractive alternative to the US, and as a valuable partner with whom to counterbalance American hegemony (Zhou, 2009). Moreover, as China remains a developing country, the Strategic Partnership with the EU is seen as a priority option in the fields of scientific and technological collaboration, as well as to learn models of regional development and convergence.

In terms of security and political relations, the Chinese ‘EU Policy Paper’ of 2003 discloses, at least in terms of rhetoric, that China regards a high potential in the bilateral collaboration:

The common ground between China and the EU far outweighs their disagreements. Both China and the EU stand for democracy in international relations and an enhanced role of the UN. Both are committed to combating international terrorism and promoting sustainable development through poverty elimination and environmental protection endeavors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2003).

Developing the Strategic Partnership with the EU, moreover, is seen by China as an opportunity to convey the image of being a peaceful ‘civilian power’ as the EU, advocating for dialogue, consultation and rule-based mechanisms for conflict resolution rather than making use of power politics. Nevertheless, the Chinese commitment to multilateralism, preeminent role of the UN and non-intervention is more determined by its historical and current context as an international actor than its official rhetoric conveys (Li, 2007, pp. 48-52). Historically, China has come a long way in order to be gradually accepted as a responsible global player, and

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4) The prevalence of such vision, which is widely represented in Chinese literature regarding EU-China relations was corroborated and acknowledged to the author in an interview at the Department of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing in March 2012.

5) As acknowledged by a High-Level EU official at the European Commission’s Delegation to China, in an interview in March 2012.

this is an image it aims at maintaining and improving. Moreover, China does not count today on the necessary technology and military capabilities to present effective opposition to the US preeminent position in (East) Asia, consequently opposing hegemonic stands.

According to this vision as a valuable partner in multilateralism, China has long supported the process of European integration and development of the EU's personality as a global actor (Zhang, 2009). China aims at the EU to develop a genuinely European foreign and common security policy that is largely independent from the transatlantic relations and from the US. This fact has revealed itself most clearly during the episode in 2004-05 of the proposal to lift the EU arms embargo imposed on China as a result of the Tiananmen Square events of 1989 in exchange for recognized advancements by China in matter of human rights.<sup>6)</sup> Despite that no internal EU consensus was reached on the matter, with the UK and France as major Member States in favor of lifting the ban and Germany among others, opposing it; it was the suspicions and disapproval arisen in Washington and Tokyo what ultimately motivated the continuation of the ban, and gave place to a certain Chinese disenchantment with the EU, which was perceived as unable to maintain an independent stand from the US interests, or to effectively reach a consensus among its Member States within the complex intergovernmental system of decision-making in the EU's CFSP (Liu, 2007, p. 121), what China has categorized as 'the flaws' of the EU as a foreign policy actor (Ding, 2009).

Since the establishment of the EU-China Strategic Partnership in 2003, however, progress has certainly been made. The Strategic Dialogue framework has given place to some concrete results, such as the 2004 Joint Declaration on Non-Proliferation and Arms Control, and also upon the basis of the existing dialogue, joint anti-piracy actions in Somali waters are being carried out successfully under the framework laid by the growing common interest in enhancing cooperation in maritime security issues (Larik & Weiler, 2011). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the value of the Strategic Partnership continues to be mainly expressed in paper rather than in concrete action. A turn towards pragmatism on the basis of the dialogues and policy adjustments must be undertaken in order to be able to call this bilateral relation a true Strategic Partnership. At the same time, the fundamental differences between China and the EU remain in place. Besides the most problematic and obvious differences in regard to human rights and democracy, not only in the international arena but also in their application to China properly; fundamental differences still exist in the way that both the EU and China perceive the multilateralism, the preeminence of the UN System, and the rule of law. In other words, the Chinese conceptualization of these does not accept the universality of freedom and democracy values (as understood by the EU and the West) as the moral core of the UN System to rule the conduct of States (Li, 2007). To a certain extent, the Chinese strong bid for multilateralism and sovereignty does not only obey to its conception of international affairs, but also to its history as a global actor and its

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6) Including the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976.



current limitations and domestic challenges. This fact reveals itself very clearly in the Chinese disregard of conditionality policies towards authoritarian regimes in Africa and Asia in the name of non-intervention and absolute respect for sovereignty.

Conclusively, the EU and China have successfully initiated the consolidation of their Strategic Partnership, which is manifested primarily in a well-developed and extensive framework of political dialogues in over 20 issue areas. Some more discreet advances have been made in terms of policy materialization or joint action, although the need for a pragmatic turn is recognized in both sides (Chen, 2010; Zhang, 2009). Nevertheless, considering that China and the EU do not have any directly opposed strategic interest, and that both have mutually recognized the other as a key partner for the consolidation of their role as global players, further advancements in EU-China bilateral relations are expected to come.

## **EU-JAPAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

The formalization of EU-Japanese relations takes place with the 1991 Hague Declaration, despite bilateral contacts, meetings and ad-hoc agreements had been taking place before. As well as with the case of China, EU-Japan relations during the Cold War had been dominated by economic and trade issues, mainly disputes, and responded to what scholar Paul J. Cardwell described as a time when “[in Japan] those who did pay attention to the EU did not see it as a preventative measure against further war or reinforcement against communism, but as a means by which European countries could exclude Japanese imports” (Cardwell, 2004, p. 12). Moreover, the end of the Cold War stimulated in Japan the pursuit of an alternative focus to its security and foreign policies, complementary to its interests within the US-Japan security alliance, but not substitutive of it (Mykal, 2009, pp. 2-4). This alternative focus was intended to allow Japan to reflect its compromise with security in a broad sense, at the same time that it would allow the country to maintain its Constitutional antimilitarism and to continue benefiting from the protection granted by the US. Also in Europe, the limited political dimension of the EEC at the time, its primarily economic character and the lack of foreign and security capacities laid the conditions in which Japan was being seen as too distant to engage in cooperation. Moreover, the low profile that Japan had been maintaining since the end of World War II on its international relations did not contribute to reversing this situation.

Since their formalization in 1991, the Japan-EU partnership has been outlined in two policy documents: from 1991 to 2001 with the Hague Declaration, and from 2001 until today with the so-called Action Plan. In a context of euphoria propitiated by the end of the Cold War, Europe and Japan recognized each other as ‘natural’ and ‘strategic’ partners and stated their renewed interest and ambition for pushing cooperation forward and expanding it into political and security issues (Berkofsky, 2007; Reiterer, 2006). Arguably, the Hague Declaration of 1991 can be merely seen as a framework document acknowledging the ambitions for the

further development of the cooperation between the ECC, its Member States and Japan, as well as institutionalizing a series of meetings which had been taking place before in an ad-hoc manner.<sup>7)</sup> Besides that, some of the provisions of the Joint Declaration set the path for what has developed into the existing security dialogue and cooperation between Japan and the EU.<sup>8)</sup> Nevertheless, the Hague Declaration did not attract the interest of neither the media nor of the academic community, and it became soon the object of criticism by its excess of grandiloquence and poor concretion (Berkofsky, 2007, p. 10).

Despite this, perhaps the most valuable aspect the Joint Declaration of 1991 is its reference in its preamble to the shared values and aspirations<sup>9)</sup> of the EEC and Japan, as the motivation for deepening their cooperation and developing a comprehensive partnership, a motive that has been invoked repeatedly in the rhetoric surrounding EU-Japan relations (Cardwell, 2004; Hook, 2000).

In 2001, Japan and the EU adopted an Action Plan named “Shaping our Common Future,” updating the Joint Declaration of 1991. The Action Plan envisioned a ‘New Decade of EU- Japan relations’, and listed potential new actions and areas of cooperation in more than a 100 points, divided into four topical areas: 1) promotion of peace and security, 2) strengthening trade and economic partnership, 3) coping with the new global and social challenges, and 4) bringing together their people and cultures (EU - Japan Summit, 2001).

However, also in the case of the Action Plan, critical voices appeared rapidly pointing out the ‘shopping list’ format of the declaration, as described by Berkofsky (2007, p. 10), and once again, the excess of grandiloquent rhetoric<sup>10)</sup> and overly ambitious objectives in contrast to scarce mentioning of how to achieve the outlined cooperation objectives (Hook, Gilson et al., 2005, p. 295). While not denying the truth of such claims, the Action Plan supposed a step forward from the modest results of the 1991 Joint Declaration in defining in a narrower sense the issues and areas in which cooperation was possible or desired, despite the excessive extension of the list, such as the promotion of Human Security and human rights, development, environmental protection, among others (Cardwell, 2004; Hook, Gilson et al., 2011), issues identified primarily along the shared identities and capacities as Civilian Powers (Mayer, 2008; Mykal, 2009).

Security cooperation has been the least developed dimension of the Partnership, having mostly been articulated along the Civilian Power identities and capacities, focusing primarily on non-traditional aspects of security and channeling primarily through multilateral fora given the preference for informal settings and lack

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7) One annual Summit, an annual meeting between the Commission and the Japanese government at ministerial level, and a twice-a-year consultation between the Foreign Ministers of the EU and the Member of the Commission for External Relations plus the Japanese Foreign Minister (Troika meeting)

8) Covering issues such as supporting the strengthening of the UN role or the joint support to Cambodia its efforts to resolve the issues related to small arms in the country.

9) These values are the common attachment to freedom, democracy, the rule of law and human rights; common attachment to market principles, free trade and development of a prosperous world economy; acknowledgement of the increasing close ties in a context of growing worldwide interdependence; need for more international cooperation; common ambitions for security, peace and stability in the world; acknowledgment of the importance of strengthening their dialogue in order to make a joint contribution towards safeguarding peace in the world, setting a stable international order according to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and taking up the challenges that the international community is facing; among others.

10) As an example of such rhetoric, the Action Plan was envisioned as a “millennium partnership between Brussels and Tokyo.”

of institutionalized mechanisms in this partnership. It has been suggested that this has contributed to the development of a comprehensive security dialogue which however lacks visibility (Mykal, 2009). This is understandable considering the limited security personality of the EU, as it is with the case of the EU-China Partnership (Hill, 1993; Smith, 2005), the Constitutional limitations of Japanese defense policy, and its strategic reliance on US-Japan Security Treaty<sup>11)</sup> for its national defense. Diverse authors have argued that this trend is bound to change in the coming years as both parties' security relevance is set to increase further: in Europe, the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, alongside with the expansion of NATO, has set the basis for a stronger and more coherent foreign and security policy; while in Japan, the debate on the normalization of the country's military and security capabilities continues to be a hot topic in the agenda with increasing popular support notwithstanding the continued support to the pacifist clauses in the Constitution (Inoguchi, 2005; Lopez Vidal, 2006; Oros, 2008). Thus, security cooperation between the EU and Japan has maintained a low profile, and it has rarely if ever become headline material. Nevertheless, as suggested by Mykal, besides cases of cooperation within multilateral fora together with successful examples of cooperation in post-conflict areas, it is the security dialogue what remains the most important dimension of EU-Japan security relations.

The most notable examples of EU-Japanese cooperation have been, to name a few, the collaboration within the North Korean Energy program KEDO,<sup>12)</sup> alongside with South Korea, the US and Australia, a program envisioned to give the North Korean regime the possibility to demonstrate its goodwill by taking part in an international cooperation project,<sup>13)</sup> which at the same time granted Pyongyang the exceptional possibility to alleviate the negative effects of its energy shortage thanks to the reactor in construction.<sup>14)</sup> The shared broad conception of security has also given place to the acknowledgement of compatible interests that bridge economic, developmental and security policies, as illustrated by the convergence of interests between the EU's neighborhood Policy and Japan's Arch of Freedom and Prosperity, having both a comparable geographic coverage and the aim of consolidating democracy and promoting economic growth as well as greater integration in the international community of former Soviet Republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia (MoFA of Japan, 2006). Moreover, Japan and the EU undertook complementary actions towards promoting Chinese and Russian memberships to the WTO (Hook, et al., 2005, p. 197), given that the integration in multilateral institutions of these two countries, and especially of their shared neighbor Russia, is a crucial

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11) Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan.

12) The KEDO framework was established in 1995 with the objective of constructing a light-water reactor (LWR) in North Korean territory with the construction team and the security control being provided by the international community, as well as the technology and the supervision technicians.

13) KEDO supposed also an opportunity to increase international trust towards the regime, given that the construction of the reactor under international supervision eliminated the concerns rising from the development of the North Korean nuclear program and the country's ambitions for nuclear weapons.

14) The KEDO program was cancelled in 2007 due to Pyongyang's unwillingness to collaborate. At the time, KEDO was maintained as an informative platform, while the debate on nuclear-related issues (both energetic and military) shifted to the Six-Party Talks, also stranded later, but of which the EU was not a member Hook, G. D., Gilson, J., et al. (2005). *Japan's International Relations* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge, KEDO. (2007). About Us: Our History. Retrieved 16 January, 2012, from [http://www.kedo.org/au\\_history.asp](http://www.kedo.org/au_history.asp).

issue for both parties.

The security dialogue between the EU and Japan since the Joint Declaration of 1991 has also given place in multiple occasions to manifested mutual support, either towards concrete action on the ground in post-conflict zones, especially in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina; or towards offering mutual support to political initiatives and proposals within multilateral for a such as the manifestation of mutual support for the establishment of a Palestinian State as a roadmap for peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict, in East Timor and in Africa (Mykal, 2009, pp. 8-22).<sup>15)</sup> The close collaboration in the Western Balkans constituted one of the basic pillars in the consolidation and further development of the bilateral security cooperation.

Put briefly, two of the most crucial issues that shape EU-Japan security relations are deeply rooted in their compromise for human security, and are, firstly, the shared compromise with peace-keeping and peace-building operations, which have materialized in common support for NGOs, organization of symposia, etc., and secondly, post-conflict nation-building, which have given place to cooperation both in Africa and in Afghanistan (Hook, et al., 2005, p. 334). Besides, Japan and the EU have developed closer cooperation in promoting measures to tackle broader aspects of security, such as measures to palliate the negative effects of climate change.<sup>16)</sup>

In summary: notwithstanding the multiple limitations and difficulties in terms of visibility and materialization of Japanese-EU cooperation, it can nevertheless be argued that the dimension of security is the aspect of EU-Japan relations that has experienced a greater change in the last decade, and that it has become an aspect which has progressively been given more attention in the bilateral relations. The completion in 2011 of the decade of foreseen validity for the 2001 Action Plan has opened the debate on the future of the strategic partnership at the time of the renewal of the basic partnership guidelines. Amidst this debate, both EU and Japanese policymakers have pointed out the need to give the partnership a pragmatic turn, in order the actual dynamics into a more solid and agile cooperation,<sup>17)</sup> a fact that confirms that policymakers acknowledge the criticism received from the academic community during the previous two decades. In this regard, the 2011 Bilateral Summit already identified the need for pragmatism in order to “take the partnership to a higher level and to strengthen cooperation in order to better face common challenges,” and identified the following four points as the most important axes for the next decade of cooperation, with two of the main issues at stake

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15) During the 1990s, Japan's peace consolidation policies played an important role in the Western Balkans. Moreover, beside the governments, Japanese and European NGOs maintained close cooperation in the region, providing support to development, as well as technical and financial support. Scholars have argued that Japan's strategy with its participation in the Western Balkans responded to the will of promoting its own conception of security and at the same time, consolidating the country's image as a reliable partner in Europe. It is through this participation, thus, that Japan obtained the condition of observer in the Council of Europe and became a member of the KEDO framework through the EU's invitation

16) High-level meetings regarding environmental issues take place at a yearly basis, and since the 2007 EU-Japan Summit, both parties have taken the compromise to continue holding environment-related consultations at a regular basis, ad-hoc meetings if required, as well as to intensify cooperation in order to establish an effective post-2012 framework against climate change Japan-EU Summit. (2007). Implementation of the EU-Japan Action Plan. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/japan/sum06\\_07/2007\\_annex\\_action\\_plan.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/japan/sum06_07/2007_annex_action_plan.pdf)

17) In this sense, the new Partnership guidelines shall not aim at being as overreaching as the current Action Plan, but at formulating more concrete goals with greater possibilities of materializing in concrete joint action.

directly in relation with security (in its broad conception), and the need for mutual engagement in key security concerns such as the North Korean or Iranian threats is openly recognized.

- [Defining the] next steps for the further strengthening of EU-Japan political and economic relations;
- In light of the experience of the accident at Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, working together to promote nuclear safety around the world<sup>18)</sup>;
- Other major global challenges, including economy, finance and trade issues, climate change and the environment and energy security; and
- Key regional and international issues, including the latest situation in North Africa/Middle East, North Korea and Iran (European Commission, 2011).

## **GAPS AND CHALLENGES FOR ANALYSIS: RHETORIC AND STRUCTURE**

### **(1) PERCEPTION GAPS**

As mentioned in the first chapter of this paper, the EU's involvement in East Asian political and security issues has remained low-profile in the two decades since the formalization of cooperation, and the Strategic Partnerships with both China and Japan have been characterized by recurrent gaps between the rhetoric and the joint-action or policy materialization levels, that have been recognized widely in the existing literature.

The causes that explain the existence of such gaps are complex and mutually interdependent in the majority of cases. Therefore, in order to have a clearer understanding, the author proposes a tri-dimensional framework of analysis, taking into account 1) the perceptions level, i.e. the perceptions that the EU generates in China and Japan and vice-versa, and how these actors mutually identify each-other as potential cooperation partners; 2) the outcomes level, i.e. what is actually achieved within the framework of the Strategic Partnerships; and 3) the structural level, i.e. the institutional/bureaucratic conditioning aspects within which the relations develop (see table 1).

On the perceptions level is arguably where most notable differences exist. From the literature review, coupled with impressions collected through interviews with officials, and focusing first on the EU-China Strategic Partnership, the EU official position identifies China as an influential and non-threatening global power, with whom cooperation is actively sought as a core point towards supporting European ambitions for effective multilateralism, particularly considering the country's condition as Permanent Member of the UNSC. Moreover, the EU identifies many shared interests with China, particularly along the terms of global

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18) Thus, despite the major shock that the March 11 earthquake supposed, and the centrality it took during the Summit, it becomes evident that there is a tendency towards defining more immediately achievable objectives, which are of great importance for both parties, and along which cooperation can be less problematic compared to other issues where common interest is less clear.

Table 1 : Variables in explaining gaps in EU-China and EU-Japan relations.

|  | EU-CHINA   | EU-JAPAN   |
|--|--|--|
| Perception (from EU)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China is seen as a major power / very influential partner</li> <li>• China a peaceful partner</li> <li>• A key partner to fulfill the EU's multilateralism aspirations (e.g. PRC is a permanent m. at the UNSC)</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of many shared interests</li> <li>• China deficient in democracy/human rights: should converge towards European values</li> <li>• Integrate China as a responsible partner globally</li> <li>• Radically different values?</li> <li>• Dependence from China? (EU/Eurozone crisis)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japan as a like-minded partner.</li> <li>• Value-based cooperation: civilian powers, promotion democracy, peace, Human Rights.</li> <li>• Common goals identified, but different approach?</li> <li>• Focus on US/Asia (relative indifference to Europe)</li> <li>• Constrains prevent diversification of its foreign policy</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of the EU policy-making and structure</li> <li>• Preference for bilateral relations with EU Member States</li> </ul>                                    |
| Perception (from CN/JP)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The EU is a valuable partner for China's ambitions of counterbalancing the US position in Asia and multilateralism globally</li> <li>• Myriad common objectives identified</li> <li>• China has supported strongly the European integration process (interest in EU becoming a balancing independent player)</li> <li>• EU complex entity / many issues preferred to address bilaterally with Member States</li> <li>• Perception that the EU's policy of value-diplomacy is counterproductive. EU as 'imposing' its values on China.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alike and compatible values, capabilities and interests, but with certain clashes: EU excessively focused on norm-exporting / moralistic policy</li> <li>• Most efforts vested in China partnership. Certain clashes with Japan's strategy of hedging China.</li> <li>• Certain difficulty in Partnerships among equals (without conditionality)</li> <li>• Lack of a clear Asia strategy / the partnership with China arises misunderstandings (US plays a role)</li> </ul>  |
| Cooperation outcomes   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A comprehensive network of bilateral dialogue on myriad issues: including Human Rights and climate</li> <li>• Problems have also occurs within multilateral fora</li> <li>• Very limited joint policy (notable exception Joint Anti-Piracy operations in Somali waters)</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodical meetings / Summits</li> <li>• Rhetoric still dominates. The question on how to enhance cooperation continues to dominate the agenda after 2 decades</li> <li>• Some cooperation materialized within multilateral fora</li> <li>• No joint policy implemented</li> </ul>  |
| Structural milieu (Both Strategic Partnerships managed in isolation) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU deals with China without a broader/higher Asia Strategy. No-coordination between EU Delegations in China and in Japan</li> <li>• China has a strong presence in Europe and vis-à-vis EU institutions (mainly economic and trade-related but with political influence.</li> <li>• In China, EU issues are dealt at State Councilor level (higher than FA Minister).</li> <li>• EU Delegation in China acts as embassy, and deals with the relations in coordination with the EEAS in Brussels.</li> <li>• China has a mission in Brussels since 1988.</li> <li>• Certain issues better dealt bilaterally with Member States.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Asia-Strategy.</li> <li>• Japan has a more limited presence in Europe than China.</li> <li>• Japanese mission to the EU / EU Delegation to Japan</li> <li>• Periodical Summits and political meetings held at high level, but limited technical/bureaucratic resources allocated in Brussels</li> <li>• Remarkable and acknowledged bureaucratic difficulties that prevent smoother cooperation</li> <li>• Bilateral relations Member States-Japan are more developed and general preference for these.</li> </ul> |

stability, multilateralism and shared responsibility. Nevertheless, the European perceptions regarding China not being a democracy, its deficient Human Rights record and the very own meaning of 'effective multilateralism' differ from the Chinese ones even at a basic level. In this regard, the EU's official standpoint is that the EU's objectives should continue to be the moving of China towards the European or Western values of democracy, which are observed as being universally valid and desirable. In a recent interview with high

level officials of the European Commission Delegation to China in Beijing, the EU perception that “China is progressively moving towards the European values despite a long road is still ahead” was expressed to the author. On the other hand, the Chinese official rhetoric towards the EU grants the Union a superpower status and defines it as an influential global power. The EU is envisioned as a key partner for China’s ambitions to counterbalance the US preeminent position in Asia and globally, as well as for building steps towards the Chinese ambitions for effective multilateralism. Similarly as the EU does, Chinese official speech identifies the multiple common objectives shared with the EU, although a common understanding of more sensitive issues such as human rights, democracy and the universality of Western values is less clear (Tian, 2009). Chinese academic writings as well as official rhetoric regard the EU’s value diplomacy as an interference with Chinese domestic affairs and have repeatedly asked for the EU to ‘stop lecturing China how to behave’ or to ‘impose European political values and system into China’, arguing that if the EU considers the Strategic Partnership with China a framework for collaboration among equals, the EU should avoid identifying itself as a bearer of higher moral values. Besides that, the EU is perceived on the Chinese side as a complex and bureaucratized actor, with whom cooperation requires a process of learning and socialization. Despite this complexity, the EU is perceived by the Chinese as having an added-value parallel to the relations with the Member States although the bilateral relations between these and China continue to be considered of great importance.

When looking at the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership, the mutual understanding at the perception level appears to be less problematic as in the case of China. As the rhetoric of EU-Japan relations has remarked since its formalization in the early 1990s, the EU and Japan regard themselves officially as like-minded partners, with shared values and objectives. Before European eyes, Japan is perceived as a liberal democracy, a Civilian Power like the EU, and a country committed to the promotion of peace, development and human security both in Asia and globally. At the same time, Japan is perceived as having ‘compatible’ bureaucratic and political structures with the EU, despite coordination of efforts is not always possible due to excessive formal requirements.<sup>19)</sup> Nevertheless, the perception of such common values is tainted by the fact that the EU perceives Japan as considering Europe/the EU a second-level priority, since the country is perceived as directing its focus overly to Asia and the US-Japan Security Alliance. In this same line, the EU perception of Japan’s foreign policy has been at times deemed as ‘overly dependent’ from the US-Alliance and accused of having little room for diversification (i.e. Japan having constraints to diversify its foreign policy) (Tsuruoka, 2008). On the other side, Japanese perceptions of the EU as a Strategic Partner are also dominated by the recognition of common values and shared interests under their Civilian Power capabilities. Nevertheless, this is not absent from problems. The Japanese side has manifested some difficulty for the EU to establish

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19) This aspect was addressed at the conference “Addressing Local Conflicts Before They Turn Global Japan - EU Cooperation” at JICA Research Institute, Tokyo, on 21 February 2012.



cooperation among equal partners, since the EU as an international actor is overly focused on norm-exporting and conditionality policies. Additionally, and as it was the case with the Chinese perceptions, Japan also sees the EU as a complex and bureaucratized machinery who is often more ineffective to cooperate with, thus not minimizing the importance to continue the cooperation with the core EU-Member States. Moreover, before the eyes of Japan, the lack of a clear EU strategy for Asia and the increasing efforts vested into the partnership with China have occasionally originated misunderstandings and concerns (e.g. such as in the case of the proposal to lift the EU arms embargo on China) and have raised questions on what is the true added value of EU-Japanese cooperation, on the need of clarifying the goals sought for this partnership and what kind of partner the EU is to become in Asia, particularly considering that the Japanese priority continues to be a solid alliance with the US to ensure its national security.<sup>20)</sup>

## **(2) OUTCOMES AND STRUCTURES**

In line of what has been detailed in the first part of this paper, the cooperation outcomes that have successfully been achieved in contrast with the identified priorities and objectives vary case by case. Arguably, the EU-Japan Partnership has maintained a more stable and balanced profile during the two decades of institutionalized cooperation than the partnership with China. EU-Japan relations have not been free of misunderstandings or periods when the smooth relations have cooled down as in the remarkable case of proposal for lifting the arms embargo on China. However, the magnitude of such punctual frictions is not comparable with major shocks such as the Tiananmen events of 1989 in the EU-China relations. Nevertheless, both partnerships still need to catch up in matching rhetoric with actual results, and arguably, the EU-China relations to a greater extent. In historical perspective, cooperation achieved within the EU-Japan framework, although modest, has gone further than that between the EU and China, especially when it comes to matters related to Human Security and particularly the operations in Cambodia, Afghanistan, et cetera (Hook, et al., 2011, pp. 292-303). In the case of EU-China relations, actual cooperation in political and security issues was achieved initially with the Chinese participation on project for the European satellite navigation system “Galileo,”<sup>21)</sup> up to more recently with the joint anti-piracy operations in Somali waters.

In both cases, judging whether such a degree of cooperation is enough taking into account the myriad complexities of the EU as a foreign and security policy actor, the geographical distance between Europe and East-Asia, as well as the inherent difficulty in finding issues of immediate and priority concern for both parties, is a matter that can be left up to subjective criterion. Yet, the fact that such levels do not meet the

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20) An important point for Japan in its relations with the EU has always been the triangulation of relations US-Japan-EU, being these complementary but never substitute of the US-Japan Security Alliance. Therefore, before Japanese eyes, the perception of what kind of partner the EU is, particularly in regard to the US (a supportive partner, anti-American partner, etc.), is a crucial element in the formulation of the Japanese EU policy.

21) A European alternative system to the American Global Positioning System (GPS).



designated objectives is a fact recognized and debated by most of the existing literature on both Strategic Partnerships. Nevertheless, it is when looking at the existing political and security dialogues, as well as cooperation/coordination within multilateral fora, where the most common results of these Strategic Partnerships come to light: meetings, dialogues and periodical joint statements.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize the fact that EU-Japan and EU-China Partnerships are managed in the EU mainly in isolation from each other, and that these two partnerships are not coordinated under a higher EU-strategy for East-Asia, neither in Brussels nor in consultations between the EU Missions in Beijing and Tokyo.<sup>22)</sup> Parallel to this, in both cases, the bilateral relations directly with the EU Member States (particularly the core ones) remain a very important aspect of European-East-Asian relations, specially considering the difficulties that both China and Japan acknowledge in cooperating with the EU both due to the difficulty for reaching consensuses or a common EU voice on crucial policy issues as well as due to the bureaucratic complexities of the EU.

Placing emphasis on this last point, and taking into account the fact that the EU as a foreign and security policy actor is not only a complex entity but also that its personality as an international player is dependent on the intergovernmental mechanisms of agreement (or disagreement) among the Member States, it is worth to make the reflection whether the EU's relations with China and Japan would not be better understood under the lens of inter-regionalism, in one of its forms<sup>23)</sup> (Hänggi, 2000, pp. 8-10), rather than as normal bilateral relations between two state actors as they are often analyzed (López i Vidal, 2012). Taking into account the limitations of the EU's CFSP, and seeing the EU's relations with East-Asian countries as part of the network of today's global multilevel governance, it is possible to argue, first, that the regimes of cooperation that can actually be achieved within these frameworks will unavoidably be either those that can avoid being trapped in the complexities of EU policy formation and consensus reaching due to their pragmatism or perceived high utility, or those issues in which a strong shared interests are identified thus being less subjective to internal EU disagreements; and secondly, that if one considers these relations within a framework of inter-regionalism rather than as conventional bilateral relations, the lack of a coordinated EU Strategy for East-Asia with a developed regional approach reveals itself as an outstanding obstacle for the proper development of both partnerships. In other words, the limited regimes of actual cooperation that such Partnerships can lead to, require taking into account the regional dynamics in which the cooperating partners operate as well as the complex historical and political relations between the two. In this sense, it is understandable that the EU places greater importance to enhance its contacts and cooperation with China, given the relevance of the country in economic, demographic, geostrategic and political terms; however, the fact that this cooperation

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22) Acknowledged to the author in an interview with the Head of the Political Section of the European Commission's Delegation to China in Beijing in March 2012.

23) In its conceptualization of inter-regionalism, Hänggi discusses that the relations between regional groupings and single powers may constitute an important component of biregional or transregional arrangements (2000, p. 7).

raises certain concerns on the Japanese side, which is uncertain about a rapidly changing situation in its regional context and pursuing a hedging strategy towards China (López i Vidal, 2011), is a matter that the EU has to take in consideration in order to develop both Partnerships to their full potential and move forward from the current rhetoric trap. The way in which this can effectively be put into practice remains to be seen given that the current policies towards China and Japan are dealt in isolation from each other. Either a coordinating strategy or through a more ambitious engagement in multilateral arrangements such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) seem to be the most appropriate ways to accommodate the different interests and sensibilities in the East-Asian partners with the legitimate interests of the EU to become a more relevant actor in the region.

### **(3) CHALLENGES FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS**

The current and existing analysis of EU-China and EU-Japan relations has acknowledged and debated the possible variables that explain the emergence of the existing gaps between objectives and materialization of cooperation in both partnerships. Nevertheless, the perceptions that the EU as an international actor generates in its partners is an underexplored area, the further knowledge of which could bring about a new understanding of how the EU's profile in this region could be improved and cooperation more effective. At the same time, it has been suggested that the EU-China Partnership, while it poses many substantial challenges, is the true proof of fire for the EU to consolidate its personality as an international actor, and the one that may have greater potential to accelerate the process of European integration in such policy areas. How such a challenge is perceived by Brussels is a factor that will need to be further looked upon in order to better understand the reasoning and motivation behind the EU's increased interest in engaging particularly with China.

Finally, further understanding the 'Europeanization' factor may shed further light in disclosing which is the true added value, at the eyes of the East-Asian partners, for enhancing its relations with the EU besides their respective bilateral links with the EU Member States. In this sense, both Japan and China have a long history of bilateral relations with the core EU Member States, and a successful record of cooperation and good relations in the past. Nevertheless, the EU may be serving Japan and China with the function of becoming a framework for improving the relations with the smaller, peripheral Member States or with those who do not have a long history of relations with Japan or China. In the same sense, it remains to be seen whether the relations of such countries with China and Japan have been Europeanized, and most specially those that have gained political independence within the last two decades or that did not have a history of diplomatic relations with East-Asian countries, or whether, on the contrary, such relations have developed newly in a traditionally bilateral fashion.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has reviewed the EU's involvement in East-Asian political and security affairs has evolved through the Strategic Partnerships with China and Japan, and how it has maintained a low profile during the two decades of formalized cooperation. Such low profile is explained by a series of gaps between the objectives set for cooperation and its actual materialization in joint action or policy, which have its origin both in the complexity of the EU's personality as a foreign and security policy actor as well as in the perceptions that the EU generates in its partners as a global actor. Nevertheless, through the recognition of these gaps, the need for a more pragmatic turn in order to close the existing deficiencies has been acknowledged, although for this task to be successfully carried out, a better understanding of the perceptions, expectations and capabilities of the EU as a foreign actor at the eyes of China and Japan is necessary. At the same time, the added value of the EU for such partners in political and security issues remains to be better outlined, and it may be better understood through the lens of inter-regionalism rather than as conventional bilateral relations. In order to gain this understanding, and to meet the desired increases in terms of effectiveness and smoother cooperation, not only political commitment and will but also further research and involvement of the academic community will be required.

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