

THE EU AND CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP: LOOKING FOR A FRESH RESTART

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The article looks at the EU and China three decade relationship and the challenges and opportunities encouraged by a common view for redesign of the international order according to a multilateral approach and some basic differences. The author analyzed the principal) policy documents approved by the European Commission and the European Council, over the years, looking to extract EU benchmark for this relationship and shows how the Chinese regard the European Union in the context of the PRC's foreign policy. The article shows that although important bilateral ties lack depth and clarity and that the reciprocal expectations of both actors seem high and unrealistic. Europe is undergoing a process of constitutional redesign where pressures for deeper integration coexist with the will of new Eastern Europe Member-States to reinforce their sovereignty and gain autonomy. China is also going through a process of internal balancing and leadership reshuffle that heading the country towards an uncertain destiny. The author concludes that the European Union and China need to be more realistic on what they pursue with their relationship.

Key words: China, European Union, Trade, External Relations, Human Rights, International Law, European Law, European Commission.

1 INTRODUCTION

When the London Council of Foreign Ministers decided six decades ago to divide up Germany and approve the Marshall Plan, Europeans were very far away from anticipating the enormous consequences this decision would have in their lives and for the geography and future of Europe. Nowadays, Europe looks very different. The Berlin Wall was brought down. The former European Community of six has been enlarged to include, sequentially, Great Britain and Ireland, the Mediterranean countries, the Scandinavian nations and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, which were parts of the Soviet empire or Soviet neighbours. In the wings, Turkey, Croatia,

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Bosnia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and Serbia expect to join the EU. If all these countries meet the Amsterdam criteria - democracy, the rule of law, a market economy and adherence to the EU's goals of political and economic union - they may be in the best position to be members of this fashionable club. Croatia and Turkey started already accession talks in October 2005. Croatia signed its Treaty of Accession in December, 2011 and if the ratification process goes well, the Treaty will come into force on July 1st, 2013. Turkey may complete the negotiation process in twenty years, although that aim depends basically on the course of Turkish domestic politics and the role Europe – as a continent – envisage for the big Muslim nation.

The objective of a unified Europe² is not completed for reasons basically ascribed to Europeans, by themselves. After the difficult approval of the Treaty of Lisbon there is an important debate where the boundaries of Europe lay and where the layers of Europe's identity, as a cultural, religious and political territorial entity, stand. Europe is basically a cultural entity with a common past, an international being without a common defence or external security policy, the perception of a common enemy, or even a coordinated foreign policy if we may call that to the sort of understanding that came out from the Treaty of Lisbon. Europe is a political dwarf, a collection of states situated in a space delimited by the Atlantic Ocean and line 30 degrees East latitude, if we exclude the territorial areas of Ukraine and Belarus that fall within that. Europe is a group of nations also divided by their fates, defined by their agreement on relevant questions of race, equality, social equilibrium, emigration, fiscal or labour policy, defence and security.

The current problems of Europe are not only of political or economic uncertainty. The European Union undergoes a difficult process of re-thinking its international legal identity, in short how the world sees it. How much Europe (and how less sovereignty) are Europeans capable of admitting? How do Europeans see the role of non-Christian communities such as the Turks or the Croats within the European Christian mainland? What type of relations does Europe foresees with its Central Asian and North Africa neighbours.³ These are among the many "ifs" that trouble Europe's future.

This article deals with something else): how the European Union as sole entity sees China? China, the far-off country where Europe's ships sailed for three centuries looking to open a new trade route. A country that has no territorial connection to Europe whatsoever but as the statistics prove, is the most important partner of Europe as a Union, a interlocutor on global issues, a co-defender of a new world international order.

The PRC looks to Europe, for the outcome of the four-year financial crisis, with some relief and amusement. Firstly China has been spared the pain and difficulties coming from that persistent crisis; secondly it has enjoyed the benefits of the expansion that followed globalization without paying the price

² Europe is mostly a geographical and a cultural *nomen*. Only the Romans managed to unify Europe and after this all the efforts to reach that unity failed. The last attempt was the *Convention for the Future of Europe* that led to the approval of the misfortune *Constitution of Europe*. For the purpose of this article, the author names "Europe" or "EU" the union of twenty-seven independent states based on the European Communities and founded to enhance political, economic and social co-operation. They were formerly known as European Community (EC) or European Economic Community (EEC).

³ According with a survey published by the site EUObserver three quarters of Irish opposed the idea of a second vote to the Lisbon Treaty. 71 percent of the respondents say they were against the move, compared to 24 percent who were in favour. On 12 June, 2008, 53.4 percent of the Irish vote against the Treaty. See EUObserver. *Ireland strong opposed to Lisbon revolt*, London, 28 July 2008. Available at <http://www.euobserver.com>. (15 May 2012).

for that. But Europe is still in China's mindset as something worthy to learn about. The process of convergence between the "five balances" articulated in the PRC's 11th Five-Year Plan and the European preoccupation with equilibrium, economic efficiency, social equity and environment, accentuate a common ground, coming from two completely different historical experiences.⁴ China experiment both admiration and distrust on Europe. China senses that the European Union lacks a strategic vision and suffers from disunity, which impedes her from becoming a credible actor in international affairs. At the same time China appreciates the prototype of a unified Europe. One "leg" of a multilateral order, with China fulfilling an important role. Chinese authorities express admiration with the unifying role performed by the Euro, naming it "a most impressive achievement" and anticipate Europe's capacity to build a greater common defence and security identity.⁵ Europe remains culturally attractive as China considers itself and Europe the two "core civilizations" of the world. The EU "is the primary collective sense in which the Chinese view Europe and they expect it to enlarge further" suggests a commentator.⁶

This cheerful conclusion is probably too optimistic. China enforces its vision of a world dominated by Great Powers aiming to use the bilateral relation with the EU and the US, as a pendulum. China envisions a new world order with the Asian nations at the core and the United States with a much more secondary role⁷, a perception that is perceived as a threat by neoconservatives or offensive realists like Robert Kaplan or John Mearsheimer.⁸

The Europe Union struggles to have a more important role in the main issues of the international agenda, v.g. the role of International Organizations like IMF, the World Bank or the G20, organizations which China aims to gain greater influence correspondent to its economic clout. For that objective to be attained, the EU needs to build big consortium of good-will and China is an important partner for that; Insofar as the EU needs to turn the EU-PRC three decade relationship into something more accountable, balanced and comprehensive (mostly in European eyes). The impression that comes out from Brussels habitual political statements is that the EU doesn't understand that China is a pragmatic and realistic power, involved in a non-zero sum game and looking to pursue its own interests, even at the expense of others. The EU needs to be focused on what precise targets to achieve through the EU-China bilateral relationship, to balance the operating costs of this cooperation and technical assistance (to China) with a fair outcome in new business opportunities for European firms in China, namely in agriculture, banking, telecommunications, insurance services or energy. The EU needs to ask more from China in political terms, applying more pressure for a crucial political reform, respect for Human Rights, transparency and conformity to the Rule of Law.

⁴ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "European Union-China Relations and the United States," *Asian Perspective Review*, 30, 4 (2006), 15.

⁵ Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese Views of Europe* (London: Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2007), XIV–XVI.

⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI.

⁷ Niall Ferguson, *Colossus. The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (London, New York, Toronto: Penguin Books, 2005), 260–261.

⁸ See Robert Kagan, "Behind the Modern China," *Washington Post*, 23 March 2008. Available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org> (10 May 2012). See also John Mearsheimer, "The Rise of China Will Not Be Peaceful at All," *The Australian*, 1 November 2005. Available at <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/P0014.pdf> (13 May 2012).

2 CHINA AND EUROPE *RENDEZ-VOUS*

Europe and China relations were influenced, during the second half of the twentieth century, by external factors. The first was China's participation in the Korean War alongside the Soviet Union against the Western block led by the United States. The second was the deterrence process initiated with the visit of Richard Nixon to China, a visit that took place from September 21st to 28th, 1972. On both occasions, Europe was mainly an observer, not a participant. At the start, the United States punished China for its alliance with Moscow; then they made peace with China as the power balance between the western and Eastern communist blocks moved apart and it became imperative to contain the USSR.

So it was with little surprise that only after the normalization of US-China relations⁹, did the European countries see this as an opportunity to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. The group of nations that presently constitutes, the European Union, recognized the PRC as China's legitimate government between 1971 and 1979. The first European country to do it was Italy and the last, Ireland.

There was one exception to the previous conclusion. De Gaulle's vision of French exceptionalism led him, in January 1964, to recognize China's communist regime, against NATO official policy and the opinion of European leaders. Nonetheless no substantial gain came to France from this isolated step. Consequently, the nucleus of the European Community (EC) articulates with the United States on how to narrow and overcome the isolation of Communist China and re-establish links. This historical fact is evidence of Europe's dependency on America's international interests (within NATO) and the rationale why China, for a long time, assessed its bilateral relation with Europe and the European Union, as basically secondary.

When the European Commissioner, Christopher Soames, visited China in 1973, two years before diplomatic relations were formalized; he found that China was still struggling to liberate itself from its revolutionary past. After Mao and Zhou died and the Gang of Four was brought to trial, China gradually retook its place as a reasonable and pragmatic developing Asian economy. Late 1978, during the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader, convinced his peers of the need to free China from reclusion and sail economically to the open sea, changing China's economic policy and opening to the outside world. This new policy was launched and implemented without major setbacks over the following five decades.

In response to this, Europe and China conceded each other the Most-Favoured-Nation Status (MFN) in areas like import or export duties and tariffs. On April 3, 1978, China and the European Communities (EC) signed, the first Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in Brussels, opening the way to a positive and advantageous relationship.¹⁰

⁹ Diplomatic relations between the US and the People's Republic of China were established in December 16, 1978, six years after Nixon visit.

¹⁰ Later this agreement was replaced by an Agreement on Trade and Co-operation signed in 1985 between the EC and China. In 1998 the European Commission opened its representation in Beijing. See Franco Algeri, "EU Economic Relations with China: An Institutional Perspective," in *China and Europe since 1978: a European Perspective*, ed. Richard Louis Edmonds (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64.

The practice of bilateral dialogue enhanced by the meetings of the TCA Joint Committee and the visits of representatives of both sides, either to Brussels or Beijing, ease the way to a better understanding of EU's and China's intentions and national agendas. On June 1979, an agreement on textile trade was reached and in 1983 and 1984 several agreements on cooperation on science and technology and agriculture and human resources management were signed.

This *open-door policy* towards Europe¹¹ followed a calculated strategy idealized by Deng Xiao-Ping to secure profitable trade and commercial relations with the US but avoided making China too dependent on them. According to observers, the European model of large governmental assistance and regulation of the economy had greater appeal to Beijing's leaders than the typical Smithean model of unregulated economies adopted by the Americans and British.¹² This special relationship with Europe helped China "to learn from the outside" and "to adapt internally", according with two well-known rhetorical mottos.¹³

The good atmosphere in Europe-China relations kept steadily during the 90s and the first decade of Twenty-First century. In 2004, China become the EU's second largest trading partner after the US and China's largest trading partner, followed by the US, Japan and Southeast Asia. According to EU statistics, China's rapid economic development had a significant impact upon EU-China trade and economic relations. This can be seen in the total bilateral trade that has increased more than sixty-fold since 1978, and worth €210 billion in 2005. The EU went from a trade surplus - at the beginning of the 1980s - to a deficit of €106 billion in 2005, EU's largest trade deficit with any partner. In recent years, EU companies have invested considerably in China, with Foreign Direct Investment to over US 35 billion.

The relevance of China-EU trade suggests that China uses the EU as a counter-weight to the US-China political and economic tensions and an alternative source of high-tech technology. The United States has kept an embargo of exports to China on "dual use technologies", i.e. civilian technologies that could be used to make weapons or have military applications.¹⁴ The EU has a different stance on this issue and regards the transfer of technologies to Beijing as a way to make profits and gain trust.

In May 2000, China concluded a bilateral market access agreement with the EU that facilitated the PRC's admission to the WTO, an objective that Beijing had as a priority goal. WTO membership has brought enormous benefits to China and its trading partners, consolidating China's central role in the global economy and allowing a greater degree of certainty for trading partners in China.¹⁵ But as it is argued elsewhere for these benefits to be completed, it becomes essential that China implements its obligations to the WTO in a timely and comprehensive manner.¹⁶ There is great debate whether China is doing this or not. Meanwhile eleven years have passed since its admission.¹⁷

¹¹ China was the first country of the so-said Communist block to recognize the European Communities (EC).

¹² John R. Faust and Judith F. Korgberg, *China in World Politics* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 77.

¹³ Paolo D. Farah, "Five Years of China's WTO Membership," *Legal Issues of Economic Integration*, 33, 3 (2006), 299.

¹⁴ Reuben Wong, *Forging Common EU Policies on China* (Singapore, National University of Singapore, 2006).

¹⁵ Cfr. World Trade Organization. *Accession of the People's Republic of China – Decision of 10 November 2001*. Available at <http://docsonline.wto.org/DDFDocuments/t/WT/L/432.doc> (7 May 2012).

¹⁶ Albert Keidel, *China's Economic Rise-Fact and Fiction*, in Policy Brief 61, Washington D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2008. Available at

3 THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TOWARDS CHINA

The normalization of relations with China has been a part of an EU Asian Strategy, backed by the German government, to strength the use of Asian markets for European exports. In the summer of 1994, the European Commission adopted a *New Asia Strategy*¹⁸ targeting Asia as Europe's new economic frontier. In accordance with this strategy, five Communications were set by the European Commission and the European Council regulating EU's relationship with China: *A Long Term Policy for China-Europe Relations* (1995); *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* (1998); *Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a more effective EU Policy* (2001); *A Maturing Partnership. Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China relations* (2003); *EU-China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities* (2006).

The sequence of these policy papers makes two things clear. First, it emphasizes the great importance given to the development of a fair, reciprocal and mutually beneficial economic relationship with China. Secondly, it outlines the comparative little weight that the political and the security dimension of the EU represents in this affiliation. A possible explanation for that is that Europe's fragile foreign policy – if it exists - responds, basically, to the needs of the European exporters and Multinational Corporations and European bureaucrats. Another credible explanation is that the EU has been for most of its history an economic community and not a true political union.¹⁹ The interlinking of tangible economic interests of the Europeans through the integration of national economies is considered the path to establish a community with a shared sense of destiny that has been mostly absent. Even this conclusion is not exempt from contradictions as the British, the Danish or the Swedish made several times clear.

Truly, The European Commission is hardly the government of Europe and the European Parliament not the General Assembly of Europe. The well-known anecdote of the red phone connecting the American and the Chinese presidents and the lack of a corresponding mechanism between Beijing and Brussels illustrates, cynically, the lack of statehood on the part of the EU and the absence of an international and security dimension on EU-China multilayer relations.

The lack of a monitoring device to follow, in the field, the progress of the policies and targets achieved as understood by the above-mentioned Communications Commission-Council, figures as a delicate problem for the EU-China relations. The European Council position has been rather ceremonial and equivocal more than a catalyst of Europe's interests. This is an additional reason why the powers of the European institutions, within the Union constitutional treaty, need to be assessed and adjusted. This objective

www.carnegieendowment.org/2008/07/08/china-s-economic-rise-fact-and-fiction/2t9 (12 May 2012). See also Robert Sutter, "Why Does China Matter?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 27, 1 (2003–2004), 75–89.

¹⁷ Joseph Y. S. Cheng, "China's WTO Membership and its concern for State Sovereignty," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 13, 41 (2004), 819–821.

¹⁸ See European Commission. *Toward a New Asia Strategy, COM (94) 314 final*. Brussels: European Commission, 1994.

¹⁹ In this sense see Heinrich Schneider, "The Constitution Debate," *European Integration online Papers (EioP)*, 7, 4 (2003).

was partially sought in the Treaty of Lisbon but there is a lot more to be done.²⁰

One important consequence of the EU stake with a policy of articulated engagement with China was the identification of areas of economic and development cooperation. The 1998 Communication “Building a Comprehensive Partnership”²¹ highlighted developments in various dialogues concerning regional security, economic and trade issues, human rights, and the need to start a dialogue on issues such as illegal immigration, drug-trafficking, money-laundering and organized crime. In its follow-up of 2001, the Commission reiterated that “engagement (between China and the EU) means developing comprehensive relations which allow for working towards a common understanding on all issues of concern, in support of multilateral problem-solving wherever this applies on international and regional issues”.²² The Commission restated the need to engage China further in the international community through a continued strengthening of the political dialogue by: ensuring greater coherence and continuity in scheduling agreed talks at all levels; targeted reinforcement of the expert level dialogue on specific issues of particular interest; ensuring a better preparation of, and a link between, the dialogue at all levels; better integration of interrelated global issues, and the consideration of producing occasional joint EU-China texts on issues of common concern in the margins of Summit meetings; and codifying the framework for the EU-China political dialogue.

In the Communication “A Maturing Partnership” (2003) the Commission went a little further by assuring that “it is the clear interest of the EU and China to work as strategic partners on the international scene (...) through a further reinforcement of their cooperation, the EU and China will be better able to promote these shared visions and interests”.²³ On October 2006, The Barroso Commission set out its strategy towards China in the Communication “EU-China: Closer partner, growing responsibilities” (2006). The communication looks to EU-China relations in the context of China’s re-emergence as an economic and global world power. It points out that the EU intends to foster its comprehensive engagement with China, elaborates a five-pronged strategy focused in supporting China’s transition to a plural society, the development of sustainable development, the improvement on trade and economic bilateral relations, the strengthening of bilateral cooperation as well increasing regional and international cooperation. The document raises, for the first time, the point that the crescent responsibilities and expectations generated by China’s rising needs to be accompanied with stronger influence and participation of China in handling and solving world problems. Adding some focus to underline criticism of lacking of palpable results the Council welcome the Communication and the trade working paper

²⁰ The relations with China are not the most serious problem in Europe fragile “communitarisation” of its foreign policy. The relation with Russia (and its neighbours) is even worse than China’s as Europe depends on Russia for the supply of gasoline and energy, during the winter season. The clash between national interests and Europe need for a common vision is been notorious.

²¹ European Commission. *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* (Brussels, European Commission, 1998), 181.

²² European Commission. *EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a More Effective EU Policy* (Brussels: European Commission, 2001), 265.

²³ See European Commission. *A Maturing partnership: Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations, Updating the European Commission’s Communications on EU-China relations of 1998 and 2001, COM(2003) 533 final*, Brussels, 10 September 2003. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/china/com_03_533/com_533_en.pdf (8 May 2012).

associated with it and conclude “that for EU-China partnership to develop its full potential it must be balanced, reciprocal and mutually beneficial”.²⁴

These successive Communications reinforce the need to focus on the EU-China dialogue, making it more than a vain exercise of political rhetoric that seems to be, for the most part of the journey. In its 2005 “Overview of Sectorial Dialogues between China and the European Commission”²⁵, Brussels authorities listed 24 different areas of sectorial dialogue between the two sides including agriculture, civil aviation, competition policy, consumer product safety, customs cooperation, education and culture, employment and social affairs, energy, environment, food safety, global satellite navigation services, information society, intellectual property rights, macroeconomic policy and regulation of financial markets, maritime transport, regional policy, regulatory and industrial policy, science and technology, space cooperation, trade policy dialogue, textile trade dialogue and transport (in general). The progress made by these portholes of dialogue is contested by some observers.²⁶ Therein, from the 17 areas of cooperation existing in 2004, bilateral cooperation has expanded to cover in a more detailed and specialised manner to more than 50 areas. The sectorial dialogues seem to help develop a fair foundation for the EU-China relationship, which is now characterized by increasingly close policy coordination in many important areas. They are assessed by the Brussels authorities as “an effective tool for further widening and deepening EU relations with China, for exploring new areas of common interest and for exchanging know-how, especially in the area of economic reform”.²⁷

4 A DUAL DISCOURSE ON CHINA

The former External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, during his term as Commissioner, defined three basic objectives for the EU external policy with Asia and China, in particular: constructive engagement, multilateral cooperation, promotion of human rights, good governance. Patten considered the last relationship “the most complex and multifaceted dialogue in human rights that the EU has with any country”. Assessing the progress on it, in 2005, the European Council stated that “although China amended its constitution in March 2004 to include a reference to human rights, and although there have been positive developments on social questions including migrant workers and HIV/AIDS and on the ongoing reform of the judicial and legal system, the EU remains concerned about continuing violations of human rights in China”.²⁸

Seven years later, the current President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso, expressed a more conciliatory evaluation of the EU-China sixteen-year political dialogue.²⁹ In a speech at the Chinese Academy

²⁴ European Commission. *EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities* (Brussels, European Commission, 1998), 631.

²⁵ See Directorate General External Relations. *The EU External Relations with China, an Overview of Sectorial Dialogues between China and the European Commission*. Available at http://eeas.europa.eu/china/sectorialdialogue_en.htm (15 May 2012).

²⁶ Terry Narramore, “China and Europe: Engagement, Multipolarity and Strategy,” *The Pacific Review*, 21, 1, (2008), 87–108; see also David Scott, “China and the EU: A Strategic Axis for the Twenty-First Century?,” *International Relations*, 21, 23 (2007), 23–45.

²⁷ See European Union, External Action Service, High Representative Catherine Ashton. *Information Note*. Available at http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/sectorialdialogues_en.pdf (3 May 2012).

²⁸ See European Union. *EU Annual Report on Human Rights' adopted by the Council on 3 October 2005*. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/HR2005en.pdf> (15 May 2012).

²⁹ The first dialogue to be started was on environment (June 1992). The Energy and Human Rights Dialogues followed this dialogue in 1994 and 1996. The last one to be set was on December 2006, the

of Social Sciences (in Beijing) he noted the difficulties happening in the relationship, namely in trade, but was swift in assuring that “we should be confident that our relations have matured sufficiently to deal with any disagreement in a responsible manner and in full confidence of the willingness of both sides to overcome these challenges. We must always keep the big picture in mind and should not let one or two issues overshadow our overall relationship”.³⁰

Even though European officials have been cautious in treating the more sensitive issues in the bilateral relations, a tougher attitude towards China came to light between 2006 and 2008. It included areas such as trade and WTO rules, intellectual property rights, demand for energy resources, and external policy in Africa.

Peter Mandelson, the then Trade Commissioner, made a very direct argument in a speech at Tsinghua University in 2006: “we are witnessing the creation of a truly multi-polar economic world, and politics is following closely...identify any global problem we face and you will find that China is an essential part of the solution, with a role in framing the international agenda and assuming new leadership responsibilities as it does so. It is no longer possible for China to shut out the world or behave as if it were outside the system looking in”.³¹

One actor that has kept along the lines a sturdy criticism on China, namely on human rights, is the European Parliament (EP). In its Resolution on *EU-China Relations (2005/2161(INI))*, the chamber stressed the importance of the EU-China Strategic Partnership for relations between both political actors considering it worthy if “based on shares common values”. But the EP acknowledged that “democratic values, credibility, stability and responsibility should constitute the fundamental basis of the relationship”, as the “strengthening of EU’s relationship with China implies meeting global challenges such as climate change, security and non-proliferation of arms”. The EP emphasized that the “sectorial dialogues” between the two sides have grown considerably in recent years, looking “forward to the advent of the EU-China Strategic Partnership and closer relation”. The EP: a) urged the Council and the Commission to formulate a consistent and coherent policy towards China; b) welcomed the work of the Commission in the sectorial dialogues with China in different issues, and requested “that Parliament be briefed at regular basis on progress made”; c) called on China (and the EU) to establish their partnership on the basis of mutual openness, credibility, stability, responsibility, and mutual understanding; d) regretted that the increased trade and economic relations with China “have brought about no substantial progress in the field of democracy, human rights and the rule of law”. The EP finally argued that “the development of trade relations with China must go hand in hand with the development of a genuine, fruitful and effective political dialogue”.³²

Macroeconomic Dialogue. One month later Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner discusses with the Chinese authorities the negotiations for a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).

³⁰ See José Manuel Barroso, *The EU and China: painting a brighter future together*, in Beijing, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 15 July 2005. Available at www.europaworld.org/week232/barrosospeech15705.htm (15 May 2012).

³¹ See European Delegation. *Mandelson: growing China must look to global role on trade, security, climate change*, in Beijing, European Delegation, 7 November 2006. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/countries/china/pr071106_en.htm (15 May 2012).

³² See European Parliament. *Resolution on EU-China Relations, 2005/2161(INI)*. Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu> (5 May 2012).

This position was replicated in other occasions. On September 7, 2006, the EP unanimously passed a resolution calling on China to release Falun Gong activists.³³ The resolution supplemented a report on Human Rights in China written by a Dutch MP, Hans Belder, criticizing China's record on this issue and expressed grim concern regarding torture and labour camps in China.³⁴ On July 10, 2007, the EP approved another resolution expressing solidarity for the victims of the earthquake in Sichuan, but deplored "the fact that China's human rights records remains a matter for concern owing to the widespread and systematic human rights abuses". The EP welcomed "the resumption of contacts, after the events of March 2008, in Lhasa, between the representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese authorities" and called for an intensification of these contacts. The resolution called "on China to abide by the public commitments which it made with regard to human rights and minority rights, democracy and the rule of law and which the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced when it decided to allow China to host the Olympic Games".³⁵

Still in 2008, the EP's President, Hans-Gert Pettering, called on athletes taking part in the Beijing Olympics (that took place in Beijing) to protest against the human rights situation in Tibet: "I would like to encourage the athletes, men and women, to look at things as they are, and not turn own way, give a signal". The comments (published in German newspaper *Bild*) come amid general political criticism in Germany over Internet censorship for foreign media after Chinese authorities published new directives on the use of the Internet, by foreign journalists, during the Games.³⁶

Commenting in the same issue, Durão Barroso declared in Beijing on April 4, 2008, that he favoured a closing dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama, but "respects totally the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of China over the region".³⁷

The tone of constructive relationship was retaken during the Prague Summit of in May, 2009, where both sides had expressed their satisfaction with the rapid expansion of the collaboration between the EU and China since the first Summit in 1998, signed that the relation is "much deeper and stronger, founded on a global, strategic, and mutually beneficial partnership".³⁸ Barroso and the President of the European Council welcomed China's development and supported China's continued path of peaceful development. Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, affirmed China's support for the EU's integration process and welcomed the EU's constructive role in international affairs.

But on 12 November 2009, the criticism on China returned as the President of the European Council issued a declaration condemning the executions of

³³ The Falun Gong is a sect introduced in China in 1992 through public lectures by its founder, Li Hongzhi. It combines the practice of meditation and slow-moving *qigong* exercises with a moral philosophy. Falun Gong emphasizes morality and the cultivation of virtue as central tenets of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Forbearance. The cult identifies itself as a *qigong* practice of the Buddhist school, though its teachings also incorporate elements drawn from Taoist traditions.

³⁴ See European Parliament. *European Parliament Passes Resolution Calling for Release of Bu Dongwei and Gao Zhisheng*. Available at <http://www.clearharmony.net/articles/200609/35369.html> (5 May 2012).

³⁵ The report on Human Rights in China was approved by 351 votes for and 48 against, with 160 abstentions. The report also strongly recommended that the EU arms embargo against China remain intact until greater progress on human rights issues. See UNPO. *Tibet: European Parliament Adopts Critical China Report*. Available at www.unpo.org (11 May 2012).

³⁶ See EUObserver.com. *EU parliament chief calls for Olympics protests*, London, 4 August 2008. Available at <http://euobserver.com> (15 May 2012).

³⁷ See Radio Televisão Portuguesa. *Durão Barroso visita oficial à China*, Lisbon, RTP, 2008. Available at <http://ww1.rtp.pt> (17 May 2012).

³⁸ See Europa. *11th EU-China Summit Prague*, Pres/09/147, Joint Press Communiqué, 20 May 2009. Available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do> (15 May 2012).

nine persons in Xingjian, following violent protests in the city of Ürümqi on July 5th-7th, 2009.³⁹ “Human Rights” continued to be a topic of disagreement in the years ahead. In February 2010, The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, issued a statement regretting the decision of the Beijing High Court to uphold Liu Xiaobo’s sentence of 11 years on the charge of “inciting subversion of state power”.⁴⁰ Ashton stated that “the verdict against Liu Xiaobo is entirely incompatible with his right to freedom of expression”. On April 2010, visiting Beijing at the head of six EU Commissioners (including the Vice-President, Catherine Ashton), the President of the European Commission, Durão Barroso, expressed great expectations on the annual Summit and perceived on it “the closeness of our cooperation” and an opportunity “to generate positive momentum in our 35-years relationship and develop a far reaching agenda for the next 5 years”.⁴¹ Barroso stated that the EU and China are important global players and is essential they work together in addressing “common challenges”. Still in 2010, in the occasion of the 13th EU-China Summit, the President of the European Council⁴², Herman Van Rompuy, declared that the UE aim to move the relationship forward, as the EU and China have “a strategic partnership of the utmost importance” and are “major players in the world and therefore naturally share outlook and concern on many issues”.⁴³ Van Rompuy said that “the EU and China have commonalities, but also differences in their approach, differences that are expected and should not impede our joint will to bring our relationship to a higher level”. “Our own interests coincide more and more with the global interests” he added.

Liu Xiabao returned as a topic of rhetorical confrontation at the end of 2010 when he received the Nobel Prize Award from the Swedish Academy. Catherine Ashton expressed her solidarity with the Nobel Prize and demanded his immediate release by the Chinese authorities. In April the following year, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy expressed her deep concern at the deterioration of the human rights situation in China and mentioned the increasing number of cases of arbitrary arrest of lawyers, writers, journalists, petitioners, artists and bloggers. Ashton expressed her concern for the arrest of the artist and intellectual Ai Wei Wei.⁴⁴ On May 2011, Herman Van Rompuy returned to China. He was received by the President Hu Jintao and gave a lecture at the Central Party School.⁴⁵ In his remarks after the meeting with Hu Jintao, Van Rompuy underscore China’s rapid growth and its immense contribution to overall global development, the fact that the EU is PRC’s largest trading

³⁹ See Council of the European Union. *Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union regarding the recent executions of nine persons in Xinjiang*, press release 15843/09, Brussels, 12 November 2009. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/> (15 May 2012).

⁴⁰ Liu Xiaobo is a prominent independent intellectual, a advocate of political reform and human rights in China and an outspoken critic of the Chinese communist regime. Liu has been detained, put under house arrest and imprisoned many times for his writing and activism. Liu is a drafter and a key proponent of Charter 08. See European Union. *Statement by HR Catherine Ashton, on human rights in China*, Brussels, 12 April 2011. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs> (15 May 2012).

⁴¹ See Europa. *President Barroso's visit to China, 29 April–1st May*, Press Release Rapid, ref IP/10/465, Brussels, 26 April 2010. Available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/> (15 May 2012).

⁴² After the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon the post become more effective and the chairperson elected by two and half years. Van Rompuy was elected for a second term in March 2012. See Xinhua. *Van Rompuy re-elected as European Council President*, Beijing, 2 March 2012. Available at http://www.china.org.cn/world/2012-03/02/content_24779710.htm (16 May 2012).

⁴³ See European Council, The President. *Introductory remarks by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council at the EU-China Summit, PCE 209/10*, Brussels, 6 October 2010. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs> (8 May 2012).

⁴⁴ See European Union. *Statement by HR Catherine Ashton, on human rights in China*, Brussels, 12 April 2011. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs> (15 May 2012).

⁴⁵ See European Council, The President. *Remarks by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council following his meeting in China with President Hu Jintao, PCE 114/11*, Beijing, 16 May 2011. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs> (8 May 2012).

partner, being both economies and societies interlinked on a relevant scale. Van Rompuy argued that the EU and China “are mutually becoming part of the solutions of each other’s challenges” and that one of the key challenges to the development of UE-China strategic partnership is “to preserve the climate of openness in our economic and trade relationship” even if the world passes a time of economic downturn. He added that Europe “is keen to achieve progress towards establishing a level playing field in our economic relations”. Van Rompuy stressed the importance of enhancing people-to-people contacts, announcing the expansion of the number of European students studying in China. Van Rompuy alluded to China’s public image, reputation, and influence, as being shaped by “factors going beyond its economic performance”. He expressly said that “safeguarding human rights and the rule of law is part of drift”. Van Rompuy remembered that China and the EU have signed up to the international instruments that “enshrine the universal values of human rights, and have a shared responsibility to uphold them”.⁴⁶

It would be hard to conclude from this recitative that the European Union has a coherent and articulated foreign policy towards China, namely on issues that have a relevant political dimension. Part of the positions framed by the EU reflect the agendas or interests of the member-states, others the equilibrium attempted by the European institutions to create a more balanced relationship with China, others still the outcome of lobbying groups pressure that manoeuvre behind some MPS of the European Parliament. This state reflects, in a way, the drifting of the political ambiance in Europe to the right since the early 2000s, a decade when central-right governments were dominant in most European capitals. Although the economy and trade still are at the nucleus of the EU-China relationship, global issues like the political situation in the Korean Peninsula, the internal situation in Iran, Afghanistan or Iraq urgently call for the attention of both partners. Because of the instability of world affairs, the uprising of the Arab Spring, and the force of the Media, Human Rights have become a central topic for European and Western audiences.

To respond to these different inputs there is a tendency (that came from the past) for EU politicians use a double discourse on China, a kind of “stick and carrot” strategy. On one side there are those that argue that China is Europe’s pleasant partner. On the other side there are those that assess China as a trouble maker that needs to be put in order. The “chairmen” Durão Barroso and Von Rompuy appear to pursue an institutional (neoliberal) approach to China emphasizing what is positive in the EU-China strategic partnership and down-plays the cases that generate tensions or acrimony. Catherine Ashton, the Labour politician that is Vice-President of the Commission and head of the EU’s diplomacy, exteriorize a discourse of moral rectitude and ethical behaviour (an idealistic approach) that would frame the European Union foreign policy and that has its foundation in the Charter of Human Rights of the EU and in article 10 of the Treaty of European Union added by the Treaty of Lisbon.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The article says: “1. The Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. 2. The Union shall seek to develop relations and build partnerships with third countries, and international, regional or global organisations which share the principles referred to in the first subparagraph. It shall promote multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in the framework of the United Nations.” Treaty of Lisbon. *Amendments to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty Establishing the European Community, paragraph*

It seems obvious that at the bottom of this “Janus” duality resides a problem with the conception of the EU’s foreign policy, something that critics point out as the reason for the EU’s fragility as an authentic international actor. Policy drafters have a problem with the *identity* or *constructionist approach* they adopt as a tool to build a stable relationship with China.⁴⁸ The *identity approach* disregards institutional or negotiation tactics (akin to the neoliberal perspective) or the remaking of the balance of power between the European Union and China (preferred by the realist’s approach) to reinforce Europe’s positions towards China.⁴⁹ Emphasizing the role of *ideas* which define the *identities* of the actors and making them part of the negotiation process; those policy makers argue that the EU needs to change China according to the European prototype. Divergent identities generate conflict and create mistrust; converging identities have the opposite effect favouring strategies of cooperation and exchange. If China turns out to be democratic and Human Rights-friendly - they say - all the problems happening in EU-China relationship will disappear. Ideas - they argue - define values, norms and beliefs that national governments and International Organizations hold and pursue when they apply power. So if China is convinced to share, in its process of transformation, the collective identity that Europe institutionalizes in their constitutional texts and that represent the paradigm principles of Europe, the EU’s position would be automatically valued with regard to other countries that pursue a more confrontational approach. So the real way-out to this deadlock is continuous, multilayer, dialogue.

It is not possible to maintain, indefinitely, a negotiation approach that holds its interlocutor as simultaneously a friend and foe. It would reveal incoherence and hypocrisy. So the EU’s double discourse cannot survive. The anarchy of the international relations, the hypothetical decline of the United States as world’s hegemon, China’s sustained path to regional leadership recommend a strategy that is flexible, intelligent and non-conditioned by voluntary declarations of principles. On delicate issues as human rights, history shows that the enforcement of political pressures through proper channels is preferable to public outcries which provoke tension and a negative attitude. There is also a problem of coherence. How can the EU’s foreign policy conceptors define an external policy toward China based upon principles such as democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms? How can the EU enforce at the same time a “realistic” policy towards Africa, Central Asia or Latin-America, including countries like Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia or Uganda whose record on Human Rights conformity is grey at best?

5 CHINA’S SCRUTINY OF THE BILATERAL DIALOGUE

China’s reaction to the tone and achievements of the China-EU bilateral dialogue has been mild-mannered and appreciative. The Joint Statement of the Ninth EU-China Summit accentuated “the past decade had seen significant challenges in the EU and in China and a progressive deepening of

24. Available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/dat/12007L/hm/C2007306EN.01001001.htm> (11 May 2012).

⁴⁸ There are different paradigms to analyze international relations, namely realism, liberalism, neo-realism, constructivism, critical theory or neoliberalism to name some of the theoretical approaches. It should be noted that the debate from different perspectives and groupings is sometimes overlapping and there is hardly one approach that has the secret of the laws of world events.

⁴⁹ Henry R. Nau, *Perspectives on International Relations*, 2nd edition (Washington D.C: CQ Press, 2009), 44–53.

the relationship, which was maturing into a comprehensive strategic partnership". The Statement stresses "the leaders of both sides (Wen Jiabao, José Manuel Barroso and Matti Vanhanen, prime-minister of Finland, and organizer of the meeting) believed that the strengthening of the relationship has been of great value to the long interests of the EU and China". The document noted "the importance of high-level political dialogue and consultations at all levels in enhancing understanding and trust, expanding common ground and advancing bilateral relations" and welcomed the "recently established regular strategic dialogue mechanism, which had proven to be a valuable tool in the frank and in-depth discussions of important international and regional issues".⁵⁰ The wording carefully chosen by the heads of the delegations illustrated a deliberate intention to encourage "harmony and convergence" the fundamental principles on China's external policy.

On the Tenth China-EU Summit held on November 28, 2007, in Beijing, the mood of the bilateral relationship was positively signed by China's official agency. According to Xinhua, Wen Jiabao declared "during the decade the China-EU ties have witnessed the fastest development in history and mutual beneficial cooperation has produced rich results and ties now have reached an unprecedented level in width and depth". The meeting was, he said, "an occasion where both sides touch upon the entire core issues in the China-EU relations in a pragmatic and open attitude and "agreed to properly handle the disputes through dialogue and negotiation".⁵¹ In this context, Wen Jiabao made a four-point proposal gathering improvements in the structure and volume of trade; maintaining close high-level contacts and have prompt exchanges on bilateral and global issues; speeding up negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement; strengthening practical cooperation in areas like climate change, energy and environmental protection.⁵² On that same occasion, after a meeting with Durão Barroso, and José Sócrates⁵³, Hu Jintao reiterated the priorities of China for the China-EU dialogue "China and EU should, in the spirit of mutual respect and negotiation on an equal footing, properly handle new circumstances and problems emerging from the development of bilateral ties so as to expand common ground, narrow discord and create a much better internal and external environment for further pushing forward the China-EU all-round strategic partnership".

On February 14, 2012, Premier Wen Jiabao, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso jointly met the press at the Great Hall of the People. The press conference followed the 14th EU-China Summit. The tone of Wen Jiabao's remarks was once again conciliatory "the overall development of China-EU relations remained stable against the ever-changing and complicated international situation in recent years".⁵⁴ He noted that "no matter in bilateral or multilateral areas, the interests of China and the EU are more closely intertwined". He saluted the coordination, communication and cooperation

⁵⁰ See Delegation of the European Commission. *Joint Statement*, 9 September 2006. Available at <http://www.delchn.cec.eu.int/en/whatsnew/pren090906.htm> (15 May 2012).

⁵¹ Just one week before Peter Mandelson had warned that China might face anti-dumping measures if Beijing would not make anything about its "unsustainable" trade surplus with the European Union. Brussels has been criticizing China for its counterfeit goods market and for exporting even for Europe fake goods.

⁵² See Xinhua. *China, EU outline strategic partnership*, Beijing, 29 November 2007. Available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com> (15 May 2012).

⁵³ At the time the Prime-Minister of Portugal and rotative President of the European Council.

⁵⁴ See Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Grenada. *Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso Jointly Meet Journalists*, Beijing, 16 February, 2012. Available at <http://gd.chinaembassy.org/eng/zyxw/t905695.htm> (15 May 2012).

between the two sides “the remarkable progress achieved in the development of China-EU relations” what in his own words make “the growing momentum of China-EU cooperative relations more obvious”. Wen Jiabao mentioned the common issues shared by China and the EU “promoting reform, enhancing solidarity and deepening cooperation is the common choice of China and EU and the only right path for the two sides.” He touched the issue of Human Rights “China is willing to continue to carry out exchanges and dialogues with the EU in various fields, including human rights”. He argued that those dialogues “should be established on the basis of mutual respect and on an objective and fair basis” and “should help to enhance mutual trust and cooperation”.

China has been very careful and self-controlled having a positive standpoint towards Europe and downplays any point of friction or dissatisfaction coming from trade imbalances or from differing views on international issues.⁵⁵ This posture is not supposed to shift in the short-run. First of all, China likes to argue China-EU hold a common view on international affairs based upon a multilateral approach. China’s diplomatic practice is consistent with the official view of *China’s EU Policy Paper* “China will continue to pursue its independent foreign policy of peace and work closely with other countries for the establishment of a new international political and economic order that is fair and equitable, and based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, China as always, respect diversity in the world and promote democracy in international relations in the interest of world peace and common development.”⁵⁶

Secondly, China assesses his priorities and challenges with a *realist* view and analysis of the problems of the international agenda.⁵⁷ China sees States as the most important actors on world stage and answering to no higher authority, looks for conflicts of interest (among them) as inevitable and sees the anarchical nature of the international society as an invitation for foreign policymakers to make choices as *rational problem* solving. So state sovereignty, an important principle of international law, give State leaders the freedom and responsibility to do whatever they sense necessary to advance the state’s interest and its survival. This has been a constant on the views of several China’s leaders since Deng Xiaoping or even Mao.

Xiaolin Guo, a Chinese scholar, remarks that despite differences in style and practice between the three last secretary-generals of Chinese Communist Party there has been a notable consistency in policy-making in domestic and international affairs. Guo says “at every juncture of volatility in international affairs, China’s central leadership has invariably reiterated its determination to stick to socialism in domestic development while opposing hegemony in international affairs. From Deng to Hu, there has been a notable consensus that hegemony is detrimental to world peace, and that it impacts adversely on economic development in China. Policy-making has, therefore, been oriented toward creating a benign environment for the country’s economic

⁵⁵ Following a discussion at EU foreign ministers meeting in March 2008, about the crackdown in Tibetan protests, China expressed its strong dissatisfaction with the EU criticism considering it interference in its own internal affairs. See EUObserver.com. *China attacks EU position on Tibet crackdown*, London, 31 March 2008. Available at <http://euobserver.com> (15 May 2012).

⁵⁶ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. *China’s EU Policy Paper*, Beijing, 13 October 2003. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t27708.htm> (15 May 2012).

⁵⁷ See Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?,” *International Security*, 27, 4 (2003), 5–56; Thomas J. Christensen, “Chinese Realpolitik,” *Foreign Affairs*, 75, 5 (1996), 37–52.

development and modernization. The management of foreign relations has, without exception, been adapted to the pursuit of that goal.”⁵⁸

Yang Baoyun, professor of international relations in the University of Beijing, argues that although the China-US relations have been considered the most important external relations for the Chinese government, China-EU relations have “an important weight in the diplomatic balance of China”. China’s government attach a greater importance in reinforcing relations with all European countries but also enhancing its relationship with the European Union, what is – according with Baoyun – a reaction to the increasing importance of the EU in the international scene. Considering, favourably, the development of bilateral cooperation in economic, commercial, scientific and technological domains, Baoyun considers that “Europe insist in the importance of human rights but looks more for dialogue then confrontation”. In his view, China appreciates this attitude and this is why “both parties agree on pursuing its dialogue on this subject on the basis of mutual respect and equal footing”. A specific trace distinguishes Sino European relations: the larger success achieved in the economic domain as compared with the political sphere of cooperation.⁵⁹

During 2006 an ongoing series of top-level exchanges have resulted in China and Europe implementing layers of cooperation and dialogue accorded during the annual summits. In 2007 and 2008 the relationship became deeper. Two-thirds of the EU commissioners visited China, as did dozens of EU parliamentarians. The heads of state or government of 14 European countries also visited China in 2007. During the 10th China-EU Summit on November 2007, the two sides agreed to launch a High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue to address their burgeoning relationship in this field to new areas like personnel training, economic reform, marketing promotion, environmental protection, agriculture and poverty alleviation, etc.⁶⁰ This stance continued till the present. The official data on bilateral relations on trade and investments, the approval of new sectoral dialogues confirm the idea of a system of interchanges that bring China and the EU together

China’s booming diplomacy reflects a renewed insight of its national interests, an awareness of his main interests (energy security, economic growth, political stability, and recognition) and the will to move from a defensive stance to a more outward one. Beijing perceives the difficulties of a responsible “international stakeholder” position as it becomes an “indispensable actor” in global politics. By doing so, China has raised its profile and is putting itself under international scrutiny as a Great Power.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between the EU and China is now almost 40 years old and it embraces areas that range from trade & commerce and human rights to foreign affairs and from research and development to education and culture.

⁵⁸ Xiaolin, Guo. *Repackaging Confucius: PRC Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Soft Power*, Asia Paper, Stockholm, Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2008. Available at <http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/ap/08/xg08repackagingconfucius.pdf> (6 May 2012).

⁵⁹ Yang Baoyun. “Confiance et prudence: la diplomatie chinoise au début du XXI^e siècle.” *La revue internationale et stratégique*, 44, (2001–2002). Available at <http://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-et-strategique-2001-4.html> (15 May 2012).

⁶⁰ Bates Gill and Melissa Murphy, *China-Europe Relations. Implications and Policy Responses for the United States. A Report of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies* (Washington D.C.: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2008).

This relationship has developed in the same frantic pace that we may find in the progress of Chinese society. Some of the suspicion, frustration or ignorance that has overshadowed that affiliation has disappeared but it is obvious that history still has an enormous influence on EU-China relations. China regularly stresses that its first priority is economic and sustained development and emphasize that nonetheless the tremendous growth over these four decades a there is still a huge distance to be overcome in order to reach an acceptable living standard for its entire people. China sees poverty and backwardness as a form of human rights and certainly it is. China doesn't like to be lectured on individual Human Rights cases such as the Falun Gong sect, Tibetan protests, Liu Xiaobo or Ai Wei demonstrations. Beijing normally over-reacts when the EU leaders raise that issue qualifying it as interference of China's internal affairs. China's accountability to international human rights will continue to be a topic of disagreement in the coming decades, as they are closely related to the democratic openness of China.

After a decade of rosy rhetoric and steadily improving ties, China-Europe relations entered a more complicated phase, recalls an author.⁶¹ After the first phase of "honeymoon" China and Europe entered the "marriage" phase and both parties are beginning to realize that their relationship has complexities, tensions, and divergences that are common to any kind of relationship. Some of these anxieties are internal but others rise from outside factors and actors that contributed to the reshaping of the relationship.

Looking ahead several variables will likely shape EU policy towards China. One of them is the impact of the trade deficit on European economies, and new claims of protectionism looking to guard the EU against international competition. Another is the willingness of China to respond, positively, to some of the complains outlined in the 2006 Communication of the Commission, like obstructions to European investments in China, dumping Chinese exports, subsidies, illegal immigration (to Europe) and other non-quantitative restrictions that impact European exports and strike at its interests.⁶² Another topic is Europe's refusal to answer positively to China's request to lift the arms embargo imposed in 1989 and grant the Market Economy Status (MES). Even another is China eagerness to proceed to effective political reforms. The EU has invest strongly in assisting China in pursuing a set of reforms dealing with the liberalization of the economy, allowing the strengthening of a civil society and making the political system more open, transparent and accountable. Europe expects that China will now reward this assistance, positively.

Another variable is the part that China is available to commit to "global governance", meaning by that, the participation in UN peacekeeping operations, a contribution to the issue of non-proliferation, to help to resolve the North Korea issue, to facilitate the dialogue between the West and Iran. Europe is deeply concerned about China's support for non-democratic states, particularly in Africa, Latin America and in Asia, what has been addressed as a "value-free democracy". Europe sees this move as China's strategy to take by force areas of European customary influence. The last variable is the China-US relationship and the way this factor weights on EU-China relation. In a year of presidential elections in the United States there is

⁶¹ David Shambaugh, *China-Europe relations get complicated* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2007).

⁶² Duncan Freeman, "New EU, China pact looks beyond trade," *Asia Times*, 2 November 2006. Available at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/china/HK02Ad01.html> (15 May 2012).

a lot of curiosity about changes a democratic president may bring in to this “competitive partnership” with reflects in transatlantic relations. Some commentators suggest that it would be unrealistic to aim for such dramatic alterations in US-China relations and that after a few months of ideological hitting everything will be back to the customary track. Others argue that a conciliatory stance between the two world powers may be scratched by lateral conflicts in the Middle East or Africa that foster the US and China to different sides of the barricade.

In any scenario, Sino-European relationship remains an important stable factor in a world doomed to Great-Power rivalry and security competition. Europe has been the catalytic force in the relationship and plays an important role as a passionate suitor, but both sides need to control their expectations, be more practical learn to live together even with some occasional frictions. It is said that any marriage as up and downs and the secret of a good relation is to refresh the passion. Europe-China dating needs more passion and less calculation.

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