

EU-CHINA OBSERVER

DEPARTMENT OF EU INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY STUDIES



"EXCHANGING IDEAS
ON EU-CHINA RELATIONS:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
APPROACH"



College of Europe
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DEPARTMENT OF EU INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY STUDIES

Baillet Latour Chair of
European Union-China Relations



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Baillet Latour Chair of EU-China Relations / EU-China Research Centre
Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, College of
Europe, Dijver 11, BE-8000 Bruges, www.coleurope.eu

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Professor Jing MEN

✉ jing.men@coleurope.eu
☎ +32 50 477 258

Dr. Anna Katharina STAHL

✉ anna.stahl@coleurope.eu
☎ +32 50 477 249

Michele CASADEI

✉ michele.casadei@coleurope.eu
☎ +32 50 477 257

EU-China Observer Inbox

✉ EUCO@coleurope.eu



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Prof. Jing MEN

*Director of the EU-China
Research Centre and Baillet
Latour Professor of European
Union-China Relations*

EU-CHINA RELATIONS - THE WAY FORWARD

DR. ZSUZSA ANNA FERENCZY

Following China's reform and opening up in 1978, the European Union (EU), as a normative power, committed to facilitating China's alignment with international norms. The people-to-people contact within their strategic partnership aims at reinforcing mutual trust. Ironically trust, a fundamental element of any strategic partnership, continues to be lacking. The predominant view is that Europe has failed to shape China's development in a manner that is commensurate with international norms. Therefore, the question must be asked: with the United States seemingly willing to disengage internationally, what is next for EU-China? In addressing the question, it is vital to examine factors both enabling and hampering cooperation. In a world where the concept of power is being reevaluated and ideas circulate globally with few boundaries, identifying effective cooperation is necessary in order to understand how and why trust has not developed more fully and what must be done to develop more cooperative relations. This is undoubtedly in everyone's interest. This paper argues that it is by stressing multilateralism within the existing international order that Europe should reinforce cooperation with China, while safeguarding EU interests and values.

EU-China in a shifting international order

The rules-based liberal international order established under the leadership of the US after World War II was based on rules and norms serving economic openness via multilateral institutions, and security organizations pursuing liberal political norms. With the end of the Cold War, this 'inside' order built in one half of the bipolar Cold War was globalized; to be inside this order was to enjoy the protec-

tion of alliance partnerships.¹ The EU has benefitted from and contributed to this order as a member of a growing alliance of democratic states with shared values, including democracy and human rights, building its integration around these values in the spirit of multilateralism. The European Union's commitment to effective multilateralism, with the United Nations at its core, is a central element of the EU's external policy, as set out in the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy.² After seven decades under the hegemonic leadership of the US, writes John Ikenberry, this liberal order is now in crisis, challenged by a wide array of states with diverse ideologies.³ States like Russia and China are questioning the liberal elements of the order, namely democracy and human rights, and support the conservative elements, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, signaling a move away from multilateralism.⁴

China has grown to be an important driver of this global change, even perceived as a challenger with increased economic and political clout. In fact, China's impact on American leadership has been addressed through the lens of the Thucydides Trap.¹ Debate continues on Beijing's intentions, questioning its "peaceful rise".¹¹ China's increased influence has strengthened doubts concerning the relevance of western liberalism, with an unpredictable US leadership seeking disengagement, as exemplified by President Donald Trump's "America First" policy. This has affected international efforts to address issues such as climate change, human rights, and global trade, with the Trump administration withdrawing from global institutions and agreements such as the Paris Agreement, the UN Human Rights Council, the Trans-Pacific Partnership

agreement and NAFTA, to name a few.⁵ EU leaders viewed the US withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council as “undermining the role of the US as a champion and supporter of democracy on the world stage”.⁶ Reflecting similar disapproval, majorities in France and Germany trust China and Russia more than the US, at the moment when German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on Europe to “take its destiny in its own hands”.⁷ The perceived challenge caused by China’s rise is linked to the future of the international order. In fact, the EU-China relationship cannot be properly assessed without considering the role of the US in a changing international order.

A brief overview of the economic and political elements of the international order therefore is helpful. The 1974 Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) marked an important milestone in addressing the relationship between developed and developing countries.⁸ It called for the equal participation of the latter in the formulation and application of decisions that concern the international community, stating that the new order should be founded on the respect of, inter alia, the sovereign equality of states. The 2016 UNGA overview of the progress since 1974 found that challenges to inclusive economic growth have remained.⁹ This aspect has become relevant in the political sphere of relations between developed and developing countries, drawing sovereignty to the centre of the debate. Sovereignty has become a contentious political issue also in EU-China ties. Notwithstanding recent tendencies of some member states to restore national sovereignty, as seen for example with the UK’s vote for an exit from the EU, the EU, as an international organization, is based on sovereignty sharing. In contrast, historically for China sovereignty is sacred, one of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to guide inter-state relations, along with territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference, equality and peaceful coexistence.¹⁰

IN 2015 ALONE, OVER ONE MILLION ASYLUM SEEKERS AND MIGRANTS ARRIVED IN EUROPE, EXPOSING FLAWS IN THE EU’S ASYLUM SYSTEM

China contends human rights are a matter of domestic affairs, and perceives any criticism as a violation of sovereignty, in conflict with the universal rights approach the EU has embraced. In Western perception it is feared Beijing uses these principles to promote its vision for a future Asian security order, made by and for Asians. “The five principles that China initiated together with India and Myanmar have become a basic norm governing state-to-state relations”, President Xi declared in 2014.¹⁰ This normative divergence lies at the heart of Europe’s and China’s relationship with international norms. While Europe has subscribed to and benefitted from the international order as this was established following World War II under American leadership, China, with an identity wavering between that of a developing and a developed country, seeks to prioritize principles that help increase its normative weight internationally. Western countries, in particular the US, perceive China as seeking regional hegemony, fearing that China is proposing a rival order “with Chinese characteristics”, incompatible with international principles currently endorsed in the West, including human rights, democracy and rule of law.

The future: what next for multilateralism?

The shift in the global distribution of power following the 2008 global financial crisis generated further challenges to EU-China relations, as China’s global clout has increased and Europe’s weakened. Albeit to different levels across Europe, managing financial difficulties has become a challenge throughout the EU. With the eurozone in crisis, EU integration has suffered, exacerbating fragmentation, creating a demand for financial resources. Turning inward, Europe appears less equipped to deepen integration and engage globally, affecting its international standing. In addition, an unprecedented wave of migration has hit the continent, sharpening divisions. In 2015 alone, over one million asylum seekers and migrants arrived in Europe, exposing flaws in the EU’s asylum system.¹¹ EU institutions have searched for remedies, providing aid to member states receiving migrants, such as Greece and Italy, and neighboring countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey, or fighting people-smugglers and securing borders. Member states remain locked in a struggle over enabling more migration vs. stopping it altogether. Migration has become political and a make-or-break issue in upcoming European Parliament elections.¹² Some believe the crises damaged voters’ confidence in political elites, and a much larger number of voters are putting their faith in anti-establishment parties promising change.¹³

In contrast, in the past decade China has seen its global influence grow, building special relationships inside the EU and boosting its political influence. For example, Chinese state firm COSCO Shipping Ports took over the terminal in Zeebrugge, Belgium's second-biggest port, following acquisitions in Spain, Italy, Greece, accounting for about one-tenth of European port capacity. While this helps the maritime half of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), European leaders fear it is enabling the rise of influence in Europe.¹⁴ As such, EU officials saw Greece's blocking the EU from condemning China's human rights record at the United Nations in 2017 as a consequence of China's buying a 51 percent stake in its largest port, Piraeus in 2016.¹⁵ Following Greece's vote, German Chancellor Merkel stressed that Europe "has to speak with China in one voice".¹⁶ After several high-profile acquisitions by Chinese state owned enterprises, EU officials see China as a powerful foreign player inside the EU, making them anxious that China is buying silence on human rights, just as speaking up has become all the more needed with US leadership in retreat.¹⁷ Yet, given that the EU remains divided on China, the level of anxiety in member states varies, with the case of Greece as a telling example.

Notwithstanding national differences however, the EU as a whole, as reflected in Brussels at the initiative of EU institutions, is shifting its China discourse towards "a more realistic, assertive and multi-faceted approach", which requires full unity. This was articulated in the March 2019 communication entitled "EU-China – A strategic outlook", calling China a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance".¹⁸ The communication also claims that while China has expressed its commitment to a fair and equitable global governance model, "China's engagement in favour of multilateralism is sometimes selective and based on a different understanding of the rules-based international order". The reference to a "different understanding" recalls the normative divergence in EU-China relations, manifested in their different systems of governance, suggesting a value gap between Europe's traditional Western liberalism and China's "socialism with Chinese characteristics". As a result, human rights in EU-China relations have become the most difficult area to engage in. As the March communication highlights, the joint ability to "engage effectively on human rights will be an important measure of the quality of the bilateral relationship". In the same spirit, in its April 2019 resolution the European Parliament even went as far as

to stress that "if and when EU-China summit language is weak on human rights, the Council, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission should decline to include it at all and issue a separate communication on the topic with a meaningful assessment both of the situation and why stronger language could not be agreed".¹⁹

Unlike the US, Europe keeps stressing the importance of upholding multilateralism in its external relations. This is in line with its normative power identity, as reflected – and contested – in vivid academic debates and within EU institutions.^{iv} When the US pulled out of the Paris Agreement, the EU and China appeared to be the champions of the 2015 accord, issuing a joint communique saying "the Paris Agreement is proof that with shared political will and mutual trust, multilateralism can succeed in building fair and effective solutions to the most critical global problems of our time".²⁰ This joint embrace is on discourse level and has to be considered in the context of China's growing and Europe's decreasing global influence, as well as the US's disengagement. These factors have all affected China's

international behaviour.

In the face of Western protectionist forces, at the World Economic Forum in Davos Chinese President Xi stressed: "We should commit ourselves to growing an open global economy".²¹ Beijing's vigorous defence

EUROPE KEEPS STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF UPHOLDING MULTILATERALISM IN ITS EXTERNAL RELATIONS

of free trade has been interpreted as a desire to play a greater global role as the US retreats.²² Indeed, under President Trump, the US has been described as a "confrontational, unreliable and unpredictable partner" for Europe.²³ Amid heightened trade tensions, the US even downgraded the EU's diplomatic status as an international organization.²⁴

Taking advantage of the global leadership vacuum, China is seeking to shape the international order according to its ambitions to take on a bigger role. To effectively address challenges to global leadership, upholding multilateralism at the core of the international order remains essential, revealing the role the EU can play, just as the transatlantic alliance frays. On discourse level, Europe and China jointly embracing multilateralism could suggest a shared belief that coordinated responses are needed to global challenges. The two cooperate in numerous dialogues, free of the rivalry for regional and global hegemony which entangle the US and China. At the 20th EU-China joint summit the two "reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism and

the rules-based international order with the United Nations at its core, and to uphold the UN Charter and international law, including the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders".²⁵ In contrast, US President Trump has never expressed support for the institutions of global governance that emerged after 1945.²⁶

Yet, normative divergence deeply affects the concept of sovereignty in EU-China ties, which makes transposing the discourse on the embrace of multilateralism into action all the more difficult. Recent significant shifts in the interpretation of sovereignty inside the EU bring further challenges. At the 2018 Boao Forum President Xi said China would "firmly support multilateralism, and take an active part in reforming the global governance system", which would enable it "to build a new type of international relations and promote a community with a shared future for mankind".²⁷ This suggests an embrace of multilateralism "with Chinese characteristics". When interpreting China's call for open trade, we have to also remember the remaining restrictions on foreign investment in China, just as Chinese state-run firms face no such restrictions in their acquisitions in Europe. As China calls for an open economy, Europe has stepped up its own calls on reciprocity, adopting an EU-framework for screening foreign direct investment, but still remaining one of the most open investment regimes globally.²⁸ In an ironic contrast, visiting Brussels in 2018 US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stressed that the US's mission was to "reassert sovereignty", embracing unilateralism.²⁹

Conclusion

Europe and China are most likely to prosper if they are mutually open. The two diverge in terms of their history, culture, levels of development and forms of governance, all of which have shaped their approach to international norms. Given the global leadership vacuum, Europe should continue stressing "effective multilateralism" when navigating

cooperation with China within the international order, "with the United Nations at its core", as its 2016 Global Strategy commits. The EU should also strive towards more internal convergence on China. This is not without challenges as member states' views diverge, and the meaning and applicability of sovereignty are being revalued globally. China's global presence – and influence inside the EU – have been on the rise, while Europe remains divided on how to engage China. This has limited its leverage and undermined its global standing. Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs in Brussels that the tone of the EU's China's narrative is shifting towards more realism and assertiveness. Furthermore, there is mutual agreement that multilateralism, embraced via a strong network of alliances, remains essential for the two partners to ensure a sustainable future together, where all sides contribute and mutual interests can be pursued together. Multilateralism must also remain the basis of the transatlantic alliance, which should be safeguarded, not trumped over. Against the background of an unpredictable US President concerning multilateralism and global trade, at the latest bilateral summit the EU and China committed to fight against unilateralism and protectionism.³⁰ It is time both sides take this commitment seriously and translate it into action. ©

I In "Destined for War. Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?", Graham Allison uses the concept of 'Thucydides's Trap' to describe the inevitable structural stress in international relations when a rising power, such as China, challenges a ruling power, such as the US. G. Allison, First Mariner Books ed. 2018.

II Articulated in 2003 by President Hu Jintao, China's peaceful rise policy implies that by taking advantage of the peaceful international environment, China will develop economically, and contribute to world peace. See Council on Foreign Relations, *The Promise and Pitfalls of China's 'Peaceful Rise'*, 2006, <https://www.cfr.org/background/promise-and-pitfalls-chinas-peaceful-rise>

III The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were first codified in treaty form in 1954 in an agreement between China and India. The principles, born of post-colonial solidarity, became a major pillar in China's foreign policy.

IV Ian Manners claimed that the development of the 1990s in international relations have led the EU to transcend both notions of military power and civilian power to become a normative power. He identified nine norms the EU thus pursues in its external relations: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, human rights, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development and global governance. Yet others, such as Mikael Mattlin argued that it is almost impossible for Brussels to uphold a consistent normative policy towards China without appearing inconsistent or hypocritical. For more see I. Manners, "Normative Power Europe: a contradiction in terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2002, 40(2): 234-258; M. Mattlin, "Dead on arrival: normative EU policy towards China", *Asia Europe Journal*, 2012, 10: 181-198.

1 For more on liberal internationalism see Ikenberry, 2018. **2** European External Action Service, Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf **3** G. John Ikenberry, "The end of liberal international order?" International Affairs, 2018, 94: 1. p. 8. **4** For more on the current international order, see RAND, Understanding the Current International Order, 2016, p. 12. **5** H. Dudar & D. 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Zsuzsa Anna FERENCZY

BIO

Zsuzsa Anna FERENCZY works as political advisor in the European Parliament in Brussels. She obtained her doctoral degree in political science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2017. Her fields of research include European foreign policy and Asia, in particular EU-China relations, Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula. As part of her doctoral studies, in 2016 she conducted research at the National Taiwan University. She is expert consultant on China and the Korean Peninsula of Human Rights Without Frontiers, and author of "Europe, China, and the Limits of Normative Power", published in March 2019 by Edward Elgar Publishing Inc.

CHINESE AND EU POLICIES TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA: A PERSPECTIVE OF CONCEPTUAL DIVERGENCES IN KEY POLICY DOMAINS

ZEREN LANGJIA & JIAN SHI

Introduction

China and the EU have multiple concerns and interests in Central Asia (CA),¹ but divergences on major norms concerning CA issues hold China and the EU back from achieving further development in cooperation. As both seek better cooperation, these divergences must be narrowed and tackled head-on. Historically, great powers equate control over Central Asia to the advantages of international leadership. As CA links up Europe and Asia, for China control over the region will mean the 'containment of Europe', exert impact on East Asia and contain Middle Eastern threats.² Central Asia, which has been overlooked, became increasingly important for both China and the EU during 1990s and in the post-9/11 era.

China did not have "an integrated and systematic picture of the region and its potential" in early 1990s, but the situation is changing according to the "dynamic development" in and around Central Asia, which urges China "to make constant adjustments to the assessment criteria with respect to the threats to its interests".³ Likewise, the EU has "a very limited history of interaction",⁴ and thus is a real 'newcomer' in the region. As late as 2007, the EU issued its first CA strategy. Since then, several major developments, such as China's BRI and CA states' increasing engagements in Afghanistan, occurred in the region (or Greater Eurasia). Thus a new EU CA strategy, as a response to new dynamics, is expected by mid-2019.⁵

Examining Chinese and EU engagements in Central Asia is worthwhile for various rationales: to better review Chinese and European policies towards the region, to recognize CA

states' attitudes towards major powers, and to understand the possibility of reducing the divergences. Therefore, this paper will look at four aspects of divergences in Chinese and European CA policies: security, energy, stability and soft approaches.

Defining the Scope of the Security Concept

The EU and China have marked divergences on the scope of the concept of security. China's security interest in Central Asia is shifting from 'no security action' in the 2000s to "an actual military presence" in recent years, especially in Greater Eurasia.⁶ In China's case, it is important to take into consideration the inclusive term 'comprehensive national strength', for Chinese security policy goes along with economic and political policies. Basically, "the military, political and economic dimensions are all regarded as vital".⁷ China prioritises conventional security. It plays an active role in promoting the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), through which China can develop its cooperation with CA states against the so-called "Three Forces" of terrorism, extremism and separatism,⁸ which are all Chinese security concerns. Zhang even argues, the decline of either Europe or China will lead to the rise and expansion of the power of mainly Islamic forces in Central Asia,⁹ which basically equates the power rise of CA states to the rise of Islamic forces, which will be detrimental to international cooperation.

The EU, however, does not share the same opinions on the Three Forces. While most terrorist attacks are ascribed to repressive political regimes and uncontrolled activism of 'foreign' religious groups, whether the origins of local Islamic radicalism are confirmed by evidence remains

a big question.¹⁰ Besides, the EU security policy covers multiple areas. The EU's CA strategy, focusing "primarily on security and stability", supports the initiatives of individual CA states to "combat poverty and develop regional cooperation in energy, transportation, higher education, and environmental protection".¹¹ Namely, the EU is more concerned with 'soft' security. However, CA states resist EU promotion of human rights, the rule of law and other democratic values. In this way, the EU is at a disadvantage as a result of excessive focus on human rights and democratic reform while the region remains receptive to EU donations.

EU and China Share Concern over Central Asian Energy Security but Disagree on Approaches to Energy Protection

Energy is a strategic resource and thus instrumental in ensuring CA geopolitical stability. Energy strategy is often based on calculation of economic interests and the security risks to energy resources, of which energy security is of greatest importance for CA regional sustainable development and for all international players involved. As the EU and China are two large energy consumers and have high demand for oil, guaranteeing energy supply security becomes a top concern and ensuring energy security is in the interests of both China and the EU. Both prioritise energy security over economic interests.

The strategic focuses of China-Central Asia energy cooperation include establishment of an energy order at the international level, strengthening the role of China-Central Asia in global energy governance, guaranteeing energy security at Chinese national level and promoting CA economic development and security.¹² Similarly, for the EU energy is identified as a key sector of cooperation with CA as the region is well-placed to meet the EU's growing external energy needs.¹³ EU-Central Asia trade is "driven by the energy sector".¹⁴ For the EU, energy has been an important policy instrument to pursue geopolitical stability. A typical example is that European integration started with European Coal and Steel Community where founding members jointly controlled energy resources, which eventually contributed to European geopolitical stability. Nevertheless, while well

THE EU HAS MADE EFFORTS ON THIS, BUT WITHOUT MUCH POSITIVE REACTION FROM INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INCLUDING CA STATES



aware of this factor, the EU and China do not share a consensus on a rule-based common energy market.

It has to be noted that economic growth is not the whole story of CA development. In particular, natural resources are not unexhaustable. Therefore, sustainable development is of great significance. To this end, to design a rule-based common energy market is important. The EU has made efforts on this, but without much positive reaction from international actors including CA states. This is partially because CA national strategies highlight role of FDI, but tariff and institutional barriers remain and FDIs mostly pursue strategic goals instead of being commercially driven.¹⁵ As Central Asia is vulnerable regarding natural environment, sustainable management of natural resources comes to be extremely important. Thus, while pursuing economic interests, international actors are hoped to pay much attention to CA's natural vulnerability.

Comprehensive CA Stability Policy: China's Focused Policy Intent versus the EU's Diversified Policy Objectives

Regarding CA regional stability, being challenged by the poor relations among CA states and their unstable political systems, the EU and China have different priorities. While the EU pays much attention to the political stability of CA states and regards it as an essential prerequisite of the long-term regional stability, China shows preference for CA security stability, which is in line of China's national policy to 'maintain stability' in its western regions. However, this is not saying that the EU is altruistic and China is egoistic. Basically, both Chinese and European CA policies benefit CA regional stability but in varying degrees. EU stability

policies have underlined the long-term interests of CA states and the region as an entirety, which will benefit the EU itself, while Chinese policy has given priority to the long-term interest of its own national stability.

There exist divergences on political diversity and stability of the region. The relational calculus between economic development and political stability in Chinese thinking is that infrastructure construction advances economic development that in turn fosters political stability. Although the intention of Chinese stress on infrastructure is to depoliticise its involvement in the region, “infrastructure is actually never apolitical”.¹⁶ For instance, the proposed Chinese–Uzbekistan railway has had impacts in separatist settlements in Southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁷ For the EU, democratising the region is an important prerequisite of ensuring stability. Nevertheless, as the Kremlin “fundamentally distrusts EU attempts”,¹⁸ China also denounces the EU for its interference in internal affairs of CA countries in the name of democratisation and does not share the EU’s view of stability based upon political diversity and alternatives for reform and modernization.¹⁹ Moreover, they have divergences on governance assistance, though international assistance to establish rule-based governance systems is important for stable political development.

China’s policy intent regarding stability is specific: it means no conflicts. China’s top concern is that instability in CA will spill over into its western region. But the EU’s intention goes beyond ‘no conflicts’. The EU has a goal of removing the root causes of political instability. Moreover, the EU’s policies regarding regional stability equally emphasise regional economic prosperity, ecological sustainability, education, women’s rights and infrastructure. This is because domestic poverty, depletion of water resources and ecological problems have caused destabilisation that gives rise to “a disorderly mass migration”.²⁰ Thus EU regional stability policy intentions have multiple goals.

Embracing Soft Approaches but Resorting to Different Instruments

So far, the consensus between the EU and China is limited to a non-military or non-hard approach to CA, but they do not share opinions on detailed aspects regarding soft power. Multilateralism is the oft-proclaimed soft approach, but the EU and China interpret the term differently. It is still problematic what kind of multilateralism is promoted and shared by the EU and China. Nevertheless, as no single actor can dominate the region according to Mackinder’s Paradox (the gap between capability and expectation), multi- or bi-lateral cooperation comes to the fore.

WHILE CHINA’S CA POLICIES ARE CHARACTERISED BY INTENSIVE ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT AND INCREASING SECURITY INVOLVEMENT BASED UPON A LONG-TERM STRATEGY OF CHINESE NATIONAL INTERESTS, EU POLICIES PRIORITIZE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENTS AND LONG-TERM REGIONAL STABILITY

Chinese soft power resorts to political, economic and cultural instruments. China promotes ‘depoliticised’ values including regional stability, economic prosperity, non-intervention and respect for sovereignty and non-ideological exports that are in contrast to the Western liberal democratic norms. This approach is “manifested and materialized in support of authoritarian regimes in the region”.²¹ The success of Chinese development model and economic diplomacy through aid and investments are the two most oft-used ways of approaching the region.²² Cultural communications include student exchanges, establishment of Chinese schools locally, Confucius Institutes, exhibitions and conferences on China, and sponsoring local scholars to write books on China. As a result, China has a degree of attractiveness in Central Asia.²³

On the other hand, the EU relies more on political dialogues and institutional interaction and less on economic incentives. For example, the Delegations of the European Commission have been transformed into Delegations of the EU since 2007, and they hold Human Rights Dialogues and other thematic dialogues with CA states and it positions itself as a balancing element among different actors. As the Union has “long-term social, technical, cultural, educational, and quality-of-life advantages to offer” for CA states who remain “receptive to advances from Europe”, the ‘give-and-take’ attitude creates “the potential for increasing a variety of mutually-beneficial ties”.²⁴ Generally, the West “exerts a greater attraction” and the EU “enjoys the relative advantage of soft power in the region”.²⁵

Conclusion

The status quo of EU-China cooperation in CA does not match the description of their 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. The above analyses have revealed several conspicuous differences in their policies towards the region. Firstly, the EU and China share common views on CA security, energy regulation, regional stability and soft approaches at a superficial level. Secondly, while China's CA policies are characterised by intensive economic engagement and increasing security involvement based upon a long-term strategy of Chinese national interests, EU policies prioritize political engagements and long-term regional stability. Thirdly and more importantly, the current situation does not make China feel it is urgent to cooperate

with the EU regarding CA issues, which may lessen China's motivation to narrow down the foregoing divergences. Finally, policy orientation, policy scope and policy intention are the important aspects for observing the divergences and interpreting EU and China's engagements in CA.

To summarise, Sino-European mutual dialogues on CA issues need to be further deepened, intensified and normalised so as to minimise divergences. Without responding to the problem of divergences, the EU and China will not be able to launch substantial cooperation in CA and bring the bilateral relationship to a higher level. On the other hand, EU-China cooperation must be grounded in their shared interests in the region. ☺

1 The term Central Asia is used here to denote five post-Soviet republics Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. **2** Russell Ong, "China's security interests in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2005, p. 433. **3** Vladimir Paramonov & Oleg Stolpovski, "Chinese Security Interests in Central Asia", *Central Asian Series*, 08/20 (E), May 2008, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. **4** Shairbek Juraev, "Comparing the EU and Russia engagements in Central Asia", *L'Europe en Formation*, vol. 374, no. 4, 2014, p. 78. **5** Martin Russell, "The EU's new Central Asia strategy", *European Parliament Briefing*, European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2019, PE 633.162. **6** Alexander Cooley, "Central Asia as Part of Greater Eurasia? Prospects and Challenges", presentation at Central Asia Security Workshop, 5 March 2018, retrieved 20 January 2019, <http://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/12332>. **7** Ong, op. cit., p. 425; see also, Li Qinggong and Wei Wei, "The world needs a new security concept", *Jiefangjun Bao*, 24 December 1997, p. 5. **8** Ong, op. cit., p. 435. **9** Wenmu ZHANG [The Silk road and the security of China's western regions: historical conditions and law and our countermeasures towards the rise of Central Asia Powers], *World Economics and Politics*, no. 3, 2014, pp. 4-27. **10** Juraev, op. cit., p. 81. **11** Rafael Sattarov, "A Needless Rivalry? Russia and the EU in Central Asia", *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 11 April 2018, retrieved 16 January 2019, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76038>. **12** Lei Li & Shuai ZHANG [Strategic position, challenges and counter-policy of China-Central Asia Energy Cooperation under the BRI], *International Economic Cooperation*, no. 6, 2018, pp. 90-95. **13** "Central Asia – Energy", *European Commission*, retrieved 20 January 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/central-asia/eu-central-asia-energy-cooperation_en. **14** Sebastien Peyrouse, "A Donor without Influence: The European Union in Central Asia", *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 478*, June 2017, p. 4. **15** Kanat Botbaev, "Regional energy cooperation in Central Asia", *UNECE Pathways to Sustainable Energy*, Bishkek, 12 June 2018. **16** Cooley, op. cit., 2018. **17** Cooley, op. cit., 2018. **18** Sattarov, op. cit., 2018. **19** Sebastien Peyrouse (2015). *Report on EU Strategy in Central Asia: Competition or Cooperation?* Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 6 December, p. 5, retrieved 17 May 2018, <http://studies.aljazeera.net>. Realistic alternatives mainly include alternatives to promote human rights and democracy, to reform and modernize CA states and their ruling system, etc. **20** Sattarov, op. cit., 2018. **21** Sebastien Peyrouse, "A Sustainable Attractiveness? China's Projection and Construction of Soft Power in Central Asia", presentation at Central Asia Security Workshop, 5 March 2018, retrieved 20 January 2019, <http://centralasiaprogram.org/archives/12332>. **22** Peyrouse, op. cit., 2018. **23** Peyrouse, op. cit., 2018. **24** Peyrouse, op. cit., 2017, p. 1. **25** Sattarov, op. cit., 2018.



Zeren LANGJIA

BIO

Zeren LANGJIA obtained a double PhD degree in EU Studies from Ghent University and in Literature from Sichuan University, China. He also holds a BA in English Language and Literature and a MA in Communication Studies from Sichuan University and Free University of Brussels (VUB) respectively. He is currently working at the Centre for European Studies at Sichuan University and will soon work at the China Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. His research interests are in the field of normative power Europe, EU foreign policies, EU-Japan relations, EU-China relations and terrorism.



Jian SHI

BIO

Jian SHI has been teaching European Cultures at the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Sichuan University. He is a Jean Monnet Professor, leading the research team of the Centre for European Studies, supervising PhD candidates and having executed various EU projects. He holds a PhD degree in Literature from Lehigh University, USA. His research fields include English literature, EU-China relations from social and cultural perspectives, Western culture and civilisation, EU studies, and he has a series of publications in areas concerned. This article is a result of the key national research project (18AGJ008).

MASS SURVEILLANCE BEYOND BORDERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU AS CHINA'S MASS CONTROL POLICIES HIT EUROPEAN UIGHURS

RICCARDO NANNI

China's Uighurs, mainly inhabiting the north-eastern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), have long been observed in academic literature. Their social and historical contextualization, among Central Asia, China, and Russia;¹ Xinjiang's geopolitical role in China's and Russia's geopolitical designs;² and Uighurs' relations with the Islamic world, on the one hand, and the Communist-Confucian one of China, on the other,³ have been objects of academic interest.

Since spring 2017, China is known to have launched a crackdown on religious extremism in Xinjiang, as major incidents took place starting from 2014.⁴ What China defines as a 'de-extremification' policy to prevent religious extremism has however been found to be a policy of political re-education of the Uighur population.⁵ In Zenz's account, given Xinjiang's geographical centrality for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's current grand foreign policy design, Beijing is ready to implement a "definitive solution to the Uyghur question".⁶ In autumn 2018, China acknowledged for the first time the existence of camps amid international pressure, but claimed those were 'vocational centres' for people at risk of 'extremification'.⁷ Meanwhile, it retroactively recognised their use as 'de-extremification' measures in law.⁸ Together with this, reports of Uighurs abroad receiving pressure from Chinese authorities are on the rise. In early 2018, a family of French Uighurs received requests for personal information from Chinese police, together with threatening messages to their relatives in Xinjiang. Their living and residing abroad and no longer being Chinese citizens did not stop Chinese authorities from making demands.⁹ This raises implications for the

European Union (EU) concerning its citizens' security. Furthermore, as surveillance systems are constantly being enhanced in China, EU citizens with Chinese ethnic minority origins are increasingly likely to fall victims of these mechanisms, casting new challenges for EU-China relations.

This paper argues that the EU could be in the position to bend China's 'de-extremification' policy and protect European Uighurs by siding with the United States (US) and engaging with third state actors such as Muslim countries. However, this would be dependent on the US's future stance in its trade war with China and the EU's capacity to resist China's 'divide et impera' design.

A police state in the making: state of the art and implications for the EU

Surveillance in China has rapidly been enhanced throughout the whole country. However, Xinjiang served as a laboratory for state-of-the-art forms of surveillance systems to be spread all over the country.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, most of Xinjiang surveillance measures have been borrowed from previous tools enforced in Tibet by the local Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, currently Party Secretary in Xinjiang since 2016,¹¹ and are being transferred to Ningxia, an autonomous region majorly populated by Hui Muslims.¹² Furthermore, China is implementing a new Social Credit System, which is expected to be fully operative in the whole country by 2020. While downplaying the widespread description of this system as the pillar of an Orwellian society, Horsley, writing in Foreign Policy, maintains it is tantamount to a new enhanced form of

social control.¹³ In Xinjiang, the combination of already-implemented mass surveillance mechanisms and the Social Credit System is likely to create an all-encompassing everyday-life surveillance system, coupled with non-tech measures such as 'convenience police stations' at every street corner and the presence of party officials in non-Han households.¹⁴ Spreading in other areas of China, such instruments are possibly hitting other EU citizens and their relatives.

In September 2018, the EU ambassador to China, Nicholas Chapsus, raised concern at the Xinjiang policy, but maintained a low profile calling for more evidence and engagement with China to address the issue, while distancing himself from the US, whose Congress was considering sanctions amid the trade war. In this context, China portrayed the EU as an ally against US measures.¹⁵ While the EU's wording and stances against China became stronger as the latter became open and unapologetic on its 'de-extremification policy', EU member states were disunited on the issue during China's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the United Nations in November 2018.¹⁶ Furthermore, in the same period fifteen ambassadors signed a letter requesting a meeting with Chen Quanguo to address the matter.¹⁷

While the EU envoy was among the signatories, only ten EU member states followed suit. The US instead made a strong critical statement during China's UPR, citing names of victims of human rights violations by the Chinese government belonging to various sectors of Chinese society, including the prominent Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti.¹⁸ In August 2018, a bipartisan group of Congress people proposed to impose sanctions on Chen Quanguo and other Chinese officials under the Global Magnitsky Act, which allows the impairment of relations between US citizens and the sanctioned person and the freezing of the latter's assets within US territory.¹⁹ In January 2019, the Senate bilaterally revived a bill allowing the State Department, FBI and US intelligence agencies to study issues related to the on-going internment programme and plan actions by introducing the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act.²⁰ Lawmakers who promoted the aforementioned bill criticised Trump's presidency for not taking action.²¹

Following this reconstruction, three main observations can be elaborated. First, the world's main superpower and EU's main ally is undergoing domestic pressure to take action against China's Xinjiang policy. As mentioned, bipartisan congressional actions are being established to push the Trump administration to enhance its support towards Uighurs.²² Second, it could be claimed that the trade war has led the US government to leverage human rights and propose further sanctions on China and its officials. Arguably, this has allowed a bipartisan consensus to be reached in addressing the Uighur situation for the sake of providing an ethical justification, other than a commercial one, to

such a confrontational stance. After all, the US targeted groups of Uighurs following 9/11, while stepping up to their defence in the wake of the trade war.²³ As observed, this bolder US stance has brought no practical consequences thus far. Nonetheless, this possibly provides space for the EU to engage with the US in confronting China to assert its position and

bring it to its side to enhance the protection of EU Uighur citizens. Third, as shown, the EU's milder stance has been taken advantage of by Chinese propaganda, while not visibly improving the condition of European Uighurs. On the contrary, China appears to have reinforced its policy towards Australian Uighurs as well.²⁴ This should increase the EU's willingness to differentiate its public position from the Chinese one, a further incentive to adopt a more confrontational stance.

Drawing from these observations, the situation of European Uighurs could arguably benefit from a more assertive EU. China's current economic contingency sees its growth at its lowest since the Tiananmen massacre.²⁵ Siding with the US in pressuring China and limiting its trade and investments in the world's wealthiest countries would hit China's Belt and Road Initiative, as it would reduce the support of those EU countries upon which it already relies.²⁶ China's 'de-extremification policy' in Xinjiang is connected to this project, which has also been incorporated into the Party's charter,²⁷ underlining its centrality in external and internal affairs. Therefore, by hampering the potential results BRI might produce for China, the EU and the US could contribute to leading the former to ease its policy on Uighurs and other minorities. While it must be acknowledged

BY HAMPERING THE POTENTIAL RESULTS BRI MIGHT PRODUCE FOR CHINA, THE EU AND THE US COULD CONTRIBUTE TO LEADING THE FORMER TO EASE ITS POLICY ON UIGHURS AND OTHER MINORITIES

that academic literature is widely sceptical on economic sanctions, especially when applied to great powers.²⁸ Sanctions in this specific context would hit China's grand design. Coupled with engagement with third countries, for instance the many Muslim countries along the strategic route for the BRI, they could induce China to ease its hold on the Uighur population. These countries have been kept silent on the Xinjiang issue through the funding 'carrot' and the sanctions 'stick'.²⁹ As soon as Turkey raised concern over Uighurs, it was subject to a travel warning from China,³⁰ despite previous flourishing relations.³¹ Nevertheless, popular pressure is mounting in such countries as Indonesia for governments to be more assertive on China's Xinjiang policy.³² EU-US economic engagement to render these countries less dependent on China might help to make it more favourable for their governments to address the issue in public fora.³³ While it must be acknowledged the Middle Eastern situation is delicate and the US's role in the region controversial, this course of action could prove useful in addressing the Uighur question.

THE EU DOES DISPLAY POTENTIAL TO SEEK MORE GUARANTEES FOR ETHNIC UIGHURS. NONETHELESS, IT APPEARS ITS CAPACITY IS STRONGLY IMPAIRED BY INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND DEPENDENT ON THE US'S FUTURE SHIFTS IN CONFRONTATIONS WITH CHINA

The outlined process is likely to face a series of internal political obstacles within the EU. While a number of member states have taken a relatively critical stance towards the BRI, other have signed memoranda of understanding with China participating in the Initiative. In April 2018, all EU member states' ambassadors to China but Hungary's signed a letter stating that BRI runs against EU interests. Nonetheless, Hungary, Greece and Italy signed memoranda of understanding shortly after. China's BRI strategy towards EU member states is connected to 16+1, a forum involving China and sixteen central and eastern European countries, eleven of which are members of the EU.³⁴ Ob-

servers argue a 'divide and rule' strategy has been established by China against the EU and these moves fit within this design,³⁵ therefore hampering the latter's capacity to act unitarily.

Conclusion

Briefly, the EU could be in the position to bend China's 'de-extremification' policy by siding with the US and engaging economically with third (Muslim) countries along the Belt and Road. Nonetheless, the current inaction of the US presidency despite Congress' claims and the differentiation of interests towards China among EU members hinders the EU's capacity to act.

Drawing from past experience, it appears that any EU action would unlikely be incisive without the US by its side. The EU's China policy changed in line with the US's one from confrontation to engagement in the mid-1990s,³⁷ notwithstanding some evidence of autonomous action by the newly unified Germany in the early 1990s.³⁷ Furthermore, even if the US were to take action against China's 'de-extremification' policy, the EU would find itself entangled within the different interests and positions of its member states towards China, something that did not apply to the 1989 European Economic Community. Greece has already demonstrated its unwillingness to condemn China's human rights conduct in international fora when, in 2017, it precipitated the failure of an EU-28 statement at the United Nations Human Rights Council.³⁸

In conclusion, the EU does display potential to seek more guarantees for ethnic Uighurs. Nonetheless, it appears its capacity is strongly impaired by internal divisions and dependent on the US's future shifts in confrontations with China. ☹

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Riccardo NANNI

BIO

Riccardo NANNI is a PhD student in Political and Social Science (curriculum: international relations) at the University of Bologna "Alma Mater Studiorum". His main research interest lays in human rights in international relations with a specific focus on China, owing to his academic and professional experience. Prior to this, he obtained the MA Human Rights and Multilevel Governance at the University of Padova and spent two six-month terms in China, first as an exchange MA student at Guangzhou University and then as a trainee at the Delegation of the European Union. Previous to this employment, he was project manager at Centro Veneto Progetti Donna, the organisation managing the four anti-violence centres of the Province of Padova.