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**InBev-Baillet Latour Chair of  
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DYNAMIC AND PROMISING**

Ambassador SONG Zhe\*

China-EU relations maintained sound growth in 2011. The two sides enjoyed more mature and stable political ties, stronger mutual trust, robust growth in trade and fruitful results in both people-to-people exchanges and other areas of practical cooperation.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to China-EU relations and frequent high-level visits have fostered favourable communications between the two sides. The Chinese President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao, Chairman Jia Qinglin of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Vice President Xi Jinping and Vice Premier Li Keqiang, all paid successful visits to Europe in 2011. President Van Rompuy of the European Council also made a historic trip to China, where he reached an important agreement with the Chinese leadership to lift China-EU relations up to a new height. The Second China-EU High Level Strategic Dialogue and the Second China-EU High Level Political Party Forum were successfully concluded in Budapest and Brussels respectively earlier on in the year and numerous leaders of the EU Member States paid visits to China. These major diplomatic events have drawn the two sides closer, have strengthened mutual understanding, increased strategic agreement and consolidated the political basis of China-EU relations by creating a more welcoming, cooperative mood.

The sound momentum of business cooperation has expanded shared interests. Strong China-EU economic cooperation and burgeoning trade are considered rare highlights in the evolving international economic and financial crisis, as they demonstrate exceptional resilience and positive growth against a strong headwind. According to Chinese statistics, two-way trade between China and Europe registered US\$ 466.9 billion in the first ten months of this year and is expected to exceed US\$ 500 billion by the year's end. From January to October, EU exports to China grew by 27.5 per cent to US\$ 172.9 billion. The EU remains China's largest trading partner, export market and source of technology transfer. The EU has also replaced Japan as China's biggest source of imports. China is the EU's largest source of imports and is the second biggest export market. Eurostat reports that since this July, monthly trade between China and the EU already exceeded that between the EU and the United States. Soon, China will surpass the United States to become the largest trading partner of the EU.

The dynamic cultural cooperation and people-to-people exchanges have been improved by a major upgrade in exchange mechanisms. This year, the two sides celebrated the EU-China Year of Youth, the first thematic

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year event in the history of China-EU relations. Through the opening and closing ceremonies – the Youth Week and such flagship supporting events as Youth Volunteer Village – China and Europe have successfully built a bridge of friendship between the two peoples, in particular, the two young populations. Such progress has afforded us fresh energy and enabled us to further consolidate the social and popular support for China-EU relations. The two sides have already agreed to establish a high level people-to-people exchange mechanism and make it the third pillar for China-EU relations.

Unavoidably, the aggravation of the European sovereign debt crisis has caused some disturbances in China-EU relations. The 14<sup>th</sup> China-EU Summit, which was scheduled to be held in the Chinese city Tianjin in October, had to be postponed. Nevertheless, the two sides have maintained clear channels of communication and a robust momentum of cooperation. Both President Van Rompuy and President Barroso have made timely phone calls with Premier Wen Jiabao, to exchange views on bilateral relations and to brief the Chinese on the latest developments in the European debt crisis. Despite the postponement of the Summit, High Representative Lady Ashton and Commissioner Vassiliou still went to China as planned and achieved a successful visit.

It is worth noting that some recent narratives on China helping Europe out of the crisis have created confusion and doubts in the minds of many European people. A handful of media representatives have even irresponsibly made up stories that China intended to use its offer of help to Europe as a bargaining chip, to push progress in its own favour over issues such as the IMF SDRs, market economy status and the arms embargo. Such accusations are misleading and have caused disruptions in our ties. However, notwithstanding the fact that it is unclear how the European sovereign debt crisis will end, China continues to believe that as the world's largest economy, Europe has the wisdom and capacity to make the best use of its strong economic foundation, sizable public wealth, advanced technology and management expertise to weather the current crisis on its own. The Chinese leadership has stressed on multiple occasions that China attaches high importance to the development of the sovereign debt crisis and will, as always, support the efforts of the EU through political and financial means and trade. China will remain a reliable and trustworthy partner to Europe and will continue to view Europe as both a key strategic force and partner in attempts to safeguard world peace and development. China sincerely hopes that Europe will emerge from the crisis as soon as possible and we will continue to afford Europe support and assistance as our capability permits. No matter how the situation may evolve, China's confidence in and determination to continue relations with Europe will not waver. Still less will China exploit the situation or engage in anything that would add insult to the injury of Europe.

Looking ahead, the international situation will continue to experience profound and complicated changes in 2012. The EU will have to continue to fight the debt crisis. Some EU Member States will also hold important elections. All these elements add uncertainties to China-EU relations. However, we must understand that China and Europe will share unprecedented levels of interdependence, as our shared interests continue to expand and the global

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challenges we face continue to grow. As the world's largest developing country, China is deeply convinced that we must work hand in hand with Europe, the world's largest block of developed countries, to overcome the difficulties and meet the challenges. We believe that as long as we put our heads together, we can certainly remove obstacles, upgrade our relations and contribute to the strong, sustainable, and balanced growth of the world economy. In my view, the two sides should focus on three aspects in 2012.

First, China and the EU should use political dialogue to further uplift strategic mutual trust. We should keep up the sound momentum of high level visits and make the China-EU Summit, the China-EU High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED), the High Level Political Party Forum and the High Level Strategic Dialogue strong engines for bilateral ties. Policy dialogues should serve as a forceful guarantee to boost the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership. The two sides need to improve and optimise the existing 50 plus exchange and dialogue mechanisms between them, to make these dialogues more substantive, efficient and enforceable.

Second, China and the EU should use practical cooperation to further strengthen shared economic interests. Economic cooperation and trade have, for a long time, played a vital role in sustaining the healthy growth of China-EU relations. The shared interests of the two sides have expanded substantially through years of practical cooperation. Next year, the two sides should work hard to explore China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and Europe's 2020 Strategy, so as to tap the potential of practical cooperation over renewable energy resources, high-tech industry, urbanisation, IPR protection and information technology. The two sides should strengthen exchanges in product quality and safety, and facilitate negotiations on a mutual investment agreement and a geographic indicator cooperation agreement. We should use the negotiation for an investment agreement as a precious opportunity to improve the investment environment and to create a fair and just competitive environment for the two-way investment of our business communities.

Third, the two sides should use people-to-people exchanges to further consolidate popular support for China-EU relations. Mutual understanding and mutual respect is the basis and precondition for the long-term growth of China-EU relations. The two leaderships have been prescient in proposing a high level people-to-people exchange mechanism between China and Europe. This proposal indicates that people-to-people exchange between China and Europe has entered a new stage that is more orderly, effective, durable and institutionalised. The two sides should start early to strengthen communication and coordination and fully ensure the development of both the mechanism and its inaugural meeting, to make sure that people-to-people exchanges will become a successful third pillar for China-EU relations. We should work together to make full use of the EU-China Year of Intercultural Dialogue and promote better mutual understanding, friendship and popular support for China-EU relations, through a diverse range of supporting events. Efforts should also be made to promote academic exchanges through the development of 1.5 track exchange, region to region exchange and increased cooperation in the tourism industry.



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According to the Chinese lunar year calendar, 2012 will be the year of dragon, an icon for success and fortune in the Chinese culture. We are confident that China-EU relations will afford boundless potential in the new year. I strongly believe that as China and Europe join hands together, our relations will exhibit the overwhelming strength of a dragon, as they attain higher and more impressive breakthroughs.



## THE CHINESE PERCEPTIONS OF THE EU, BUT WHOSE PERCEPTIONS?

Jing Men\*

Since 1995, Brussels has considered “raising the EU’s profile in China” to be an important target in its China policy paper. In this regard, the EU has developed an impressive number of programmes to strengthen its presence in China, hoping to raise general awareness of this *sui generis* political institution. In recent years, several projects have been launched that attempt to understand the ways in which the Chinese perceive the EU and some publications are available on this topic.<sup>1</sup> The largest research project on Chinese perceptions so far is that of the consortium led by Nottingham University, which bears a cost of €1.4 million. A part of the results stemming from this research has been released and we are still waiting for more publications from the consortium. Although it is still too early to give an overall review of their research, some of the results are quite interesting and are worthy of further analysis.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why are the Chinese more friendly towards Europeans?**

One of the findings in the research is that compared to other key players in the world, including the US, Russia and Japan, the Chinese seem to appreciate Europeans the most and dislike the Japanese the most. Why is it so? Does it indicate that the EU’s active policy has been successful in China? Or does it demonstrate the success of the Chinese government in its attempts to establish a positive image of Europe in China?

For those people who have some knowledge of China, it would not come as a shock to learn that the Chinese attach great importance to their history. History is both from where people in China get their pride and their resentment. Imperial China, which for about two thousand years experienced both rise and fall in East Asia, always managed to establish a new dynasty on the basis of the old one, until the European imperialists partly colonised it. The “century of humiliation” is a painful memory in the heart of the Chinese. Yet, strangely enough, while the Chinese read from history books that the Opium

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<sup>1</sup> Publications on this topic include, for example, J. Men, “Chinese Perceptions of the European Union: A Review of Leading Chinese Journals”, *European Law Journal*, vol. 12, no. 6, November 2006, pp. 788-806; G. Geeraerts, “Chinese Perceptions of the EU as a Global Actor”, *BICCS Asia Paper*, vol. 1, no. 4, 2 December 2007; M. Leonard, *What Does China Think?* London, Fourth Estate, 2008, 1<sup>st</sup> edn.; and K. Lisbonne-de Vergeron, *Contemporary Chinese Views of Europe*, London, Chatham House, 2008, 1<sup>st</sup> edn.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars from the consortium talked about their research on the Chinese perceptions at a seminar organised at Madariaga-College of Europe Foundation on 24 November 2011. The analysis of the Chinese perceptions in this paper is based on the reports made by the consortium on that day.

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Wars broke China's door open, inflicting many unequal treaties on the government at the time; that many of their treasures were plundered by the Europeans and, up till now, remain in the Louvre or the British Museum, there is no hatred towards the Europeans like there is towards the Japanese. One of the explanations may be that the Opium Wars broke out more than 160 years ago, while the anti-Japanese war, taking place just over 60 years ago, was comparatively recent. Indeed television programmes, which have a major influence over the diffusion and absorption of information, are much more "anti-Japanese war" oriented than "anti Opium Wars" oriented. Even when there is a one off programme on 19<sup>th</sup> century China, people seem to be less emotionally involved than when they watch programmes on China in the 1930s and the 1940s.

Time is thus certainly a factor when we try to find out the reasons behind all this. A number of generations have come and gone since more than 160 years ago and so it is difficult for the Chinese to keep a vivid memory of what happened around that time. Conversely, only two or three generations have passed since the 1940s. Many Chinese people lost family members during that war – the history is too recent to be forgotten.

Perhaps even more important than this "time effect", the role of the Chinese government cannot be ignored. Unlike the EU, China has an authoritarian regime, which has overall control of the dissemination of information inside the country. In other words, what the government encourages and discourages will have a direct impact on the flow of information in the media. For example, when the Japanese revised their textbook on the history of WWII and their invasion of China, it was discovered and reported to the public by China's official media, triggering demonstrations against the Japanese in China. Furthermore, the Chinese government regularly organises activities commemorating the anniversary of the success of the anti-Japanese war, which to a large extent helps refresh Chinese peoples' memories of those years, reviving their hatred towards the Japanese. In contrast, there are not many official activities organised to commemorate the Opium Wars. Even if students get access to that part of history from their textbooks at school, the knowledge is much more abstract and far less stimulating.

A question that arises from all this is: why does the Chinese government have different attitudes towards Japan and the EU? Japan, as a close neighbour of China, has always had a problematic relationship with Beijing. While living under the shadow of Imperial China for a long time, Japan became a military power at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the defeat of Japan at the end of WWII helped transform the country into a pacified state, its close relationship with the United States; its rising tendency towards a more independent military and security policy and its territorial dispute with China, somehow alarm the Chinese, who are sceptical of Japan's motives. Japan's close relationship with Taiwan only further complicates its relationship with Beijing. On the other hand, China's fast military modernisation also makes the Japanese uncomfortable, who in 2005 listed China as a possible threat to



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Japan in their defense policy guidelines.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the security concern does not exist between China and the EU. As China's EU policy paper states, "There is no fundamental conflict of interest between China and the EU and neither side poses a threat to the other".<sup>4</sup> Europeans don't have military bases in East Asia, nor do they have any official diplomatic relations with Taiwan. This makes EU-China relations much simpler. In Beijing, as early as the mid-1980s, the Chinese leadership already had the vision of a multipolar world and Europe is one of the important poles in such a design. Therefore, rather than acting as a threat to China, the EU has been regarded as a partner that enjoys strategic significance in China's view of international relations. Against such a background, Chinese reports on the EU and its Member States are, in principle, more positive than negative. Even if some negative reports were found in the Chinese media during 2008 on the torch relay of the Olympic Games, they did not jeopardise the institutional arrangement between Brussels and Beijing, nor did they seriously challenge EU-China relations.

The analysis demonstrates that the Chinese government backs positive reports on the EU in China. Indeed, owing to the fact that Beijing wants to maintain a good working relationship with Brussels, a limited number of negative reports on Europe can be found in China. Consequently, the Chinese public are more friendly to the Europeans.

### **Chinese perceptions of the EU**

There is another question regarding Chinese perceptions to which we need to find an answer: the Chinese population totals around 1.4 billion and so, when the word "Chinese" is mentioned, which group of Chinese people are we referring to? Can we say that Chinese perceptions are shared by all Chinese people in China? Or, do these perceptions only represent the views of specific groups of Chinese people?

By far, research into Chinese views focuses on Chinese city-dwellers. With 36.22 per cent of its population in cities and towns and 63.78 per cent in the countryside,<sup>5</sup> city-dwellers represent only a minority of Chinese people.<sup>6</sup> Even in the cities, it is difficult to find Chinese people who actually follow developments in the EU and who have an opinion of the EU. In general, the EU is reported on much less than the other major global players in the Chinese media, which may in fact be the disadvantage of a relatively smooth relationship. As China has many more problems with the US, Russia and Japan, people would naturally find more coverage on these countries than

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, S. Fujihira, "Should Japan Fear China's Rise?", Paper prepared for the Triangle East Asia Colloquium (TEAC), *Ruptures, Rivalries, and Reconciliations in Modern East Asia*, Duke University, 25 March 2006, retrieved 6 December 2011, [http://web.duke.edu/apsi/events/TEAC/2005\\_2006/Fujihira\\_paper.3.25.06.pdf](http://web.duke.edu/apsi/events/TEAC/2005_2006/Fujihira_paper.3.25.06.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> "China's EU Policy Paper", *Xinhuanet*, 13 October 2011, retrieved 7 December 2011, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-10/13/content\\_1120500\\_1.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-10/13/content_1120500_1.htm).

<sup>5</sup> "Population and density", *China.org*, retrieved 7 December 2011, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/38110.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> The publications by Jing Men, Gustaaf Geeraerts, Mark Leonard and Karine Lisbonne-de Vergeron (see footnote 1) mainly rely on the leading academic journals and interviews with scholars and think tanks in major Chinese cities. The project led by Nottingham University is also undertaken in Chinese cities.

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on the EU. Therefore, if one really wants to find meaningful and interesting Chinese perceptions on the EU, the contributions from Chinese diplomats, think tanks, journalists and scholars at different levels are indispensable. However, the problem is that they only represent a very tiny number of people in China.

When it is clear that the Chinese perceptions mainly come from a small group of people, it makes things both simpler and more complicated. The simplicity of the matter arises from the fact that research can be done rather easily, so long as the right target groups are selected. Complication arises, however, as most of these experts on the EU are not independent. In other words, the experts are either public servants, or those working for state universities or research institutions – whose views are more or less in line with the governmental point of view – and so it is very difficult to separate what they say from what the Chinese government states. Noticeably, there is a general correlation between the views of the targeted groups and those of the Chinese government.

Needless to say, nowadays China is not a monolithic society as it once was. It is developing towards pluralism and openness. In particular, with over 500 million netizens in China, it is almost impossible to keep track of all the different voices. However, it is important to highlight that the Chinese netizens discuss domestic issues more than they do international issues. They are more concerned with their daily life than what is going on in Europe. More specifically, the active involvement of Chinese netizens in EU-China relations only occurs on certain special occasions; for example, the year in which the Beijing Olympic Games took place<sup>7</sup> and also currently with the evolving euro crisis, as the netizens are asking whether or not the Chinese government should lend money to Europe.

In order to understand who knows what about the EU in China, it is helpful to construct a pyramid. On top of the pyramid, there are a tiny number of people who can be counted as experts on European affairs, be they from political, economic, historical, social, or cultural backgrounds. These peoples' views on the EU may be valuable and helpful for Europeans to understand how China perceives Europe but they may not represent the views of the whole Chinese population. At the bottom of the pyramid there is a large number of Chinese farmers who may have no, or certainly very little, interest in the EU. In between these extremes one finds Chinese people from cities and towns. However, they are only concerned about Europe in an *ad hoc* way. Their views, compared to the views of the experts, may be more emotional, less rational and may not reflect the reality of the EU. The research undertaken by the Nottingham consortium indicates that the Chinese public has limited knowledge of the EU. For example, few Chinese people know exactly how many Member States there are in the EU and an even smaller number know about pressing issues such as the Lisbon Treaty and European integration. Therefore, after more than sixteen years of active efforts from the

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<sup>7</sup> As mentioned earlier, China faced great pressure during the torch relay – China was criticised for its human rights policy and its policy in Sudan. Many Chinese followed on TV the problematic torch relay from London to Paris and felt offended.

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EU, there is still a big gap between the EU's objective of raising its profile in China and general knowledge of the EU among the Chinese. It thus remains a considerable task for the EU to promote itself in China.

### **How to raise the EU's profile in China?**

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese government supports a positive image of the EU in China. This is an undeniable advantage and a favourable condition for the EU to move ahead. Apart from engaging in economic cooperation and political dialogue, the EU should develop more joint activities with the Chinese government on how to raise general awareness of the EU in China. The Europalia of 2010 witnessed close cooperation between China and Belgium to introduce Chinese culture, history and art to the Belgians. The EU can learn from the approach of Europalia and organise similar activities in another direction: the EU can propose to Beijing that the government cooperates to promote knowledge of the EU in China. Beijing's cooperation with Moscow resulted in the year of 2006 being the Year of Russia. EU officials could try in a similar vein to reach an agreement with the Chinese leadership to launch a **YEAR OF THE EU** in China. While a Year of the EU can serve as a good starting point, Europeans should also act to develop more ideas on how to attract China's attention and how to deepen the country's knowledge on the EU.

While strengthening cooperation with the Chinese government, the EU should, in the meantime, develop more joint programmes with Chinese civil society, represented by education institutions; associations and flourishing NGOs. As a matter of fact, different instruments have already been designed to enhance exchanges and communication between the two sides: 2011 has been the "Year of Youth" and 2012 will be the "Year of Culture". However, it is very unfortunate that due to various reasons, only a negligible number of people from both the EU and China were involved in the activities during this past "Year of Youth". The wide public in the EU and China does not know what is going on and what has been organised by Brussels and Beijing.

This poses some questions that the organisers of the "Year of Culture" really ought to consider: how can general European and Chinese interest in the year be raised; how can the year be made as well-known as possible and how can the organisers influence as large a number of people as possible? It is not easy to answer these questions. Yet, if both the Europeans and the Chinese are serious in their desire to improve mutual understanding, they need to invest a considerable amount of time and energy coming up with a solid blueprint that will ensure all their objectives are met.



## MOVING BEYOND SYMBOLISM IN THE EU-CHINA RELATIONSHIP ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Jonas Parello-Plesner and Susi Dennison\*

Within aspirant democracies in its immediate neighbourhood, the EU has some leverage that it can use to push for changes to tackle human rights abuses. However, China – an authoritarian state far from Europe's neighbourhood that has deeply entrenched, systemic restrictions on civil and political rights – presents a different and much more difficult case for Europe as a normative actor<sup>1</sup> China's combining of an authoritarian government with a free market economy has become a model for at least some elements in other countries in the developing world; the so-called "Beijing Consensus". This challenge to the Western democratic model as a foundation for growth has gained credibility with the economic crisis, which China has so far weathered far more successfully than Europe.

Nevertheless, the grassroots revolutions that have shaken the Arab world in 2011, have undermined Chinese leaders' certainty that economic growth is a universal panacea. The Chinese government had previously appeared open to some areas of legal reform and the gradual development of the rule of law. However, since the Arab revolutions, it has reversed this course and arrested a number of human rights defenders and defence lawyers such as Sakharov Prize-winner, activist Hu Jia, in early May 2011.<sup>2</sup> In March, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson declared bluntly that "the law is not a shield to hide behind".<sup>3</sup> The cautiousness associated with the upcoming leadership change reinforces the quest for stability at all costs.

If there was ever a time for a consistent EU stance on human rights and rule of law, to promote these two as universal values, it is now. Yet as China becomes an increasingly important investor in Europe, it strengthens its hold over some Member States, further weakening a common EU position to

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<sup>1</sup> China was rated as "Not Free" in Freedom House's 2011 "Freedom in the World Index", scoring 7/7 (1 being free and 7 being least free) for political rights and 6/7 (1 being free and 7 being least free) for civil liberties: see Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Index", Washington D.C., Freedom House, 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, [http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/Tables percent2C percent20Graphs percent2C percent20etc percent2C percent20FIW percent202011\\_Revised percent201\\_11\\_11.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/Tables%20percent20Graphs%20percent20percent20etc%20percent20FIW%202011_Revised%201_11_11.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> For more detail on recent arrests of defence lawyers, see Amnesty International, "Against the law: crackdown on China's human rights lawyers deepens", London, Amnesty International, June 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/018/2011/en/20ed6bf3-aaa9-4da5-8220-6c07615e531b/asa170182011en.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, M. Earp, "In China, a state of denial on detentions, abuse", Committee for the Protection of Journalists, 29 March 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, <http://www.cpj.org/blog/2011/03/in-china-a-state-of-denial-on-detentions-abuse.php>.

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confront China on human rights abuses.<sup>4</sup> Increasingly, EU Member States seem willing to leave more sensitive issues to the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, while they pursue their own commercial and economic interests bilaterally.

Despite the challenges, the EU can still pursue a normative agenda with China through a multi-layered approach. Public statements issued at a senior level that condemn serious violations are primarily symbolic but they also both highlight Europe's commitment to its values and signal support to activists in China. At the next level down, Europe should back this up with "silent diplomacy" by using dialogue in all effective forums to push for an expansion of a law-based criminal justice system. Finally, Europe should support Chinese NGOs through funding and capacity building, particularly NGOs acting to encourage freedom of expression and the rule of law, as well as those that target areas critical to driving China's continuing economic growth under the next five-year plan, such as innovation and environmental activism. These are areas where China's government's pragmatic self-interest in continued economic development coincides with a values-based agenda from Europe.

### **Tracking the dynamic trends in Chinese society**

The Chinese government's placing of economic growth and stability above personal freedoms appears to some extent to be endorsed by the Chinese public. The 2010 Pew Global Attitudes Survey indicates that 87 per cent of Chinese people were satisfied with the state of affairs in their country and 91 per cent believed the country's economic situation to be good. European levels were comparatively much lower.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the notions of justice and fairness strike a chord in China and there are many areas of discontent. The number of social protests has been steadily rising: around 180,000 recorded protests of varying sizes now take place every year in the country.<sup>6</sup> In May 2011, Xinhua reported that a man named Qian Mingqi blew up three government buildings in Fuzhou, angry with the lack of response to his legal search for redress after his house was demolished in 2002 in the midst of the construction of a motorway. Public interest lawyers take up citizens' cases against the government in a range of areas, from environmental law to mental health as a defence in death penalty cases.

Much of this discontent is expressed through China's vibrant Internet – the world's largest public sphere with over 500 million users. Non-state

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<sup>4</sup> See F. Godement, J. Parelo-Plesner with A. Richard, "The Scramble for Europe", *ECFR Policy Brief*, European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37\\_Scramble\\_For\\_Europe\\_AW\\_v4.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37_Scramble_For_Europe_AW_v4.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, "Global Attitudes Project: Survey Report: Obama more popular abroad than at home, Global image of US continues to benefit", *PEW Survey Report*, Pew Research Center, June 2010, retrieved 14 December 2011, <http://pewglobal.org/2010/06/17/obama-more-popular-abroad-than-at-home/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Dui Hua Foundation, "No Price to Pay", *Dialogue*, no. 43, Spring 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, [http://www.duihua.org/work/publications/nl/dialogue/nl\\_txt/nl43/nl43\\_3a.htm](http://www.duihua.org/work/publications/nl/dialogue/nl_txt/nl43/nl43_3a.htm).

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controlled media constantly test the boundaries of state censorship, reporting on sensitive issues such as corruption and the lack of transparency in China. Home-grown Chinese versions of Facebook and Twitter have mushroomed inside the country over the past decade and can convey information without initial government control. Censors do, however, sometimes shut down controversial threads and block sensitive keywords.

More recently, the high-speed train crash on 24 July 2011 in Zhejiang Province resulted in a huge outpouring of public anger in the blogosphere and beyond. The anger was over both alleged manipulation of the figures of people killed – with many arguing that official estimates were far too low – and over the fact that proper safety measures were not in place. The government was forced to respond with ministerial sackings, apologies for the deaths, compensation for the victims' families and an investigation into the safety practices that were unable to prevent the accident.

### ***Finding the right local champions***

In addition to individual activists, there is also a wide range of small Chinese organisations that are working in these fields. These “below-the-radar projects”, often supported by development NGOs and EU funding, test the parameters of both media law and of the rule of law framework more generally. Yet there is a limit to the extent to which China's one-party state will allow the rule of law: once you push beyond the Chinese Communist Party's comfort zone, you eventually come up against a wall. As an ambassador of one EU member state put it, “in China it is possible to criticise applications of the law but one can't discuss the legitimacy of the Party to decide”.<sup>7</sup>

China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2011-2016) places priority on green growth; increasing private consumption; technology and innovation and increasing the role of the Chinese state in service delivery. The pragmatic side of the Chinese party apparatus acknowledges that in order to achieve these goals, not only does it need to improve the predictability of the business environment through the rule of law, it also needs Chinese civil society to help it deliver on these goals. This is to ensure that the government is held to account for delivering good services and also to carry out social and environmental work in vulnerable communities.

### ***The limits of EU action***

As highlighted above, the Chinese government's main concern is to secure internal stability in order to enable economic growth. It therefore confronts almost all efforts made by foreign counterparts to discuss violations within China with a very frosty response.

China knows that it has considerable leverage over European countries as a result of the booming commercial relationship between China and Europe. The visits of the Dalai Lama in Europe neatly depict this evolution. In the 1990s, a period when, after Tiananmen, Europe was in a position to

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<sup>7</sup> Author's interview, March 2011.

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sanction China, the Dalai Lama was received in Europe by many political leaders. Now the tide has turned and China can sanction Europe. In the last four years, China has shown that it is capable of levying "soft" sanctions, by blocking ministerial visits as well as official deals after European leaders meet with the Dalai Lama. Notably, China has even managed to pressure France and Germany, two of Europe's largest nations.

EU Member States' willingness to react in a co-ordinated way to this changed scenario varies significantly.<sup>8</sup> Many of them lack the political will to support the EU's policy on human rights at the national level. Rather than issuing public statements, creating human rights projects in China or introducing high-level critical dialogue, they prefer to defer this thorny issue to the EU level. The short moment of glory recently was the coordinated EU-position to meet up in Oslo for the Nobel Peace prize in 2010, when China pushed for an empty chair policy.

Almost all EU Member States now have trade interests in China. These range from those of Germany and the Netherlands, who are keen to open up opportunities for their high tech firms on the Chinese markets, to those of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, who all want to encourage Chinese firms to come and operate within their borders.<sup>9</sup> However, the extent to which these commercial interests feed a reluctance on the part of the Member States to stand up to China on human rights varies considerably between the Member States, both in their bilateral policies towards China and also in their desire to see this featured in the EU's collective policy.

In this sense the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), launched in December 2010, presented both opportunities and risks. Opportunities because the EEAS provides a locus for developing a comprehensive China strategy, one that both takes into account the range of EU interests in China and human rights promotion, and risks because the EEAS provided even greater potential for difficult issues like human rights to be delegated to the European level, while Member States pursue their bilateral interests. The EU approach looks even more pusillanimous at a time when the US is once again becoming more vocal in condemning repression in China. After a retreat from pressurising on human rights at the beginning of his term of office, President Barack Obama seems to be once again making human rights and democracy critical factors in US foreign policy. In perhaps the strongest statement from the administration yet, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton referred to China's efforts to repress dissent as a "fool's errand" in an interview in May.<sup>10</sup> However, interestingly, the US does not appear to be

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<sup>8</sup> For a fuller discussion of this trend, see F. Godemont, "A Global China Policy", *ECFR Policy Brief*, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2010, retrieved 14 December 2011, <http://ecfr.eu/page/-/documents/A-global-China-policy.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> For greater exploration of these trade links, see F. Godemont, "The Scramble for Europe, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> J. Goldberg, "Hillary Clinton: Chinese system is doomed, leaders on a fool's errand", *The Atlantic*, 10 May 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/05/hillary-clinton-chinese-system-is-doomed-leaders-on-a-fools-errand/238591/>.

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suffering any serious consequences in its relationship with China. The same goes for Obama's decision to meet the Dalai Lama on 16 July 2011, which got the ritual statement that it "hurt the feelings of the Chinese people and harmed Sino-U.S. relations" and yet had no real impact on broader relations.<sup>11</sup>

The EU's main vehicle for raising human rights issues with China is the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue between the EEAS and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which began in 1995 and takes place twice a year. However, Europeans consider that it achieves very little, and the Chinese consider it an annoyance. Moreover, business negotiations, which are arguably the negotiations that really matter, go on elsewhere. If the EU confines human rights issues to the dialogue alone, the Chinese may reasonably assume that these issues are not a genuine European priority.

### **Conclusion – A multi-layered EU strategy based on targeted and consistent action**

While there are limits to EU action, Europe should still pursue a normative agenda with China. Since it has always emphasised the need for China to improve its human rights record, retreat from this position would signal to China that Europe has accepted a weakened position vis-à-vis this great power. This would have potential consequences for the EU's negotiating position with regards to other areas of the relationship, and also for the EU's global credibility; above all the EU is a body that uses its political dialogue to promote its values.

If Europe refrains from speaking up for Chinese dissidents and NGO-activists who, working for change inside China, are unfairly detained and arrested, it is surely sending the wrong signal. Indeed the Union must send a consistent message and, above all, continue to speak out about its concerns surrounding human rights violations in order to ensure that China understands that this is the framework within which EU-China relations will work. This message should be amplified by Member States. Such an approach is critical for the EU to re-establish a position of strength in its broader relationship with China.

At a political level the EU should confidently demonstrate that it has clear red lines and should always raise diplomatic concerns over severe human rights breaches. Member States may wish to reiterate this message bilaterally, or indeed, it may make sense in some cases for a member state to speak up on behalf of the EU. Individual Member States should not, however, dilute the collective European position with a weaker, or muted, bilateral message. As well as engaging at all diplomatic levels, the EU can also use public statements to reinforce concern about worrying trends of abuse.

The EU should not waste political capital on staying within the parameters of the yearly Human rights dialogue. At the moment, it is perceived by Europeans as progress that the Chinese government is willing to sit and listen to European concerns. Last year in December 2010, the dialogue

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<sup>11</sup> "China: Obama visit with Dalai Lama has "harmed Sino-U.S. relations" " *CNN*, 16 July 2011, retrieved 14 December 2011, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/07/16/dalai.lama.white.house/index.html>.



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was cancelled by China because of the Nobel Prize. Europe's response was to sit and wait. Europe should get itself out of the role of demandeur within the dialogue and should not hesitate to go beyond it when necessary. Europe ought to make clear to China that it is not afraid to speak out publicly more often on human rights issues if the closed official dialogue does not make progress.

The EU's "offensive" strategy, at a programmatic level, should focus on working with civil society in order to push for an expansion of the rule of law, as well as accountable government at the local level. It should engage in a social debate, society to society, rather than simply talking to the gatekeepers in Beijing. The Chinese Government faces practical problems at various levels in dealing with citizens and is looking for pragmatic solutions. In particular, the EU should try to support existing trends in Chinese society such as the creation of a clear legal framework in areas like company and business law. It should also work with elements in Chinese civil society that are working in the priority areas of the government's Five-Year Plan. A green economy needs environmental activists; delivery-oriented social and health services need both a vigilant press and citizens' groups and innovation in science demands freedom of thought as well as the uncensored right to publish. These areas form the "pressure points" for the EU's relationship with China.

It follows from this that Chinese NGOs and even smaller grass-roots organisations are the EU's key allies in China. While, like Chinese society more generally, these organisations are unlikely to be receptive to "lecturing" on their political system, or to suggestions that they should replicate a Western model, they are likely to be interested in discussions relevant to their immediate work. For example, the EU could advise on how freedom of expression and a rule of law framework can support balanced economic growth, whilst at the same time provide a challenge to not only government but also to businesses and service providers. The EU should respond to any Chinese attempt to block the EU from working with such groups – for example through visa refusal or disruption of projects – by putting pressure on China to allow these channels to operate once more. The EU should also be prepared to move beyond the comfort zone of the Chinese government. The US has started to invest in areas such as "circumvention technology" in support of online activism. To date, the EU has been more cautious than its American counterpart and yet if civil society engagement is to become a priority of the EU's strategy on human rights in China, it should really be acting with full gusto.



## A NEW PEARL IN CHINA'S STRING? CHINA'S NEW MILITARY BASE IN AFRICA'S TROUBLED WATERS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU

Martin Pavlus\*

It is almost 600 years ago that a major Chinese fleet navigated for the last time the waters of East Africa, when the legendary admiral Zheng He endeavoured to complete his trade and discovery missions across the Indian Ocean. Only a few decades after the admiral's adventure came the first Portuguese explorers, heralding the coming of a new age of European colonial dominance.

In 2011 the Chinese are back and, apparently, this time they intend to stay. On December 1, the Chinese minister of defence Gen. Liang Guanglie embarked upon a visit to Victoria, the capital of the island state the Seychelles, which is only approximately 730 naval miles from Mogadishu. The purpose of his visit became clear on 2 December, when the Seychelles' foreign minister Jean-Paul Adam announced that his government had invited Beijing to set up a military base on the archipelago.

Numerous indices coming from Beijing during recent years have led to the assumption that China has adopted a more assertive policy stance in the area of international security. This paper tries to analyse the operation in the Gulf of Aden from a broader perspective and particularly from the Chinese point of view. One of the assumptions is that the operation constitutes only a random episode in larger Sino-Indian competition in the Indian Ocean but at the same time offers a great opportunity for China to project its power; improve its own naval capabilities and gain prestige. The purpose of the paper is, then, to evaluate what implications this has for the EU and whether or not it can profit from the current situation.

### **Chinese overseas deployments**

From its establishment, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has strictly adhered to the principle of non-interference and respect for other countries' sovereignty. Besides some sporadic border clashes that never resulted into full-scale war,<sup>1</sup> the Chinese People's Liberation's army (PLA) was restricted to territorial defence. Formerly in the United Nations (UN), China neither voted in favour of deploying peacekeeping operation (PKO), nor did the country participate in them.

Indeed, it was only two decades ago that China started to actively participate in PKOs under the hospices of the United Nations. Since its modest beginnings, with 5 military observers in the UNTSO mission in 1990,<sup>2</sup> more than 12,400

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<sup>1</sup> For example, skirmishes on the Chinese-Indian border, on the Soviet-Chinese border and several ones with Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *Troop and police contributors archive (1990-2010)*, New York, United Nations, 2010 retrieved 3 December 2011,

[http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors\\_archive.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors_archive.shtml).

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Chinese troops, observers or police officers participated in UN PKOs until 2008.<sup>3</sup> As of October 2011, China had 1,936 personnel deployed in 12 different UN operations.<sup>4</sup> Chinese troops were deployed even in regions where troops from EU Member States were involved, either as a part of the EU's CSDP operations or independently.<sup>5</sup>

Not only has the number of Chinese troops participating in PKOs increased, but also the composition of units sent to these missions has become more striking. Until recently, Chinese official policy was to only send engineers, observers, transport or medical units to operate in PKOs. This pattern is, however, changing. Currently, Beijing not only officially admits that it is ready to send combat troops to PKOs,<sup>6</sup> it actually does so while participating in the counter-piracy operation off the Somali coast. In this operation, China deploys missile frigates for patrolling and escorting duties and the vessels even carry Special Forces on board.<sup>7</sup>

### **The counter-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden**

China has deployed its vessels off the Somali coast since January 2009. Although reasons for China's participation in UN PKOs were, by some observers, seen as somewhat ambiguous – ranging from the promotion of a multilateral agenda and the desire to be seen as a responsible, humanitarian power to arguments about operational benefits for Chinese troops<sup>8</sup> – China's anti-piracy operation clearly has as its principal motivation the protection of Chinese interests abroad. In this particular instance, not only are Chinese sailors directly threatened by Somali pirates but, more importantly, the attacks show how fragile the flow of vital resources from Africa to Chinese ports is.

China's tremendous economic growth triggered the country's search for accessible raw materials in Africa, alarming European and US corporations operating in the continent. The resources, however, need to be transported across the Indian Ocean, which is frequented by pirates as well as cruised by the navy of China's biggest competitor in the region – India. Consequently, India does not feel very comfortable with the fact that China's navy comprises nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers, acknowledging that sooner or later, these could be deployed close to Indian waters. Some Chinese think tankers even feed India's concerns themselves:

It is true that we are facing the threat posed by terrorism, but different from America, it is not a critical issue. The real threat to us is not posed by the pirates but by the countries which block our trade route.... The situation

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<sup>3</sup> Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, *China's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations (1990-2008)*, New York, People's Republic of China, 2009, retrieved 3 December 2011, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/wh/t534321.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> UN, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> E.g. EU operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo was launched in order to help the UN MONUC mission which involved in summer 2003 approximately 230 Chinese military personnel and observers (source: UN PKO, *op. cit.*).

<sup>6</sup> C. Guangjin, "Chinese combat troops can join UN peacekeeping", *China Daily*, 7 July 2010, retrieved 3 December 2011, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/07/content\\_10073171.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-07/07/content_10073171.htm).

<sup>7</sup> "China's anti-piracy role off Somalia expands", *BBC*, 29 January 2010, retrieved 3 December 2011, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8486502.stm>.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. B. Gill & C. Huang, "China's expanding role in peacekeeping", *SIPRI Policy Paper*, no. 25, November 2009; Z. Pang, "China's changing attitude to UN peacekeeping", *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 12, no.1, spring 2005; International Crisis Group, "China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping", *Asia Report*, no. 166, April 2009.

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requires us to be able to hit the vulnerable points of our potential opponents by restricting their international waterway. So we need to set up our own blue-water navy and to rely on overseas military bases to cut the supply cost.<sup>9</sup>

It can be thus argued that it is not only the lives of Chinese citizens or the money gained by companies importing raw materials from Africa that are at stake. It is the growth of the Chinese economy that is in peril and, with that, the social stability of the whole country. The operation is a part of a broader vital Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean.

### **A warm water port for the Chinese navy?**

Although there are many speculations concerning the double use of some of China's civil naval facilities in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, there is officially only one major Chinese naval base outside mainland China, located on the island of Hainan. In May 2011 an allegation that Pakistan invited China to use its port of Gwadar as a naval base stirred up speculation. However, Beijing promptly rejected the idea that it had any intentions to establish a naval base there.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is only very recently that the Chinese officially announced their readiness to build a base on the Seychelles, which, they argue, is necessary for their operation in the Gulf of Aden. Already in May 2011 China's *Global Times* explained Beijing's policy of building legitimate military bases:

If the world really wants China to take more responsibilities in Asia-Pacific region and around the world, it should allow China to participate in international military co-operations and understand the need of China to set up overseas military bases.<sup>11</sup>

A similar assertion would be unthinkable some years ago and this is a clear example of how Chinese thinking in security affairs has evolved. It is possible that the denial of rumours concerning the port of Gwadar was a herald for what is to come. Alternatively, rumours about a possible Chinese naval base in Pakistan (that would be in any case problematic for several reasons)<sup>12</sup> simply coincided with the development of a fully legitimate naval base on the Seychelles. Beijing is very cautious about the image it projects externally and it would thus be a cunning move for it to ensure that its hypothetical naval ambitions conform with the multilateral agenda. Shen puts it as follows: "As long as we aim to maintain the world peace, international society won't misunderstand our move in building overseas military bases".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> D. Shen, "Don't shun the idea of setting up overseas military bases", *China.org.*, 28 January 2010, retrieved 3 December 2011, [http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-01/28/content\\_19324522\\_3.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-01/28/content_19324522_3.htm).

<sup>10</sup> "Update 1-China says unaware of Pakistan naval port proposal", *Reuters*, 24 May 2011, retrieved 3 December 2011 <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/24/china-pakistan-port-idUSL3E7GO1QU20110524>.

<sup>11</sup> "China needs overseas bases for global role", *Global Times*, 25 May 2011, retrieved 3 December 2011, <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/chinese-press/2011-05/658995.html>.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the reasons, see P. Lee, "China drops the Gwadar hot potato", *Asian Times*, 28 May 2011, retrieved 3 December 2011, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/ME28Ad01.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Shen, op. cit.

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Interestingly enough, there have also been several talks between the government of the Seychelles and India, whereby the island state requested the Indian navy to carry out counter-piracy patrols in its waters. In February 2011 the Indian navy deployed a surveillance aircraft to the archipelago<sup>14</sup> and only weeks before the announcement of the Chinese military base, the Seychelles and India conducted talks about expanding India's anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean.<sup>15</sup>

### **EU NAVFOR Somalia**

Somewhere alongside this broader Sino-Indian competition is the EU NAVFOR operation, located in the Horn of Africa. Similar to the Chinese case, it is the first time that an EU navy task force has been deployed to deal with an international crisis situation<sup>16</sup> and, as with China, the EU's motivations are rather clear on first sight: as is the case with China, the EU is out to protect its own interests. Although Beijing does not participate in the EU's operation directly, nor does it take part in the Combined Maritime Force (CMF), it did join the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia that is intended to further the cooperation between various vessels and their commands, which are deployed off the Somali coast. Moreover, the EU as well as the CMF regularly express their wish for more enhanced cooperation with single-nation forces, such as Russia, China, India and Japan.<sup>17</sup>

The operation itself falls well within the parameters of the EU's preference for multilateral solutions and its support for the United Nations and the African Union. The EU also deploys, besides its naval forces, a training mission for Somali security forces and supports the Transitional Government of Somalia. The EU argues that "there can be no purely military solution to the crisis in Somalia"<sup>18</sup> and also supports, besides AU peacekeeping efforts, political initiatives to create security.

### **Comparison and Implications for the EU**

The table below shows a comparison of selected elements

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<sup>14</sup> "Indian Navy deploys surveillance aircraft in Seychelles", *The Times of India*, 24 February 2011, retrieved 4 December 2011, [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-02-24/india/28627242\\_1\\_seychelles-anti-piracy-indian-navy](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-02-24/india/28627242_1_seychelles-anti-piracy-indian-navy).

<sup>15</sup> "India, Seychelles to expand anti-piracy operations", *Sify News*, 28 October 2011, retrieved 4 December 2011, <http://www.sify.com/news/india-seychelles-to-expand-anti-piracy-operations-news-international-lk2ukhhgeea.html>.

<sup>16</sup> There was a number of naval operation deployed in the framework of the Western European Union before e.g. in the Gulf 1988-1990 and Adriatic 1992-1996.

<sup>17</sup> EU NAVFOR Somalia, *Co-operation between EU NAVFOR and the Combined Maritime Force, TF 151, is developing*, Middlesex, European Union, 1 June 2010, retrieved 4 December 2011, <http://www.eunavfor.eu/2010/06/co-operation-between-eu-navfor-and-the-combined-maritime-force-tf-151-is-developing/>.

<sup>18</sup> European External Action Service, *EUTM Somalia*, Brussels, Council of the European Union, 2011, retrieved 10 December 2011, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/eu-operations/eu-somalia-training-mission?lang=en>.

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	Motivations	Uni /Multilateralist	Way of tackling the issue	Possible benefits	Willingness to cooperate
<b>EU</b>	Security of own citizens and ships. Broader interest in Africa's security.	Multilateralist	Naval operation, support for the transitional government and the AU, training mission	Securing EU's external borders, Showing leadership	High
<b>China</b>	Security of own citizens and ships. Broader interest in the Indian Ocean as well as in Africa's resources	Multilateralist	Naval operation	Training for Chinese sailors, projecting the image of a responsible power	Limited

After having compared some elements of the participation of the two actors in the anti-piracy operation, we can see that some of them overlap. There is thus a common ground for cooperation even if there are some discrepancies.

The EU can profit from China's involvement in the Gulf of Aden in the short run; the new Chinese military base could even contribute to it. A well supplied ally in the fight against piracy is arguably be more useful than a constantly troubled one, although it is necessary to bear in mind that a well supplied ally today can become a well supplied competitor in the future. Piracy is one of the global security threats that cannot be successfully addressed by single powers and the operation off the Somali coast can serve as a good example for future multilateral actions to fight modern security challenges. Moreover, both parties can cast their commitments in a good light: the EU can show its leadership and China can project itself as a responsible power. Although China only participates in multilateral efforts in a limited way, tackling rather the symptoms than the roots of the problem, its contribution is very welcome if used in cooperation with other parties.

Whether or not there is also a hidden objective that China tries to exploit while participating in the fight against piracy is not that important for the EU, as long as China helps it to follow its own objectives. The EU has no big power ambitions in the Indian Ocean and even if it started in the future to feel uncomfortable with the new Chinese military base for one reason or another, it could still remind China that its base in the Seychelles is built only for a specific purpose – to fight piracy. The end of the fight against piracy is, however, not expected in the near future.

The operational challenges for the EU and its fleet, if indeed there are any, are yet to be seen. Even after the setup of the new Chinese military base, EU vessels will still stay superior in quality as well as in quantity. Li argues that China has, for the moment, only 15 long-range vessels that are able to carry out four month turns.<sup>19</sup> A

<sup>19</sup> G. Li, "Chinese naval-gazing: piracy fight reveals weakness", *International Institute for Strategic Studies voices*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2 March 2011, retrieved 10 December 2011, <http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-voices/?blogpost=143>.



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nearby naval base could increase Chinese naval capabilities and help the PLA Navy to project its power in the region.

Finally, the broader analysis of the geo-political situation clearly shows that the EU plays only a random role in the broader competition in the Indian Ocean and it illustrates even more the necessity for EU Member States to act consistently and closely together over world affairs. No longer can a single European country dominate the world's oceans, neither can it successfully compete with emerging regional powers such as India and China. Robert Kaplan argues that even the US is very well aware of the challenges that it will have to face in the Indian Ocean in the coming years and predicts that the US is likely to adopt a soft power approach in the area.<sup>20</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As has been shown, to understand all the implications of possible EU-China cooperation off the Somali coast, it is necessary to look at the broad picture of Chinese interests and motivations, to fully examine the patchwork of possibly colliding relations. Even if the setting up of the new military base was a hint of China's big power ambitions, as long as China sticks to its proclaimed support for multilateralism, there is enough room for cooperation with other involved actors such as the EU. This broader perspective further underscores the need for more EU coherence and integration in the area of foreign affairs.

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<sup>20</sup> R. Kaplan, "Indian Ocean becomes battleground for India and China", *Global News Blog*, The Christian Science Monitor, 26 October 2010, retrieved 3 December 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2010/1026/Robert-Kaplan-Indian-Ocean-becomes-battleground-for-India-and-China/%28page%29/2>.



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