

EU-China Relationship on Global Security Issues

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Abstract: *On the public agenda, the Sino-European ties have been reduced and limited to commercial exchanges. Nevertheless, bilaterally, there has been a surge and a constant shared interest in widening cooperation on political, social, security issues, a.s.o. By assessing a series of agreements and common diplomatic efforts, this paper intends to point out that the joint Sino-EU projects, beyond sheer commercial purposes, include elements that could lead to promoting mutual interests, as well as to boosting global security, especially as far as regional and global crisis management is concerned.*

Keywords: *China, European Union, commerce, crisis, security.*

1. Introduction

For 41 years, UE – China relationship has been characterized by the media as a love-hate trade story. Judging by the controversies over antidumping European policy, granting the Market Economy status/ MES to China by Brussels authorities, intellectual propriety frictions or human rights dissensions, one may think that there is more hate than love in the bilateral dialogue. This article aims at arguing the fact that China and EU have much more in common besides the commercial interests and the fact that the strategic dialogue between these two important political and economic global actors is the right framework to bolster their role in managing security issues, both at regional and international levels.

First, an analysis of the bilateral relationship, from a historical point of view, will set the framework of the argumentation that the relationship between China and EU has a great potential of collaboration and growth in multiple areas. Then, an analysis of strategic dialogue will take into consideration the multilateral levels beside the trade and investment, pointing out the bilateral documents and formats that allow the cooperation in security matters. After that, the article focuses on crisis management cooperation, as a good opportunity for China and EU to use their strengths and instruments in managing security crises that might affect them both.

In the end, we conclude that in a globalized world, global challenges must and can be addressed jointly. Even if China is not yet willing to fully engage in managing security crises, EU should seek opportunities for practical co-operation and co-ordination with China on issues such as capacity-building and supporting nations in their way to sustainable development.

2. Background of EU-China Relations

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations as of 6 May 1975, very intense diplomatic and trade exchanges nurtured the Sino - European cooperation. There is no doubt that commerce was and still is the most important bilateral issue, judging by the fact that the very first agreement was the ‘Trade agreement EEC-China’, in 1978, followed by the ‘Textile trade agreement’ in 1979. China is a major trading partner of the EU, with a huge and expanding market, whereas the investment agreement negotiations represent one of the most important issues in EU-China bilateral economic and trade relations. According to Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Trade, from economic flows that were almost literally zero, they came to exchanges that exceed 1.5 billion euros every day (Malmström, 2016).

In 1985, Chinese and EU authorities signed the ‘Agreement on trade and economic cooperation’ that set the background of the bilateral relationship for the next decade. The next big step on trade and commerce field was in 2007, when the parts agreed on the High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue. Meanwhile, bilateral agreements were signed in other economic related domains: in 2002 - EU-China maritime transport agreement; in 2003 – ‘Agreement on cooperation in Industrial Policy Dialogue’ and ‘Agreement on cooperation in EU-China Dialogue on Intellectual Property’; in 2004 – ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Approved

Destination Status' (the 'Tourism Agreement') and 'Customs cooperation agreement'¹. The bilateral dialogue took shape and grew also due to the multiple dedicated events such as EU-China Civil Aviation Summit and ADS Committee Meetings, Macroeconomic Dialogues, Euro-zone Troika and Chinese counterparts, or visits of European Commissioners in China and of Chinese ministers in Brussels. Now, EU is China's biggest trading partner, while China is the second largest two way trading partner for the EU. The trade and investment relationship is seen as an essential source of wealth, jobs, development and innovation for both sides.

Occupying a very high level on the bilateral agenda, the energy issues were addressed in early stages: in 1992, the environmental dialogue was launched, followed, in 2005, by the Joint Statement on climate change. In 2006, European Commission and Chinese Government signed a MoU on cooperation on near zero emissions power generation technology and the first EU-China bilateral consultations under the Climate Change Partnership were held, in Vienna. The cooperation on climate change and energy was reinforced successively, as the global engagements and initiatives became deeper. Energy cooperation is one field where progresses are visible: China's domestic policy in this area changed gradually and Beijing authorities have considered reducing the carbon and energy intensity in economy, even if China has been reluctant on EU requests to commit to global stabilization target or to binding domestic commitments as part of the negotiations for a post-Kyoto settlement.

The political dialogue was much slower at the beginning, but grew fast on multiple levels of consultation which added values to the strategic dimensions of the bilateral relationship. First political consultations at ministerial level, in the context of European Political Cooperation were held in 1984 and in 1992 the parts established a new bilateral Political Dialogue. The 1998 1st EU-China Summit, in London, became the main framework of discussions which provides strategic guidance to their relationship. Moreover, every year, in special meetings, experts and ministers debate and agree on bilateral, regional and global issues: Political Directors Troika, Ministerial Troika, EU-China Strategic Dialogue, EU-China High Level Strategic Dialogue, EU-China Consultations on African Affairs, EU-China High Level Political Parties' and Groups' Forum².

Regarding the scientific dialogue, China and EU tried and succeeded on developing a fruitful engagement, since 1983, when they launched of first 'Science and Technology Cooperation Program', followed in 1998 by the 'Agreement on scientific and technological cooperation'. In order to give more impetus to this framework, in 2001 was established a new Information Society Working Group. A more practical and useful cooperation focused on European Galileo satellite navigation program, which started in 2002 and took shape in 2003, once the bilateral agreement was signed on this issue. Even if the cooperation on Galileo was not really successful, it set a path to other possible space programs and, in 2005, Chinese and European authorities signed a 'Joint Statement on cooperation in space exploitation, science & technology development'. An efficient collaboration would benefit both parts, by reducing costs, enhancing competitiveness, resolving some of the problems brought by technology supply-demand, and increasing transparency of the space programs (Jianxiang Bi, 2014, p. 16).

Other important dynamic relationship, less revealed in the media, is on social and cultural dimension. In 2005, the parts signed 'Memorandum of Understanding on labor, employment and social affairs' and, in 2010, a High Level Cultural Forum was held. 2011 was proclaimed the EU-China Year of Youth and, in 2012, the EU-China Year of Intercultural and EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue were launched. In 2013, the 1st meeting of the EU-China Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchanges was held, in Brussels. A very dynamic dialogue takes place twice a year on human rights issues, starting from 1995, as an integrated part of the EU-China relationship under their agreed 2020 Strategic Agenda, and also on Civil Society, since 2007, as a commitment to overcome the bilateral problematic issues.

Despite this intense congestion of initiatives and contacts, most of them are formal and have no practical ending and Beijing's policy towards the EU remains essentially economic in nature. China still feels concerned about the arms embargo, the Market Economy Status, Taiwan and Tibet issues, the EU worries over trade balance, IPR, market access, human rights and democratization issues. China also wants wide access to EU markets and investment, it seeks technology transfers, and it wants the EU and other partners to take the lion's share of the costs of the fight against climate change (Fox; Godement, 2009, p. 8).

¹ More on the EU-China agreements can be found at eas.europa.eu/china/docs/chronology_2012_en.pdf [20 February 2017].

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3. Strategic Partnership

As EU and China also share common global goals, such as promoting peace, their values and the well-being of their people and stressing the importance of multilateralism, the possibilities of cooperation on key international issues are diverse: nuclear proliferation, Korean peninsula, piracy in the Gulf of Aden, assistance in Afghanistan and Pakistan, cooperation on governance in Africa, regional developments in East Asia, energy security, climate change, investment in better technology, intelligent exploitation and use of natural resources, global imbalances, exchange rates regimes, domestic savings and consumption, state subsidies, foreign direct investment (Moran, 2011). China and EU also are committed to Millennium Development Goal and they have made major contributions to this end. Both partners are, at the same time, WTO beneficiaries and stakeholders with a duty to contribute effectively to a rules-based global trading system and China's impressive economic development is good for the EU-China business environment while Europe's social cohesion model might be inspiring to China (Achten, 2011).

The EU-China Strategic Partnership is developed on the basis of the 1985 EU-China trade and cooperation agreement, but gradually included foreign affairs, security matters and international challenges such as climate change and global economy governance. It became of key importance to relations between the EU and the China and to finding mutual answers to a range of global concerns and identifying common interests, such as global and regional security, counter-terrorism, the fight against organized crime, cyber security, weapons of mass destruction and nuclear non-proliferation, energy security, global financial and market regulation, climate change and sustainable development, as well as in creating a framework to address bilateral concerns between the EU and China.

The first EU-China Summit took place in 1998, in London, during the UK Presidency of the EU Council. Ever since, they have been held on an annual basis, alternating between Brussels and Beijing. They are attended by the Chinese Prime Minister and accompanying Ministers and, for the EU, by the President of the EU Council, the President of the European Commission and the EU High Representative/ Commission's Vice President as well as other relevant European Commission Vice-Presidents and Commissioners. In recent years, Joint Statements have been issued, setting out agreed policy positions on a wide range of bilateral, regional and international/ global issues.

The 'EU-China Strategic 2020 Agenda for Cooperation' agreed at the EU-China Summit in 2013 is the guiding document of the relationship. It can be used as a prerequisite in enhancing their role as global players and partners on addressing key international and regional issues during their annual summits and through the three pillars directly underpinning the Summit (the annual High Level Strategic Dialogue, the annual High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the bi-annual People-to-People Dialogue), through their regular meetings of counterparts and through their broad range of sectorial dialogues on trade, foreign policy, industrial policy, education, customs, nuclear energy and consumer protection. The document is comprehensive, spanning from politics and business to science and technology, culture, education, and youth exchange. It has a long term view and focuses on regional and global issues, beyond bilateral issues, ensuring the mutual benefit and motivation to foster and bolster the relationship to adapt to the changing environment. In conjunction with Chinese initiatives such as 'Belt and Road' or 16+1 formula, the 'EU-China Strategic 2020 Agenda for Cooperation' has the potential to contribute to economic development and regional stability from which both China and the EU could benefit in terms of security.

4. Crisis Management as a Binder in EU-China Relations

As Beijing's global trade, its finance and technology flows, and its drive for energy and raw materials have made it a crucial global actor, in need to manage the consequences of its own success, which have come in the shape of new demands to help secure global stability (Fox; Godement, 2009, p. 8). This means that China cannot afford to continue to simply contemplate the dynamics of international security environment, but to act in order to shape it. For EU, this is a great opportunity to engage China in a more enhanced cooperation and strategic dialogue on current threat scenarios and crises management initiatives, crisis prevention and peacekeeping. As major stakeholders of many major international and regional issues, China and EU are important forces to develop a fair and reasonable international order. The strategic importance of bilateral relations has gone beyond bilateral context and gained global significance.

Some steps were made: during the visit of State Counsellor Ma Kai to Brussels on 29 November 2011, both sides signed an agreement on cooperation on disaster risk management where the EU will share know-how

and best practice on disaster prevention and response. In 2012, during the visit of Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response to China, an EU-China Disaster Risk Management Project was launched and the China-EU Institute of Emergency Management was inaugurated. Also, crisis management talks between EU (CMPD-Crisis Management and Planning) and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defense took place in the same year, in Beijing. The fact that the Chinese government has in general been supportive of the concept and the idea of a 'Responsibility to protect' as it was formulated at the 2005 World Summit and the fact that China's 'New Security Concept' launched in 2002 stressed the respect for sovereignty especially in developing countries and also points out the requirement for the United Nations to play a 'leading role in the settlement of disputes preferably through negotiations and reciprocity' (Lanteigne, 2014, p. 7) might help the parts to formulate a common vision on security crisis management.

Global issues and security crises spanned by terrorism, pandemics, natural disasters, organized crime, international financial and economic crises, sustainable development, environmental protection, climate change, food and water security, energy security and nuclear safety are good areas for closer cooperation. In Africa, for example, the need for resource security and for new markets and investment opportunities made China to take a more proactive stance in solving security crises. Also, China has established a strong economic position, including in the most troubled states, due to the volume of its trade and investment in raw materials industries, altering European and American domination on this continent. As Beijing seems willing to put resources at risk, there is much room for dialogue and risk assessment, for instance, between Chinese and European companies. Beijing has also a political-strategic interest in making allies in Africa, hoping to increase its influence on its African partners and to strengthen the African voting bloc within the UN to have a group of like-minded countries challenging the global dominance of the USA and the West (Olsen, 2015).

In this conditions, taking action for providing security and counteracting violent conflicts that haunt this space is the only tool left for the EU to maintain some influence on African governments. But this is not a matter of contest, but collaboration and political dialogue between China, EU and African regional organizations. Recent crises where the European Union and China both have been involved in providing security are Somalia, Mali and South Sudan. China was a strong advocate of greater UN involvement in Somalia and of a takeover by the UN of the AU's peacekeeping tasks in the country. During a UNSC mission to Addis Ababa in June 2006, China urged other nations to support the deployment of peacekeepers and contributed to financing AMISOM (Hoeymissen, 2011, p. 101). In this equation, European Union has contributed significantly to managing the conflicts in and around Somalia and providing security. On the other hand, Chinese involvement has been very limited both in financial terms and as far as military support is concerned.

Mali, in 2012, was the first state where China committed combat troops to a UN peacekeeping mission – MINUSMA. This does not mean that Beijing is has entered a new phase in its peacekeeping diplomacy. The positive Chinese response was linked to the fact that the adversaries in Mali were religious extremists seeking to overthrow the government in a sovereign state by force (Lanteigne, 2014, p. 11). In 2014, in the case of South Sudan crisis, the Chinese behavior was very different as it decided to contribute to UNMISS with a full infantry battalion of 700 soldiers to the UN mission which already had 350 Chinese peacekeepers on the ground, mainly engineering units and medical staff. China has also played an active diplomatic role urging the conflicting parties to enter into serious and substantive negotiations as soon as possible. On the other side, the Libya crisis had serious consequences for the Chinese attitudes towards R2P issues like intervention and state sovereignty. Beijing had a feeling of being deceived and betrayed by the Western powers not least by France and the UK because the mission against the Qaddafi-regime developed from protecting human rights and civilians to regime change. Chinese representatives have even used words like 'conspiracy' or 'trick' describing the behavior of the three Western powers operating in the UNSC (Olsen, 2015, p. 18).

Beside these joint actions, there is more to be done in managing crises in Central Asia, Latin America and the respective neighborhoods of the EU and China, on bilateral formats, but also in a multilateral format, such as UN, G20, ASEM, ARF, East Asia Summit, ASEAN.

5. Conclusions

Unfortunately, there will always be a crisis somewhere in the world ready to be managed and a global challenge to emerge. Moreover, the world will become more networked and interdependent, so no single country or a single bloc of countries will be able to address these challenges by themselves.

Even that China and the EU do not share a common vision for global governance, there are many opportunities for cooperation, which could contribute to the building of such common vision. As important global players, they are both indispensable to each other: China needs the EU to ensure its global rise, and on the other hand the EU needs China to strengthen the global governance architecture.

In order to achieve these goals, they have to be truly strategic partners. Such approach means a long-term project and stability in the relationship. Strategic partnership cannot be left to cooperation on a case-by-case basis, but rather needs more in-depth reflection, which has been initiated on both sides.

Chinese engagement as a global security actor is not a certainty yet, as the actual involvement is still low, but UE can engage Beijing in innovative and pragmatic formats in which China can harness its experience and soft power in order to reestablish balance in areas affected by security crises. For start, direct investments and economic diplomacy – the main instruments China uses to support the states in need for security and protect its national interests - can be accompanied by jointly leading regional missions for peacekeeping, offering negotiations, good offices and mediation for solving security crises and conflicts – instruments in which EU has gained a great expertise.

Due to Trump Administration new policy and to potential relapse of protectionism and even of trade wars EU may put together an international alliance with China, India and other important players to defend the open trade system represented by WTO and to solve other global issues within international organizations, like UN, IMF, World Bank. EU and China must cooperate and provide the leadership in the area of solving climate change issues, in ensuring energy security in the world, in nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and in other major global issues.

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