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**The EU and 'Strategic Partnership' with China: How Much Strategy? How
Much Partnership?**

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of EU strategies towards China since the mid-1990s, asking two central questions. First, how has the EU developed a strategic view of its relations with China, and what influences does this view reflect? Second, has the aim of creating a strategic partnership with China been carried through into concrete proposals, negotiations and outcomes? The paper falls broadly into three parts. The first part develops a framework for the analysis of 'strategic partnership' in EU external relations and foreign policy. The second part explores the development of EU strategies towards China through the late 1990s and early 2000s, with reference to key official documents and statements, and examines the motivations for declaration of a 'strategic partnership' with China in 2003. The third part looks at the evidence for such a partnership in EU-China economic and diplomatic relations, and assesses the recent and current state of negotiations for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The conclusions evaluate the two key questions in light of the framework, and reflect on prospects for further development of EU-China partnership.

I. Introduction

How far has the EU become a strategic actor in the global arena? This key question relates to the continuing debate about the EU's roles in international relations, and to the ways in which the EU might or might not become a 'power' in the international system (Elgström and Smith 2006, Hill and Smith 2005, Sjørusen 2007). It brings into focus a number of the key dilemmas that have been identified by the literature in respect of the EU's international relations: persistent problems of converting resources into power and leverage within international politics, the two-edged sword of the EU's institutional set-up, conferring both institutional strength but also institutional complexity and rigidity, the

pervasiveness of 'capability-expectation gaps' in all areas of the EU's international activity, and the equally pervasive tension between norms, identity and material interests in the EU's international life. Not only this, but it also relates to the ways in which the EU can establish its position in a rapidly changing international system, and adapt its aims and instruments to the rise and fall of actors and issues: can the EU position itself strategically to deal with new developments, and can it adapt its strategies to enable it to manage change and transformation?

The EU is not short of strategies; indeed, it has spent much of the past decade developing and publishing strategies in respect of significant actors, institutions and issues in the global arena. The Commission has produced successive Communications dealing with all regions of the world – including Antarctica – and with the changing global agenda, particularly where that agenda raises issues of global governance and the management of global change. During the past decade, it has also identified an increasing range of 'strategic partnerships' that can be taken to lie at the heart of its international relations (see for example Grevi and de Vasconcelos 2008). If we take the USA to be in important ways the original 'strategic partner' for the EU and indeed the EC before it, it is clear that the EU-US partnership has taken on a more formal and institutionalised shape in the period since the end of the Cold War. More recently, there has been a rush of strategic partners: the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China – but not necessarily in that order or all in the same institutional forms), various world regions or regional organisations, including Africa (especially through the African Union but also through sub-continental partnership agreements), Latin America (especially through the inter-continental summits, but also through links with MERCOSUR and other regional bodies), Asia-Pacific (through the Asia-Europe Meetings, but also through links with ASEAN) and South Asia (through links with SAARC, and also now with the incorporation of some South Asian countries into the ASEM). And this is only a partial sample of a growing web of strategic links

and commitments that seem increasingly to constitute an important element of the EU's international identity.

But what does all this add up to? One way of approaching an answer to this question is to ask whether the EU can be conceived of as having a 'grand strategy' – in other words, a systematic set of positions on the big international issues and relationships, in which aims, objectives and resources are brought together in a consistent and at least a medium-term way. In this context, one might point to the European Security Strategy and related documents as in some way encapsulating the EU's 'grand strategy' and providing a holistic approach to the role of the EU in the world arena (Dannreuther and Peterson 2006, Odgaard and Biscop 2007). The ESS, however, raises as many questions as it answers, given its very broad range and the lack of concrete policy commitments with which to implement it or to progress it. The more one interrogates the notion of 'grand strategy' for the EU, the more one is also forced to recognise that any 'grand strategy' has as one of its core aims the preservation of the integration project – that in effect external strategy is the servant of the need to provide an accommodating world for the development of the EU's internal structures and processes. As a result, it seems clear that 'grand strategy' occupies a place in the international relations of the EU that is partly based on a normative approach to the notion of a 'good world' and partly based on the imperative of preserving and if possible enhancing the integration project (Smith 2009a).

If this is the case, what then are we to make of all those strategies? This paper represents an attempt to develop some general ideas about the role of strategies, and especially 'strategic partnerships', in the EU's external policies, and to apply them to one of the most fully developed 'strategic partnerships', that with China. Since the mid-1990s, the EU has doggedly pursued the development of this partnership, and as noted above declared in 2003 that China was to be a formally designated 'strategic partner'. The EU-China relationship is thus the most mature of the new-generation 'strategic partnerships'. It is also one where

there is a strong coming together of the economic with the political and of material interests with normative elements; and it is one where the 'strategic partner' is itself a very powerful and increasingly prominent global actor. An exploration of this relationship thus promises to help us understand important general issues about 'strategic partnerships' in EU external policies.

Such a study also bears the promise of insight into some of the fluctuations in the EU-China partnership, and some of the apparent contradictions. These have been pointed out by a number of recent studies (for example Balme 2008, Crossick and Reuter 2007, Fox and Godement 2009, Grant and Barysch 2008, Kerr and Liu Fei 2007, Zaborowski 2006). Such fluctuations and contradictions include: the internal divergence of preferences and commitments between EU Member States; the problems of integrating and coordinating policies crossing a range of issue areas in Brussels; the difficulties of translating formal institutional commitments into action; and the dilemmas created by the emerging 'triangle' of relations between the EU, the US and China. By interrogating the idea of 'strategic partnership', we can hope to gain purchase in analysing and evaluating EU policies towards China in the period since the end of the Cold War and since the declaration of the 'strategic partnership' in 2003.

The paper approaches the issues in three key stages. First, it develops a general framework for understanding the role of the EU as a strategic actor, the role of partnerships in EU external policies, and the logics of 'strategic partnerships' in EU external policies. Second, it explores EU-China relations asking the question 'how much strategy?' – in other words, examining the EU's discourse, positions and assumptions about EU-China relations and asking how they match up to the requirements of 'strategic partnership'. This part of the paper will rely on detailed examination of EU strategy papers and statements. Third, the paper re-examines the EU-China relationship in light of another key question: 'how much partnership?', with the aim of establishing how much substance there is to the practices of partnership in the relationship. In pursuing this second question, the

paper examines a range of case studies in EU-China relations during the past ten years, and also attempts an evaluation of the current state of play in the negotiations for an EU-China Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).

The paper concludes that in exploring 'strategic partnerships' it is important to understand the underlying logics of EU external policies, and the ways in which these condition the union's external actions. It re-evaluates three key logics, which can serve as the foundation for further analysis of 'strategic partnerships' in EU external policy as well as the basis for analysis of EU-China relations more generally. And it finally concludes that the EU-China 'strategic partnership' is at best a partial rather than a comprehensive one, understood in different ways at different times and among the key stakeholders.

II. 'Strategy' and 'Partnerships' in EU External Policies

In order to pursue the analysis of the EU-China 'strategic partnership', it is necessary to clarify some key concepts and to develop some central questions. Essentially, there are three concepts that demand attention: first the idea of the EU as a strategic actor, second the notion of 'partnership' in EU external policies, and finally the logics of 'strategic partnership'. This section will explore the first two of these ideas and propose some questions that can guide further investigation. The following section proposes an approach to 'strategic partnerships' based on three logics of EU external policy.

First, let us explore the notion of the EU as a strategic actor. We have seen that the EU, through the Commission and other channels, has developed a large number of strategies. But this in itself does not make the EU a strategic actor. In order to be recognised as such, the EU needs to fulfil a number of criteria:

- First, it must demonstrate the capacity to extract and mobilise resources from its Member States and other relevant sources, and to do so consistently over a period of time.

- Second, it must show that it is possible to relate these resources to agreed medium and long term objectives, and to act positively in line with those objectives.
- Third, it must demonstrate that it is capable of generating a strategic narrative that shapes the expectations of both its member States and other EU bodies and also its key international interlocutors.
- Finally, it must be able to adapt its aims, its resource allocations and its strategic narrative to changes in the global context and to challenges that emerge from its developing international activities.

As already noted, these criteria are presently met only partially and unevenly by the EU, for a variety of reasons. It does not have unquestioned commitments or resource allocations (in external policy at least) from within the Union; it does have on the face of it a set of long term objectives and commitments, but it is not clear how consistently it can act in line with those objectives; it has a bewildering variety of strategies and some elements of a grand narrative, but this in itself is questionable and questioned at many levels; and as a consequence, its capacity to achieve adaptability and to adjust to changing challenges can be questioned. In saying this, we are not saying anything new. But we are relating it specifically to the notion of the EU as a strategic actor – or as Chris Hill and one of the present authors have proposed elsewhere (Hill and Smith 2005: Introduction and Conclusion), a ‘power’ in the world arena.

The second idea that demands exploration here is that of partnership. It has very often been argued that the EU is an inveterate (if not compulsive) seeker of partnerships in the world arena. In many ways, this is also seen as a sub-set or consequence of a fundamental commitment to multilateralism, which leads the EU into the construction of a series of overlapping partnership arrangements expressed in a wide variety of forms: association, economic cooperation, political dialogue, sectoral and other arrangements with governments, civil society and non-governmental organisations. It is possible to see the following general

characteristics in the EU's pursuit of partnership: But how are we to judge the effectiveness of these pervasive partnership arrangements? The following criteria seem relevant:

- First, the extent to which the partnerships represent more than declarations and embody material commitments and activities which are themselves subject to evaluation. In other words, the level of economic and political commitment by both the EU as an entity and external stakeholders, and the specific practices that characterise the partnerships.
- Second, the extent to which the partnerships commit all parties within the EU itself or (on the other hand) permit defection and deviation. In other words, the level of economic and political commitment by internal stakeholders, and the ways in which they are prepared to commit resources to the practices embodied in the partnerships.
- Third, the ways in which the partnerships relate to other international commitments undertaken by the EU and the relevant partner(s). In other words, the relationship between these partnerships as ways of 'governing' relations and the broader mechanisms of regional and global governance, which may reinforce or undermine the effectiveness of the partnerships in question.
- Fourth, the symmetry or asymmetry of the partnerships. In particular, the ways in which they embody disparities in structural power between those who subscribe to them (and for our purposes, the ways in which the EU finds itself in a position of relative dominance or relative inferiority in the partnerships), and thus arguable disparities of outcomes.
- Finally, the extent to which the partnerships are open to renegotiation and reform in light of changing circumstances, and the extent to which this can be seen as happening in specific partnerships. It may of course be the case that specific partnerships flourish and adapt not because of formal revision and reform but because the everyday processes from the bottom

So far in this section, we have argued (a) that we need to be careful in our analysis of the EU as a strategic actor and apply explicit criteria to it, and (b) that we should be equally explicit about the ways in which we assess the EU's search for and creation of partnerships in the global arena. In the final part of this section, we argue that both of these preceding discussions feed into our analysis of 'strategic partnerships'. That is to say, the notion of 'strategic partnerships' embodies assumptions both about the EU as a strategic actor and about the prevalence of partnerships in the EU's external policies. It might be assumed that the notion of 'strategic partnerships' would be self-explanatory in EU external policies: these are partnerships that embody or express the general interest of the EU as a strategic actor, that form relationships with key interlocutors and that contribute to the realisation of the EU's strategic ambitions within the context of an agreed narrative. But the preceding discussion indicates that this statement is questionable at many points.

IV. Three Logics of 'Strategic Partnership'

How then are we to analyse and assess the forces driving the EU's 'strategic partnerships'? We propose that these partnerships can be analysed through exploration of their underlying logics, and that the fluctuations and unevenness of the 'strategic partnerships' can equally be accounted for by the operation of these logics. The three core logics that we propose are (1) the integration logic, (2) the logic of the external opportunity structure and (3) the logic of the EU's search for identity through external policy (Smith 2009b).

In brief, these three logics enable us to argue as follows. The 'integration' logic bears on the ways in which the demands of the European integration project make themselves felt in the development of the EU's external policies. Amongst other effects, this logic creates a situation in which external policy is the spillover

or the projection of internal needs, and in which external policy can be seen as a means of providing a 'safety valve' for the pressures built up by the progress (or lack of progress) of the integration project. The 'external' logic can be seen as a reflection of the pressures and opportunities arising from broader international structures, such as the effects of the end of the Cold War and the 'gaps' created for European external policies by the post-Cold War search for a new international order. The 'identity' logic sees the external policies of the EU as bound up with the search for a 'European' international identity, and thus with the generation of images and understandings of the EU itself, both within and outside the Union. Each of the logics generates its own characteristic patterns of activity and criteria for 'effectiveness' in the context of the EU's external policies.

What does this notion of the three logics tell us about the changing nature of European external policy? First, it is clear that the three logics are not self-contained, insulated one from the others. They interact, and in the interaction can be found important pointers towards the past, current and future development of European external policy. Second, their interaction has become more intensive during the past fifteen years, when the end of the Cold War, the emergence of a new world (dis)order, institutional change and policy innovation in the EU and the increasing consciousness of European collective distinctiveness on the world stage have come together to create new momentum towards a 'European foreign policy'. Third, that momentum has not been continuous or always cumulative; the process has been lumpy and spasmodic, since all three of the logics have not always pointed in the direction of increased European external policy development.

Finally, how does this discussion of the logics driving EU external policies help us to understand and evaluate the EU's 'strategic partnerships'? First, the 'internal logic' gives leverage to analysis of the ways in which the EU's institutional structures and internal politics might shape the search for 'strategic partnerships'. We can expect this search to be conditioned by the internal distribution of

preferences, by the broader institutional development and capacities of the Union, and by the ways in which Member States are prepared to commit themselves. But we should also expect it to be governed by the 'disintegration logic' by which the divergence of internal preferences disables or dilutes the EU's external policy capacity. Second, we can expect that 'strategic partnerships' will be a reflection of the external opportunity structure and the EU's collective capacity to take advantage of it. Thus, the post-Cold War period and the rise of new international 'powers' has created new openings for the EU as well as new challenges, to which one response is the search for 'strategic partnerships'. There is another aspect to this: the external opportunity structure also embodies the prevalence of EU-US relations and the search by the EU for ways of balancing the USA's predominant power within the world arena. So we should expect this to be a factor in the search for and conclusion of 'strategic partnerships'. Third, we would anticipate that each and any 'strategic partnership' would be in some way a response to the 'identity logic', expressing the EU's search for identity within the world arena and also projecting formally or informally the values on which the EU is taken to be founded. So 'strategic partnerships' are in part an external projection of the notion that the EU is a 'force for good' and a contributor to world order (Smith 2007) as well as a means of projecting the EU's growing need to assert itself within that arena. Finally, we would also expect that 'strategic partnerships' would express the interaction of the three logics and the fluctuating balance between them, and that as a result they would be subject to consequential contradictions and unevenness. The needs of European integration, the opportunities or challenges presented by the world arena, and the less tangible but often equally powerful search for an EU identity should all be evident in the development of any 'strategic partnership'.

This establishes the ground for our more detailed empirical study of the EU-China 'strategic partnership'. We have argued that there is a need for clear specification of the criteria for judging both the search for and the development of 'strategic partnerships'. We have argued further that it is possible to analyse such

partnerships against a set of explicit criteria, and to explore the logics that lie behind them. This should help us to explore the two key questions set in this paper: how much does the EU-China 'strategic partnership' express a coherent EU strategy, and how much does it demonstrate the development of a practical partnership in specific areas of EU-China relations?

III. The EU and China: Strategy

As argued above, in assessing the extent to which the EU has a 'China strategy' it is necessary to consider not only the public record and statements of a strategic nature but also the underlying coherence and operational effects of the EU's policies. Thus in this section, we will explore first of all the 'public record' of EU strategic declarations in order to uncover key themes in the EU's presentation of its positions and aims (see also Cameron 2009). One key element in this assessment will be the ways in which the EU's efforts have chimed or not with China's strategic objectives; thus we will briefly consider the nature of China's international strategy and the ways in which this 'fits' with the EU's aims and objectives.

The EU-China diplomatic relationship was first formally established in 1975, and the first EEC-China trade agreement was concluded in 1978. The initial bilateral ties were 'explicitly economic, though implicitly (especially for China) strategic' (Scott 2007: 23). With the growth of EU-China trade during the early 1980s, the need for a new and more comprehensive agreement was met with the EU-China Trade and Cooperation Agreement of 1985. This established a legal framework for the bilateral relationship and for the next twenty years it reflected an EC/EU approach in which trade was the top priority. Ironically, in the view of later developments, part of its purpose was to redress a trade imbalance in which the EC ran a surplus with China (Fox and Godement 2009: 19, EEC-China 1985, chapter 1). The key aim of the agreement was to 'intensify and diversify their [EC/China] trade and actively develop economic and technical cooperation in line with their mutual interests' (EEC-China 1985). The agreement also established

an EC-China Joint Committee to manage the relationship – a body which remains significant in the evolution of EU-China relations. It appears that while the EC had rather broad ambitions for the agreement, the Chinese saw it as primarily about increasing their economic ties with Europe (Griese 2006, Gosset 2002). Notably, the agreement was explicit in allowing EC Member States freely to ‘engage in bilateral activities in the field of economic cooperation and to conclude new economic cooperation agreements with China where appropriate’ (Europa 2007).

The year 1989 saw further important developments in the EC’s approach to china, catalysed by the Tienanmen Square incident but also more generally by the end of the Cold War. Although Tienanmen did not interfere fundamentally with the development of the EC-China economic relationship (Algieri 2002: 64), it forced European policy-makers to put the economic relationship into the broader context of social, political and humanitarian concerns – a context that resonated in all subsequent EC/EU policy papers. In addition, European policy-makers increasingly shaped their approach in the realisation that China’s emerging role in the global community should be shaped by ‘coordinated commitment from governments worldwide’ (European Commission 1995a) and thus that China’s integration into the global community and global institutions should be a key aspect of any EU position.

The 1995 Communication *A Long Term Policy for China-Europe Relations* thus occupies a key place in the development of EU thinking about the relationship. For one commentator it was ‘the first important signal that Brussels had started to anticipate a growing political influence’ (Holslag 2009: 3) and to set long term objectives in this light. The Communication set out to establish a new market based relationship with China ‘for the future competitiveness of European business’ (Barysch et al 2005: 7), to further the integration of China into the international community and particularly to push for china’s membership of the WTO, and to contribute practically to China’s internal economic, political and

social reform so that the Chinese economy would continue to grow and to open itself to European business. The aim of the approach was to focus on problem solving and to do this within the context of common ground and mutual interests (European Commission 1995a, Möller 2002: 22). It was clear that the development of the EU-China relationship was seen in a global context: 'Europe's relations with China are bound to be a cornerstone in Europe's external relations, both with Asia and globally' (European Commission 1995a).

Given the development of the EU's broader foreign and security policy structures during the early and mid-1990s, it was also clear that the development of policies towards key interlocutors such as China was a key part of the EU's emerging international role. But this contained a number of actual or potential contradictions, especially since the EU was more generally concerned to position itself as a 'normative power' with a particular emphasis on human rights and connected issues – issues that were less comfortably dealt with in the EU-China context. When this was combined with the need to make progress on a number of pressing economic issues, the concern of the 1995 Communication to reconcile normative and material interests seems clear. It was also clear that the 'European' position contained a number of tensions between European institutions and the interests of Member States, although the Communication talked confidently about synergies between Member States and EU activities (European Commission Commission 1995, D1).

The 'long term policy' set out in the 1995 Communication lasted for three years (although many of its principles are still extant in EU policies). In 1998, the Commission produced a second Communication, *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* (European Commission 1998). A change of EU position was rationalised on the one hand by the potential impact of Economic and Monetary Union and of the eastern enlargement of the EU, and on the other hand by the pace of change in China itself: 'the EU must be ready at short notice to adapt its policy to any unforeseen changes promoted by the speed and scope

of China's transition' (European Commission 1998: 25). As Griese notes, 'from 1998 onwards the Commission is very careful in giving precise time references – at least in the title – for the permanence of its China policy' (Griese 2006: 550). In 1998, the EU was worried that China might slow down or even reverse its reform process in the wake of the death of Deng Hsiao Ping, the Asian financial crisis and the reversion of Hong Kong. The Communication also responded to issues arising in the negotiation of China's WTO entry, which had begun in 1997. As a result, the Communication proposed a 'renewed' and 'upgraded' approach in which China would be further engaged bilaterally and multilaterally whilst further support would be given to its transition process (European Commission 1998: 5).

One of the essential elements of the policies proposed in the 1998 Communication is their comprehensive nature, covering political, economic, social and regional security issues and encompassing contacts at several levels: bilateral, regional and multilateral (and thus linking with the EU's inter-regional approaches to Asia-Pacific, most obviously the Asia-Europe Meeting established in 1996). The Communication proposed annual summits between the EU and China, like those already established between Beijing and other partners such as Japan, Russia and the US. Dialogue with China would in turn benefit the inter-regional dialogue with Asia-Pacific and increase the EU's 'overall influence in the region' (European Commission 1998: 7). In accord with the request of the European Council, the Communication also pursued the aim of establishing a constructive dialogue with China on the issues of human rights and the rule of law. The general intention was to work towards a situation in which China would be a 'strong, stable and open partner (European Commission 1998: 11), but not to increase the pressure on Beijing in sensitive areas of domestic policy. In the realm of global economic relations, the EU's support for China's WTO accession remained strong – not least because it was also seen as linking closely with potential domestic reform in China itself, in the cause of removing obstacles to trade and improving China's adherence to the rule-based multilateral order (see the following section of this paper).

By 2001, the Commission felt it necessary to follow up the 1998 Communication with another, this time explicitly building on the framework established three years earlier. The 2001 Communication *EU Strategy Towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a More Effective EU Policy* (European Commission 2001) was framed most obviously by the impending entry of China into the WTO, and by the linked need to provide ‘a comprehensive and forward-looking review’ of the 1998 policy (European Commission 2001: 3). Notably, the title of the Communication for the first time referred to this in terms of EU strategy, defining this as including both short term and long term action points and recalling the long term objectives set out in 1998. Notably also, the paper pointed out a number of difficulties in EU-China relations, referring to China as ‘both part of the problem and the solution’ and as ‘not always an easy partner for the EU’ (European Commission 2001: 7). So the issue was not just one of dialogue and accommodation – or at least, so it seemed.

Only two years after the 2001 Communication, the Commission was back in action on the EU-China partnership, this time with the Communication *A Maturing Partnership – Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations* (European Commission 2003). According to at least one analysis, this Communication represented an effort to ‘mark a shift...from traditional state-to-state relations up to the European level’ (Fox and Godement 2009: 33). Its other, explicit aim was to initiate an upgrading of the bilateral EU-China relationship to a ‘strategic partnership’ across a broad range of issue areas, anticipating developments not only in the EU (especially the 2004 enlargement and institutional reform) but also in China (for example, the installation of a ‘successor generation’ of leaders and China’s increasing assertiveness in world affairs). The Communication also referred to a host of more immediate problems that demanded coordinated action, such as the threat of SARS. The 2003 Communication was later paralleled (but not mirrored) by China’s only formal ‘communication’ on this

subject, the 2003 *EU Policy Paper* (Chinese Government 2003), which echoed the perception of the partnership as strategic in nature.

The 2003 Communication is not only notable for its 'European' focus and its emphasis on strategic changes; it also goes much further than its predecessors in setting out the infrastructure of EU-China relations. Its implicit benchmark for 'maturity' seems to be the quantity of EU-China dialogues, especially sectoral processes and agreements. There is no doubt that by 2003 there was such a growing infrastructure (see the following section of this paper), but questions remained about its efficiency and effectiveness. And crucially in terms of the discussion here, the question arises as to whether the strategic quality of a relationship can be measured by quantity rather than by quality of exchanges. As one critique put it, 'the proliferation of programmes, dialogues and agreements created the danger of loss of focus and strategic vision: there is little linkage between the various dialogues, their short-term objectives sometimes clash, and they do not always serve the EU's overall objectives as defined in its strategy papers' (Barysch et al 2005: 8-9). The description of the relationship as 'mature' in the title of the 2003 Communication thus raises as many questions as it answered.

As it happened, the 30th anniversary of the establishment of EC/EU-China relations took place at a time when the relationship was anything but harmonious (see following section). But by 2006, the Commission was again ready to launch another Communication, this time entitled *EU-China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities* (European Commission 2006a). Alongside this paper was issued a working paper on EU-China trade and investment (*A policy paper on EU-China Trade and Investment: Competition and Partnership*) (European Commission 2006b) which picked up what had become a central theme of the Commission's approach to global trade and investment issues: the need for the EU to assert its competitiveness and to hold others to their commitments (see for example Mandelson 2006).

The 2006 Communication can be seen as a more realistic and pragmatic response to the growing range and scope of EU-China relations, and especially to the rapidly increasing trade deficit which had already led to some sharp disputes (see following section). The emphasis was as much on competition as on partnership, and on the use of 'sticks' in the form of WTO rules and other devices as well as on 'carrots'. Amongst other issues, the Communication identified 'a range of obstacles to market access and skewed conditions of competition' that limited the benefits to the EU from the growing economic relationship, and failure by Beijing to fulfil all of its WTO obligations. The result was that in crucial sectors such as telecommunications, financial services and manufacturing, EU companies found it difficult to invest in or export to China (European Commission 2006a: 7, 2006b: 9). The anticipated dynamic effects of WTO accession had not been realised, and in some ways it appeared that WTO accession marked the end of China's reform process rather than its beginning (Interview with EU official, Beijing, April 2009). Key issues such as intellectual property rights and the investment climate were particularly identified as areas of concern (ibid). In consequence, the Communication sets out a range of potential remedies that might be sought by the EU, including not only dialogue and bilateral negotiation but also use of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism (European Commission 2006b: 13). One symptom of the problems was the continuing refusal of the EU to grant China Market Economy Status (see following section).

The 2006 Communication also set out a range of areas in which the EU would pursue continued dialogue with China: human rights and democracy promotion, and a range of sectors in which there were established dialogue arrangements (European Commission 2006a: 4). Not only this, but it presents a long list of areas in which cooperation with China is vital to key EU global objectives: sustainable energy supplies, environment and climate change, employment and social issues, international development and governance especially in Africa.

Africa in particular has claimed increasing attention as an arena for EU-China cooperation (and implicitly, competition), and in 2008 the Commission was moved to present a Communication on the subject (European Commission 2008). One area of security policy remained especially neuralgic in the relationship: the debate over whether to modify or lift the arms embargo imposed on China in the wake of the Tienanmen Square events in 1989 (see next section); the 2006 Communication promised only continued dialogue on this issue. There was, though a clear bottom line to the Communication: it proposed the start of negotiations for a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which 'should encompass the full scope of the bilateral relationship' and update the 1985 Trade and Cooperation Agreement. This was presented as 'the practical basis for the comprehensive strategic partnership' (European Commission 2006c: 9), but it was apparent that both the political and the economic dimensions of such an agreement would be full of potential pitfalls.

We will withhold judgement on the significance of the developments described here until the general Conclusions to the paper, and now turn our attention to the 'partnership' aspects of EU-China relations. The following section looks at both the issue of partnership in general and at a number of brief empirical case studies, with the aim of establishing the basis for an evaluation of the nature, extent and impact of the EU-China partnership.

V. The EU and China: Partnership

As noted earlier in the paper, the EU is engaged in a ceaseless search for partners in the global arena: simply put, this is part of the essence of the EU, and links very strongly with embedded multilateralism and the EU's self-image as a 'force for good' in the world. In respect of China, this search has so far extended over at least twenty and possibly thirty years. What can we say about the ways in which the partnership has been developed, and its key characteristics, not only in general but also as revealed in key episodes of EU-China relations?

One approach to the general problem of partnership between EU and China is to examine the changing scope and scale of the partnership. This is not the same as examining the scope and scale of EU-China relations as a whole; rather it entails an assessment of the ways in which formal partnership activities have arisen, been institutionalised and spread. One clear trend in this context is the increasing scope and scale of partnership activities. From the initial stages where the concern was very largely with trade promotion and trade defence (on both sides), we can now discern a relationship which is formalised over a wide variety of sectors and at a number of levels (Crossick and Reuter 2007). We shall look below at the key institutional elements of this growth, but here it is possible to note that both the scope and scale of the partnership has been growing, that it has also been encapsulated in successive EU strategy papers, and that EU institutions have given their support to this expansion. The partnership is pursued at the bilateral level, within a variety of 'mini-lateral'; and multilateral inter-regional contexts, and at the level of global multilateral organisations such as the UN and the WTO. Most recently, the partnership has been expanded (at least on the EU side) to encompass 'third party' issues such as the mutual engagement of the EU and China in Africa, and to explore the possibilities of cooperation and/or dialogue at the local or regional level in that continent.

The partnership has also become increasingly institutionalised. We noted earlier that the EU has typically tried to develop a dense institutional network around its key international partnerships, with the aim of stabilising them and of making them manageable. In the case of EU-China relations, we are dealing with the partnership that (apart from that with the US) has had the longest and most extensive history of institutionalisation (Algieri 2002, 2008). As a result, a map of the relationship needs to cover the following institutional elements (among others): the annual summits and accompanying political dialogues; meetings of the troika with the Chinese leadership on an annual or biannual basis; meetings in the context of successive presidencies of the Council of the EU; meetings in Beijing between EU Heads of Mission and the Chinese Foreign Minister; strategic

dialogue meetings; meetings of political directors and regional directors; a host of expert level meetings covering such issues as human rights, migration and trafficking, non-proliferation and arms exports and more general Asian affairs; Joint Committee Meetings in the context of the 1985 Trade and Cooperation Agreement; Working groups on economic issues involving officials at a variety of levels; and more than twenty sectoral dialogues covering both highly technical areas and those which are much more heavily politicised (the latter including energy and environmental issues) (Algieri 2008: 70. See also Cameron 2009). This is a formidable 'menu', but it is subject to the criticism already mentioned, that there is no clear strategic direction or linkage of the many activities listed. So the partnership has become more institutionalised, but it is not clear that is more effectively institutionalised.

For this there might be a variety of explanations. One is that the institutionalisation process is essentially responsive to new issues arising on the EU-China agenda. Another might be that in some areas of partnership, the interests and presence of the EU Member States are inevitably more obtrusive, and that this lends a different tone and direction to the activities undertaken. An unanswered question (at least in the context of this paper) is whether the pattern that has emerged reflects consensus among the EU and Chinese leadership, or essentially the application of mechanisms that the EU has developed elsewhere, such as dialogues and sectoral working groups. Another question that arises is the relationship between this framework and other EU-China encounters. A brief listing of these might include inter-regional encounters within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and in the context of such Asia-Pacific bodies as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the UN system in general and especially the General Assembly, and a range of multilateral bodies of which the most prominent might be the World Trade Organisation and global climate change negotiations (Balme and Bridges 2008, Laatikainen and Smith 2006, etc).

This raises the issue of differential commitment within the partnership framework. If (maybe) we are witnessing the application of established EU 'fixes' for the EU-China relationship, how much can we infer that the EU and the Chinese are equally committed to the partnership and its component activities? And to what extent is that commitment subject to 'external' forces (for example, the gravitational pull of EU-US and EU-China relations, which is always likely to be strong, or EU-Russia and China-Russia relations)? In this context, it is relevant to note that Chinese views of the changing global arena gave seeming priority to EU-China relations during 2003-2004, but since then appear to have reverted quite strongly to a fixation on the USA (Barber 2009, Zaborowski 2006). The US not only takes a different and more assertive line than the EU on a number of US-China issues (for example, Taiwan, Tibet), but also has a great deal more to offer and threaten in areas related to 'hard power' than the EU. According to Fox and Godement, the Chinese are well aware of the divisions within the EU about a range of sensitive issues, and thus tend to pursue divide and rule policies where they can, whilst their relationship to the US is far more demanding and concentrated (Fox and Godement 2009). In particular, the closer the relationship gets to issues of 'hard security', the more the Chinese see no cohesive EU position; rather they can see a 'strategic gap' (Wissenbach 2007).

The general texture of the partnership thus raises important questions about scope and scale, institutionalisation and levels of commitment from the partners. But how does it work when specific issues are involved? In the remainder of this section, the paper deals briefly with a number of cases which indicate different qualities of the partnership, and then evaluates both them and the partnership in general in light of the criteria advanced earlier.¹

Case 1: China's Accession to the WTO

The first case concerns a key element in the development of the EU-China-US 'triangle': China's entry into the WTO. In a way, of course, this is almost a pre-

¹ The following discussion of the WTO accession and textiles cases is based on Smith and Xie (2009).

condition for other developments in the commercial relations between the three parties, because it concerns China's access to the key institution for the multilateral management of international commercial policy. There was a lengthy 'pre-history' to the formal negotiations that took place in the late 1990s and the first year or so of the new millennium, since the Chinese had first indicated their desire for membership in the late 1980s. There was also a specific institutional context for the eventual negotiations, since the granting of WTO membership requires bilateral agreements with all existing member states (or groups, in the case of the EU). Given the development between the late 1980s and early 2000s of increasingly intense trade relations between the EU, China and the US (and of course, of increasing trade deficits for the EU and the US), it was to be expected that negotiations would be long and hard.

The EU was concerned above all with one key element in the eventual deal that might be struck with China: market access, which would give them the potential to expand their commercial interests in China not only through trade in goods but also through trade in services, intellectual property protection and potential future investment. They thus set priorities for the negotiations that implied a significant market-opening process in China, and also saw as central the WTO's role in promoting rules and norms on international commercial transactions, including both trade and investment (Pearson 1999; Rumbaugh and Blancher 2004). The notion that China should become a 'responsible stakeholder' in the world economy and particularly in trade was a key underlying motivation for the EU, in line with its commitment to multilateralism more generally. For the Chinese themselves, it is clear that entry into the WTO was seen as emblematic of a broader integration into the world order, and a recognition of their status – in addition, of course, the liberalisation of trade in areas such as textiles was a key material motivation.

During the negotiations themselves a key problem for the EU was countering the possibility of an unequal deal in which China would gain relatively free access to

European markets whilst retaining significant levels of domestic protection. This went alongside the fact that at the same time as the EU was negotiating, the US was also negotiating its own bilateral deal with Beijing; this meant that the EU was faced with a problem of monitoring and influencing not only what went on in their relationship with China, but also their relationship with the US, and in turn the US relationship with China (Zimmermann 2004, 2007). This position for the EU was shaped by the undeniable fact that they placed great importance on Chinese accession, which was seen as strengthening the WTO system in general but also as bringing China into a rules-based system where they would be more amenable to EU influence. Not only this, but there was a further important dimension for the EU in general and for the European Commission as the negotiator: the ways in which an active if not leading role in the negotiations could play into the broader international status and recognition accorded to the Union. For the Chinese, as already noted, the issues were not only those of material economic benefit but also those of recognition within what they would define as a multipolar global system.

Apart from (but linked to) market access, one key problem was the terms under which China should enter: should it be judged as a 'developed' or an 'underdeveloped' country' (Anderson 1997)? This issue has major implications for the ways in which a new member is allowed to adjust to the pressures of life in the multilateral system, and it was one on which the EU was inclined to accept that China should enter with the status of less developed country. The US position was much less accommodating than that of the EU throughout the negotiations – reflecting no doubt the relative priorities placed on membership for China *per se*, as well as the influence of Congress, which was extremely sensitive to any 'give-away' on the negotiations. What developed for the EU was a (self-allocated) role as a kind of intermediary between China and the US, emphasising the importance of sensitivity to the varying levels of development in different sectors of the Chinese economy and also stressing the importance of

EU interests in such areas as trade in services and the integrity of the WTO system as a whole (Eglin 1997).

When it came to the *dénouement* of the negotiations as a whole, there was a key role for timing. The EU as it transpired was the last of the major WTO members to conclude a bilateral deal with China, and this enabled it to push for greater concessions in some areas than the US had already achieved; at the same time, there was pressure on the EU to conclude a deal so that key Congressional votes in the US were not jeopardised (European Report 2000a, 2000b). As a result, the final conclusion of the bilateral agreement with the EU was delayed until May 2000 – the US having agreed in late 1999. It could be argued that this enabled the EU to achieve some slight advantage in the deals carved out for specific sectors, particularly for financial services. But it was also clear that Chinese entry (formally achieved on January 1st 2002) was only the beginning of the story. There remained key questions about the ways in which Chinese status within the WTO would be defined, and about the impact of the concessions that had been achieved in specific sectors. Among these, textiles were one of the most sensitive.

Case 2: The Textile Dispute

Among the key agreements made during the WTO entry negotiations had been one on the elimination of tariffs and quotas. On their side, the Chinese had agreed to eliminate quotas and other quantitative restrictions on imports no later than 2005, thus opening up in principle a large new market for European goods (European Report 2001). Not surprisingly, Chinese entry was followed by sustained pressure on Beijing to introduce – if not to accelerate – these changes. But the changes have to be seen in the broader context of the reduction of quotas and quantitative restrictions for all countries as a result of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations that was completed in 1993. One of these was key to both EU and US interest: the phasing out of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement, which had governed imports into industrial countries of textile products for many

years, and which had at its core a set of quota arrangements (Brambilla et al 2007). The agreement was due to expire on 1st January 2005, replaced by the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, which meant that the EU as well as other WTO members had had ten years to adjust – but the phasing out of quotas brought about a veritable flood of imports from China (as well as a number of other developing countries, especially those in South Asia).

The crisis, which made its initial and dramatic impact in early 2005, thus posed major problems of management for the EU and Member States within the context of their bilateral relationships with China and of their ‘domestic’ constituencies; as it developed, it also produced significant problems of adjustment for the Chinese, because of the need to adapt to successive negotiation phases. Potentially also, it played into the whole question of the terms on which China had been admitted into the WTO, since it raised issues about whether the EU (and the US) had the right to impose protective measures against the surge of Chinese imports, and about whether they could use the WTO as an instrument or as a legitimising agent in applying whatever measures they might decide upon. Thus, although the dispute was about only a part of the trade with China conducted by the EU and the US, it raised far more general questions about the ways in which that trade was to be managed both at the time and in the future.

Between 2004 and 2005, Chinese exports of textiles and clothing to the EU grew massively both in volume and in value; at the same time, average unit prices for textile products in the EU had dropped significantly. Not surprisingly, this led to protests from EU manufacturers, channelled especially through the trade association, Euratex, which identified China as the key culprit and argued that there was a threat both to EU producers and to other supplying countries from Chinese domination of the import market. The Commission had already identified the textiles issue as one which might lead to major pressure for protection, and had deployed a proposed amendment of Council regulations that would at least in principle allow for the imposition of safeguard measures (European

Commission 2004, 2005). But this in itself did not prepare the EU for the dramatic flood of imports, nor for the conflicting pressures that arose from the tensions between producers, retailers and consumers as the crisis developed. In addition to the EU-based instruments, there was also the possibility that measures could be taken under general WTO provisions to counter market disruption. Finally, there was also the possibility of coordinated action with other countries or regions especially affected by the import surge – the obvious candidate being the US, which was itself confronting a crisis in this area.

The EU's early response was to place the emphasis on self-control by the Chinese, rather than to undertake unilateral measures, and to hold any possibility of action through the WTO very much in the background (Allen and Smith 2006). But the Commission's hand was forced by pressure from Euratex (the association of textile producers) to deploy safeguard measures, and by increasing evidence of concern on the part of particular Member States, especially Italy, Portugal and France. In effect, on this as on a number of other trade issues, there is a North-South divide in the EU itself, and this became increasingly obvious during the Summer of 2005 as the retail interests of Northern members such as Sweden and the United Kingdom ran up against those of the producer countries. As a result of these complex pressures, Peter Mandelson, the EU Trade Commissioner, produced a set of guidelines; but at the same time, in April 2005, the US announced that it was considering the imposition of safeguard measures that might include revived quota arrangements. Arguably, this led to a hardening of the EU position as Spring moved into Summer during 2005, with the first mention of possible reference to the WTO. But this itself was trumped by the planned imposition of quotas by the US. The Commission found itself between a rock and a hard place, since it was determined not to jeopardise its broader relationship with China, and equally determined not to damage relations with a whole raft of other textile producers, in South Asia and elsewhere, that would be disrupted by any imposition of broad quotas. So there was a desperate search for specific measures that could be

seen as evidence of Commission concern but which would not create significant harm. In this process, the threat of formal reference to the WTO played a role, by enabling the start of formal consultations with the Chinese government and an eventual agreement between the EU and China in June 2005. It was notable that at this stage, a contrast was drawn between this agreement based on consultation and negotiation, and the unilateral actions of the US (Bodeen 2005; Buckley 2005).

The agreement of June 2005, though, only served to create further problems, partly because the mechanisms for implementation and monitoring were ill-defined, thus leaving room for further increases in Chinese exports but also catching large numbers of textile products in a sort of limbo, trapped in European ports. It appeared that none of the vociferous interests involved in the crisis had actually been satisfied, and this led to further negotiations during the Summer – eventually producing an agreement in September 2005 that dealt with the release of the ‘trapped’ products and also established a system for reviewing the position in the medium term (with the intention of phasing out any quotas by late 2008) (Allen and Smith 2006). Notably, although all of the processes described took place in the shadow of the WTO, and all parties were well aware of this, there was no formal move to open a WTO dispute, or to use the established WTO safeguard provisions.

Case 3: The Arms Embargo

The two issues discussed so far – WTO membership and the textiles dispute – can be seen in the first case as concerning global governance and the application of rules, and in the second case as concerning commercial challenges for the EU. Our third case is very different. The arms embargo imposed on China by the EC in the wake of Tiananmen Square was not only a measure of ‘high politics’, it was also one that relied for its initiation on the Member States acting within Political Cooperation (and later the CFSP) and which only incidentally touched on the ‘pillar 1’ concerns where the commission

could be expected to play a significant role. During the early 1990s, the embargo became symbolic for the European of a wider concern with human rights issues in China, standing as a key indicator of an EU-wide consensus on the matter. As such, although clearly it involves commercial considerations, it is a trading issue in a very sensitive area which 'has rapidly elevated into a political question taken up by decision-makers at very high levels not only in Europe and China, but also in North America and across East Asia' (Anthony, 2005, p1). We might therefore expect that the processes through which any type of EU-China partnership could be pursued in such an area would be both distinctive and laden with both symbolic and security concerns. We might also expect that as indicated in the quote above, this could not be confined to EU-China bilateral relations.

The embargo as imposed in 1989 is not legally binding; nor is the subsequent Code of Conduct on arms sales agreed by the EU in 1998. It has also been noted that the embargo as actually implemented by EU Member States has often proved to be 'leaky' and uneven in its impact (Putten 2007:2; Kogan 2005:10). Thus when in October 2003 the Chinese *Policy Paper* on EU-China relations proposed the lifting of the ban, there was at least in theory a good deal of political discretion for the EU and the Member States to reconsider their positions. It must also be remembered that this challenge to the status quo emerged just as the EU-China 'strategic partnership' was on the launch-pad – indeed, it might be suggested that the Chinese request was a 'test' of the relationship and of the validity of the EU as a partner in a multipolar global system. Immediate responses came from President Chirac of France and Chancellor Schroeder, who during visits to Beijing in October and early December supported the lifting of the ban and its replacement by a strengthened Code of conduct.. The EU-China summit held in the Hague in early December considered the issue, but the line held by the Dutch EU presidency was that the time was not right and that studies needed to be conducted before the embargo could be amended or lifted (Crossick and Reuter 2007: 190). The position adopted by both the EU High representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, and the Council of

Foreign Ministers meeting in mid-December was that whilst the 'political will' for changing the embargo existed, the time was not yet right. The implication was that by about the middle of 2005 (fittingly the twentieth anniversary of the EC-China Trade and Cooperation Agreement), the time would be right.

There were obviously some very significant incentives for both the EU collectively and the Member States to review the embargo at this time. Apart from any strictly commercial considerations (and these were powerful for some Member States), it was apparent that the demands of 'strategic partnership' and the idea that the EU could become a major interlocutor for China in the multipolar world system were prominent in the calculations of the French, for example; indeed, it might be argued that the 'strategic partnership' provided a rationale for the type of policy change that was contemplated. The Chinese assiduously played to this perception, and to the idea that the EU could make a mark for itself by lifting the embargo. In early 2004, 'studies' were duly initiated, but a series of postponements meant that the issue never really came before the Council after a vote in early 2004 when the lifting of the embargo was opposed by 14-1. By this time, however, a new factor entered into the equation: strong and growing US concern, both in the White House and in Congress, related specifically to the prospects for Taiwan and more generally to the reliability of the EU and its members as allies (Sandschneider 2006). The linkage to Taiwan became a key element in the process that then unfolded, since during 2004 there was a prospect that the Taiwanese might vote for independence in a referendum, a prospect greeted by Beijing with threats of dire consequences (Sandschneider 2006: 42-3). It seemed clear that the EU and the Member States were increasingly between a rock and a hard place. One response among those Member States still determined to pursue the issue was to link the lifting (or potential lifting) of the embargo to broader concerns about human rights in China, and in particular the need for ratification by the Chinese of the UN International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, but this was met with puzzlement in

Beijing by a government that felt it was already doing quite enough in these areas (Odgaard and Biscop 2007: 75).

By the end of 2004, three key obstacles stood in the way of any significant EU action on the embargo. First, there was the issue of human rights, raised by the EU and met with a stony response by the Chinese. Second, there was the still thorny issue of Taiwan – especially since the Chinese had begun to consider an ‘anti-secession law’ authorizing the use of force if Taiwan should move towards independence. Finally, there was the lack of any real proposals for strengthening of the Code of Conduct in a way that might reassure the United States but not antagonize the Chinese themselves. The Americans increasingly linked the arms embargo issue with questions about the overall reliability of the European as allies, and with threats to withdraw access to certain equipment or forms of cooperation if matters went any further (Sandschneider 2006: 41 et seq.).

On 14th March 2005, the Chinese People’s Assembly passed the ‘anti-secession law’, and one of its predictable effects was the killing of any momentum that had been building in the EU behind the proposal to lift the embargo. In fact, there had been some significant momentum, even extending to expressions of apparent support by the UK for a lifting of the ban, and there had been continuing discussion in Brussels of a June 2005 deadline for measures to take effect. As it was, despite continued expressions of interest by the French and the Germans (until the election of Angela Merkel as Chancellor in late 2005), the proposal was to all intents and purposes dead – a condition that prevails today. So on the face of it, the most tangible ‘test’ of partnership set by the Chinese for the EU was flunked; for at least one set of commentators, the episode is a ‘case study in diplomatic bungling’ (Crossick and Reuter 2007: 189).

Case Study 4: The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

As we have already noted, the major formal expression of partnership between the EU and China remains the Trade and Cooperation Agreement of 1985. In the

wake of the calls for a 'strategic partnership' during 2003, and in the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the 1985 agreement, it was therefore no surprise that there were calls for a new and more comprehensive framework agreement. As Benito Ferrero-Waldner, EU Commissioner for External relations, said in May 2005:

'Both the EU and China have changed beyond recognition in 30 years and so has our relationship. Our existing Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement simply doesn't live up to the dynamism of today's partnership. It's time to reflect the vibrancy of our relations with an ambitious new Agreement that will help us move to a fully-fledged strategic partnership.'
(Press Releases, RAPID, 2005b)

For the Commission, this was thus clearly a strategic priority, and one that from the point of view of this paper was clearly connected with the aspiration of a 'strategic partnership'. This general aim was clearly supplemented by the desire to put EU-China relations on a firmer legal footing, and to bring together the range of activities and mechanisms referred to in preceding sections. The process of negotiating such an agreement, designed not only to link a wide range of activities but also to encompass political and even security issues, was bound to be less than straightforward.

And so it has proved. It was clear from the outset that whilst both the EU and China saw value in such an agreement, both hoped that they would be able to extract concessions by linkage between disparate agenda items, to 'create linkages between different areas [so that] they will get the other side to make concession on the issue they care most about' (Barysch et al 2005: 10). The EU, represented by the Commission, clearly wanted the agreement to be as comprehensive as possible, dealing with all issue areas of EU-China relations (International Herald Tribune 2007), including those the Chinese have historically found most difficult, relating to norms, values and dialogues on such areas as

human rights (Barysch et al 2005: 10, Fox and Godement 2009: 31, Weske 2007: 4). They also wanted to base the agreement on the principle of 'reciprocal engagement' (Fox and Godement 2009: 12), implying a less unconditional approach to the acceptance of Chinese positions on a range of sensitive issues. This seems to contrast with the Chinese approach, which focuses strongly on trade and cooperation in the traditional sense, and separates the trade and economic issues from the political agreement (European Report 2006, 2007). The Chinese would also wish to link the negotiations with progress on the issues of market economy status and the arms embargo (see above), a move resisted by the EU (Weske 2007: 4).

Preparations for the negotiations were set in motion during 2005, but a formal declaration on negotiations was not made until the 9th EU-China summit in December 2006, at which point it was noted that the agreement 'will encompass the full scope of [the] bilateral relationship, including enhanced cooperation in political matters' (Council of the EU 2006: 2). But it was also noted that the negotiation of the trade and economic aspects 'will be administered in a relatively independent manner' (ibid), thus bearing out the problems of linkage between the political and the economic aspects of the process. Negotiations were expected to begin in early 2007, and some hopes were expressed that they would be concluded in two to three years (Wu 2006). The negotiations were duly launched by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing in Beijing on 17th January 2007, with much talk of their being concluded by January 2009.

As suggested by pre-negotiations, the discussions on economic and political aspects of the PCA have been conducted in relatively independent ways, involving different parts of the Commission and of the Chinese government: thus on trade issues, DG Trade leads with the Chinese Ministry of commerce, while on political issues the lead is with DG RELEX and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Men 2008: 18). Almost immediately, the two parallel sets of talks began to operate to different rhythms, with the political discussions more easily set in

motion than the trade negotiations. Predictably, negotiations envisaged as extending over two or three years have also been subject to important fluctuations created by external events: in this case, specifically the Tibet disturbances of Spring and Summer 2008, the demands for a boycott of the Olympic Games in August 2008, and the frostiness caused by Nicolas Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama in Autumn 2008 (which itself led to the postponement of the scheduled EU-China summit from December 2008 to May 2009).

As noted above, negotiations spread across a wide range of linked issues and over a long period of time are subject to external forces and to political or other changes in the negotiating parties. Thus it is no real surprise that as of September 2009, there has been little indication that the PCA will indeed be concluded by the beginning of 2010. There has though been significant progress on a range of political issues, whilst the economic aspects (perhaps because more specific and entailing real financial costs or benefits) have been more difficult throughout (Crossick 2009a). On the political front within the EU, the European Parliament has made its voice heard especially on the need to link trade agreements with matters of human rights, environment, sustainable development and social issues (Wortmann-Kool 2009: 11), and outstanding clauses to be agreed as of September 2009 include those on Taiwan and human rights (Crossick 2009b). In the economic field, a range of thorny issues remains open: market access and investment, intellectual property rights, government procurement, environmental and energy clauses, and of course market economy status (see above).

This means that although agreement has been reached on a wide range of political clauses and on some economic aspects, there are major aspects of the PCA that remain open to agreement (and disagreement). Many of these issues involve not only the EU and China themselves but also interested 'outsiders' such as the USA, and some of them relate to parts of the world such as Africa

that we have already noted as part of the new dynamic of EU-China relations. From the EU perspective, it is important to note that both the negotiations and any subsequent agreement involve all three pillars of the European structure, and also allow for interventions from a variety of organizations and institutions both in Brussels and elsewhere. At all stages – pre-negotiation, negotiation itself, agreement and ratification – this agreement thus poses distinctive problems of scope, scale and complexity.

VI. Conclusion: How Much Strategy? How Much Partnership? How Much ‘Strategic Partnership’?

This paper has attempted to provide a wide-ranging discussion of both the central conceptual components of ‘strategic partnerships’ as part of the EU’s external policies and the EU-China relationship as an emergent ‘strategic partnership’. The Conclusions will focus on each of the key components in turn before offering some general remarks and evaluations.

Our review of the EU’s approach to the EU-China relationship was designed to uncover key themes and assumptions in that approach. The task now is to relate those themes and assumptions to the earlier discussion of the EU as a strategic actor: how much can we discern a coherent strategic approach on the part of the EU over the past ten to fifteen years? In the first part of this paper, we suggested four elements of strategic ‘actorness’ that could be used to evaluate the extent to which the EU might achieve this status in any given policy domain: *resources, objectives, strategic narrative and adaptation*. These criteria can be used to evaluate the evolution of the EU’s China strategy.

On the first of the criteria, resources, the answer must be nuanced. It is clear that the EU, especially through the Commission, has dedicated significant resources to the formulation of strategies, and that these have been given the required attention at the European level. But essentially, it might be argued, the strategic positions that have developed are ‘cost free’ in terms of more material resources.

The positions are just that – positions. We shall investigate in the next section what happens when the strategy is called into question, but it could be argued at this point that the development of the EU's strategic positions *vis à vis* China has been at the level of 'cheap talk', establishing a set of principles but not fully considering the resources that might be needed to implement or sustain them. At the more detailed level, it is far from clear how the various activities that have emerged around the EU-China partnership have been linked or integrated (Barysch et al 2005, Odgaard and Biscop 2007). In terms of the second criterion, aims, it is clear that the EU has set out a succession of clear general aims in relation to China, including integration of China into the world economy, promotion of good government and human rights, engagement on a wide range of global governance issues and management of bilateral trade and other economic relations. The issue is, first, whether the appropriate resources have been committed to pursuit of these aims and second, whether the aims add up to a long term and coherent strategy.

This brings us to the third criterion, a strategic narrative. It seems clear that this narrative has gone through several phases, with a number of strands on which EU Member States and the Commission are not always entirely agreed: there are elements of multilateralism, but a strong admixture of bilateralism; there are elements of positive collaboration, but also elements of containment in light of the changing China challenge; and there are strong elements of the commercial and commercial interest promotion, but there are also - often equally strong - elements of normative and world order concerns. Finally, in terms of our criteria, we can discern successive adaptations of the strategy in line with the depth and intensity of the China challenge. But how much of this is pro-active strategic adaptation, and how much reaction to events over which the EU has relatively little control? This question applies both in the essentially commercial sphere (the shift from trade promotion to competitiveness) and in the more political sphere (the balance between economic and political or humanitarian concerns as seen in the EU's developing positions).

The verdict at this stage is thus decidedly mixed. And it is made more mixed by the fact that Chinese international strategies – including those towards the EU - have been in a state of flux and evolution. The Chinese search for international status and legitimacy and the mixture of motivations behind China's rise (peaceful or otherwise) have been noted by many commentators (for example Clegg 2009, Deng 2008, Möller 2002, Zaborowski 2006). Others have pointed to the fact that Chinese policies are often 'experimental' in nature, including those centred on multilateralism (Odgaard and Biscop 2007), or that they see the EU as only one of a large number of contending forces in a multipolar world (for example Barber 2009). The Chinese *Policy Paper* of October 2003 on China-EU relations remains the only explicit statement of policy from Beijing; it described the relationship as a comprehensive strategic partnership, but with little indication of how that was to be followed up and implemented across the range of EU-China relations. It might be argued (and has been – see Barber 2009, Zabrowski 2006, etc) that as time has gone on, Beijing has clearly become more interested in its strategy towards the USA, a clearer and more demanding interlocutor, than in its approach to the EU.

If the picture on strategy in general is unclear and fragmented, how do things stand on the second key element: partnership? In the first part of the paper, we proposed five ways of evaluating partnerships in the EU's external policies: *external commitment, internal commitment, relationship to other 'governance mechanisms' in the world arena, symmetry or asymmetry, and openness to renegotiation or reform*. How can we appraise these elements of the EU-China partnership on the basis of the evidence produced here?

In the first place, it seems clear that there is a wide range or more or less specific and more or less material commitments in the partnership. One of the key tasks – both at the analytical and at the policy level – is thus differentiating between those commitments that are symbolic and those that are material, those that are

core and those that are peripheral to the partnership. We have seen that for the EU one core commitment is to the establishment and proclamation of a 'strategic partnership' *per se*, whilst we have seen that for the Chinese there are certain key elements such as those concerning their status (both economic and political) and their treatment that are clearly symbolic in nature. But it is also clear that once one leaves the 'framework' level, there is a determination on both sides to preserve or promote key material interests, for example in trade and investment. One of the problems in managing such a situation is that of understanding the linkages between these levels and issues, and of either manipulating or countering them so as to promote key interests. For the EU specifically, it seems that managing the range of internal stakeholders, including European institutions such as the EP, Member States, and non-governmental groups on both the commercial and the political sides, constitutes a major challenge. Given the aim of a comprehensive partnership, covering both general statements of commitments and a host of more specific commitments, it could not be otherwise, and the cases of the arms embargo and of the textiles dispute bear this out. At the same time, the level of 'external' commitment by both the EU and the Chinese governments seems to have fluctuated significantly over the years. The most obvious case in this regard is that of Chinese commitment in the wake of the declaration of 'strategic partnership' as a goal in 2003. There followed a year or so in which the Chinese seem genuinely to have believed (or hoped?) that the EU could be a 'pole' in the emerging multipolar world and thus a partner in the contest with the USA. After the frictions over the arms embargo and other issues in 2004/5, the Chinese seem to have become more realistic in their hopes for the partnership and to have focused increasingly on key material objectives in their approach to the PCA, for example.

So the management of the commitments inherent in any partnership has posed problems both for the EU and for the Chinese, but our argument would be that the EU has encountered particular difficulties in both creating and managing its version of 'strategic partnership'. The same holds true, in a different way, when

we consider the relationship between the EU-China partnership and other international commitments. At one level, the potential of the USA to create complications for the EU is clear – it is there in all of the empirical cases with which we have dealt, and one is tempted to conclude that it would be there in any others we chose to examine. The US is the inevitable ‘third party’ in any EU-China negotiations and although our evidence does not at this time extend to the US influence on the PCA negotiations, we would expect it to feature there at the point where concrete commitments were about to be entered into. American pressure is both direct and indirect, operating in a variety of contexts – and it is felt especially by the EU because of the centrality of the US to the external policies both of the Union and of key Member States. At the same time, we have noted that the EU-China partnership is subject to (and in some cases supported by) commitments to other international governance mechanisms. The most obvious case is that of the WTO, which plays a key direct and indirect role in the management of the partnership, both at the level of framework commitments and at the level of specific disputes (whether or not the organisation is formally invoked by the parties). It is clear – although not part of our empirical work in this paper – that other international governance mechanisms, such as those centring on environmental or human rights issues, will also be part of the EU’s strategic diplomacy towards China, whether reinforcing or moderating it. If we conceive of the partnership at least partly as a form of ‘external governance’, it is clear that it is part of a system of multilevel governance in the world arena and that this has important effects for the EU’s efforts to manage it.

Finally, we can note that the relationship is subject to multiple asymmetries, which vary across issue areas and time (see also Cameron 2009). At the framework level, it might be imagined that this is a partnership of relative equals, but it is clear that at times the EU is less than equal to the capacity of the Chinese to pursue strategic issues in a consistent and coherent way. At the level of specific initiatives or disputes, the EU shows what one might expect: the capacity to exercise considerable influence in areas where it is not only powerful

(in the sense of possessing resources) but also has powers (in the sense of being able to mobilise and exercise leverage using these resources). Where the situation is less clear, for example in the case of the arms embargo, the EU's position is much less robust and more subject to erosion both from inside and from outside. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that in many areas, especially those with a more symbolic or political aspect, the EU is fighting an unequal battle.

It seems clear from this discussion that our judgement on 'partnership' as expressed in EU-China relations must be qualified. There is clearly a significant and growing set of activities and commitments around the relationship, expressed both in the desire to renegotiate the overall framework of the relationship and in the growth of dialogues and sectoral mechanisms as described in the paper. But this leads to an uneven and fluctuating picture, influenced both by internal and by external pressures and by the development of the broader global arena. We have not had the space in this paper to discuss the impact (for example) of the international financial crisis, of further enlargement or institutional reform in the EU itself, or of political change in China, but it is logical to expect that these will play their part in the evolution of the partnership.

This brings us to an overall appraisal of the 'strategic partnership' as it stands in late 2009. It is an incomplete partnership, which expresses fragmentation and fluctuation but which also reflects a set of key imperatives for the EU. Thus it will not lightly be discarded, although it may well be pushed around by events and by the pressures of international life. It seems to us that this situation can be explained to a significant degree by applying the three logics of 'strategic partnership' that were set out in the early part of this paper. As we argued then, the 'internal logic' encourages analysis of the ways in which the EU's institutional structures and internal politics might shape the search for 'strategic partnerships'. We expected this search to be conditioned by the internal distribution of preferences, by the broader institutional development and capacities of the

Union, and by the ways in which Member States are prepared to commit themselves. But we also expected it to be governed by the ‘disintegration logic’ by which the divergence of internal preferences disables or dilutes the EU’s external policy capacity. Ample evidence to support these conjectures is provided by the empirical study in this paper, which shows that the interplay of internal commitments, Member State and other interests, and external initiatives is key to understanding the course of EU policy development.

The ‘external’ logic of the EU’s search for ‘strategic partnerships’ is also apparent. Earlier, we suggested that ‘strategic partnerships’ will be a reflection of the external opportunity structure and the EU’s collective capacity to take advantage of it, and in particular that the effects of post-Cold War change and the continuing influence of the USA would be significant. It is clear that these factors and forces have been crucial both to the generation of the EU’s search for a ‘strategic partnership’ with China, and to the unevenness of the results. A further element that needs to be built into our analysis is also suggested by our empirical analysis: the effects of change and development in China itself, which have clearly influenced the Chinese response to the EU’s successive initiatives.

On the basis of the evidence here, we can conclude that the EU’s search for a ‘strategic partnership’ with China also expresses the ‘identity’ logic of the EU’s external policies. We argued earlier that each and any ‘strategic partnership’ would be in some way a response to the ‘identity logic’, expressing the EU’s search for identity within the world arena and also projecting formally or informally the values on which the EU is taken to be founded. ‘Strategic partnerships’ are thus in part an external projection of the notion that the EU is a ‘force for good’ and a contributor to world order as well as a means of projecting the EU’s growing need to assert itself within that arena. The evidence on this point seems compelling: the search for an EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ reflects the a perception in key EU institutions that the Union has a role in introducing China to the global order and ensuring that the Chinese play by the

rules of global society (as interpreted by the EU). We should of course also note that this perception has often been met by an equally firm Chinese perception that they will do things their own way, and by their capacity to resist or reject the EU's presumption.

Finally, we also argued that 'strategic partnerships' would express the interaction of the three logics and the fluctuating balance between them, and that as a result they would be subject to consequential contradictions and unevenness. The needs of European integration, the opportunities or challenges presented by the world arena, and the less tangible but often equally powerful search for an EU identity should all be evident in the development of any 'strategic partnership'. We can think of no better way to end this paper than simply to restate this and note that our empirical study has shown the pervasiveness of this set of linkages. Whether the EU can prevail in its search for an EU-China 'strategic partnership' over the limitations this seems to imply, we will leave for future research.

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