

The EU and China – reconciling interests and values in an age of interdependence^{*}

The dilemma between economic interests and human rights

Uwe Wissenbach, Delegation of the EU European Commission to Korea

Abstracts

The paper examines the underlying tension in the EU-China strategic partnership between the EU's normative foreign policy and China's sovereignty driven realist agenda.

- 1) How do the EU's relations with China fit the EU's ethical and normative foreign policy? How can a value-based foreign policy come to terms with power politics? How universal are the values and norms professed by the EU?
- 2) How to reconcile the EU-China strategic partnership with the different approaches China takes on core issues of sovereignty, human rights, democracy etc. in the UN and in the developing world?
- 3) How to conceive of China's international responsibility for global governance with its insistence on non-interference in domestic affairs of other countries?

In his attempt to answer these three questions the author looks first at the changing paradigm of international politics, the de-Westernisation of globalisation, driven in particular by China. The EU's strategy to deal with this new phenomenon is the focus of the research. The author argues that China's crucial role in shaping international politics of the 21st century may be defined by the opposition of so-called Confucian values and Western democracy. The author, however, rejects the equation of Confucian values with authoritarianism, citing Korea as a counter-example. The author then turns to the EU's normative agenda and the challenges it faces. The human rights policy is the focus of the second section which outlines the EU's ethical dilemma in its efforts to pursue its interests on the one hand and promoting human rights on the other. An example of this dilemma is given in the third section which provides insights into the apparent competition between the EU and China in Africa. Concluding this critical examination of the EU-China partnership, the author argues that while the de-Westernisation of global politics driven by China's rise poses a series of fundamental challenges to the EU's normative foreign policy this process does not necessarily lead to a new round of ideological confrontation. Rather policy-makers can shape the future of global politics by forging cooperative patterns based on shared interests. However, the EU's global agenda will have to adapt to new forces that challenge the norms it stands for. But so will China have to adapt to international society.

Introduction

In 2009 it will have been 20 years that the EU has imposed economic sanctions and an arms embargo on China after the bloody intervention on Tian An Men Square. 2009 will also mark the 50th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight to India and thus discussions on human rights and democracy in China will surely continue to make headlines a year after the Olympics in Beijing.

* The author works for DG Development in the European Commission. This article only reflects his private views and can in no way engage the European Commission.

The arms embargo is still in place while all other sanctions have been phased out. Since 1978, EU-China trade has increased more than 60-fold and reached approximately €254 billion in 2006. Since 1999 Chinese and EU leaders have met in annual summits, complemented by numerous strategic or sector dialogues which are weaving an increasingly dense web of relations. Yet, in December 2008 China cancelled an EU-China summit because French President Sarkozy announced he would meet the Dalai Lama at a gathering of Nobel Prize laureates in Poland. What is an issue of sovereignty for China is seen by many in Europe as a human rights issue. And many observers will ask what the depth of the EU-China strategic partnership is and whether it can reconcile such contradictions.

Behind these developments lie questions on the EU-China relationship and the EU's role in the world more generally:

- 1) How do the EU's relations with China fit the EU's ethical and normative foreign policy? How can a value-based foreign policy come to terms with power politics? How universal are the values and norms professed by the EU?
- 2) How to reconcile the EU-China strategic partnership with the different approaches China takes on core issues of sovereignty, human rights, democracy etc. in the UN and in the developing world?
- 3) How to conceive of China's international responsibility for global governance with its insistence on non-interference in domestic affairs of other countries?

Box: EU-China trade and investment

Trade in goods

EU goods exports to China 2007: €71.6 billion

EU goods imports from China 2007: €230.8 billion

Trade in services

EU services exports to China 2006: €12.4 billion

EU services imports from China 2006: €11.2 billion

Foreign Direct Investment

EU inward investment to China 2006: €6 billion

China inward investment to EU 2006: €2.1 billion

The paper will address these three questions by discussing the global context of de-Westernisation of globalisation in an age of interdependence. Then it will examine China's rise and Asian values and the EU's normative power and global role in this context. Finally it will put the findings in the EU-China context with references to Africa. In this way the paper aims at contributing to a debate about values, ethics and responsibility in international relations and global governance.

Defining patterns of partnership after the Cold War: cooperation, confrontation or clash of values?

The global agenda is no longer a function of a bipolar power and system conflict embodied by what was called the Cold War, neither has history come to its end. We are in a period of shifts in power and relationships, world visions and interests which will certainly determine the future pattern of relations and partnerships for some time to come. Terrorism has shaped this agenda somewhat dramatically since 2001, but this focus will probably recede and structural issues such as economics, climate change, sustainable development and demographics will

affect these patterns of emerging multipolarity more. To deal with these interdependent global issues institutions dominated by the West are no longer sufficient. These issues require concepts of shared, global responsibility and solutions jointly elaborated by diverse actors in interactive partnerships and with functional strategies. Policymakers have to choose: perpetuating the cold war antagonisms with a different enemy on an ideology driven platform (such as the league of democracies (cum war on terror) idea putting US-style liberalism and democracy up against the "evil") or promoting a pattern that allows cooperative development on the basis of mutual respect, division of labour and responsibility. Clearly, the decades to come will be marked by competition and cooperation.

Europe is often dismissed in Asia as an economic partner with little influence on global affairs, while the US is the superpower reference for Asian policy makers. But in terms of setting norms that define international relations, the US has long neglected its traditional role, concentrating on regime change in selected key countries and jealously guarding its sovereignty rather than furthering global governance as it used to do after WWII. As a result, its soft power, but increasingly also its hard power has eroded and declined – the global financial crisis triggered by irresponsible, egoistic laissez-faire policies in Washington is only the last of the events which foreshadow that the US is losing the legitimacy to dominate world affairs. The new US administration stands at a critical juncture.

Global governance instead has been promoted by the EU, including strengthening the UN. The title of the EU's security strategy shows this ambition: Europe in a better world¹. The EU's key success has been to provide durable peace and prosperity to its region and gradually enlarging this region (to now 27 countries with almost 500 million inhabitants generating an estimated nominal GDP of €2 581 billion in 2008 according to the IMF. It accounts for about 31% of the world's total economic output).

This paper argues that a new paradigm is emerging. A period of de-Westernisation of globalization – although fundamentally rooted in Western-created capitalism - has started perhaps at first imperceptibly in the 1980s deep in the Chinese countryside. This is where China started its domestic reform process. At the same time a particular view of Confucianism (Asian values) was promoted from Singapore, to explain the rise of Asia and the decline of modernity as defined by the West. Nowadays, many analysts and policy makers see the Asian century as an inevitable trend and the West, Europe in particular, in inevitable decline.

Europe's global governance agenda and normative ambition is caught in a pincher movement between the claws of a crab: the American superpower and the Asian rising powers, which moreover seem to sway large parts of the developing world. Both move on a "realist" agenda of power politics in the national interest anchored in an emphasis on national sovereignty which is at odds with the EU preferences for multilateralism, regulation and negotiation.

In this context the EU has a number of challenges to address which diminish its global clout:

- The EU and its Member States do not always follow the same strategies, interests and priorities (they often delegate the difficult areas – such as human rights dialogues - to Brussels, but cherry pick on profitable issues)
- The EU has been inward-looking because successes (enlargement), regional priorities (Balkans) or setbacks (Constitutional Treaty referenda) absorbed its energies
- the support for its positions in the UN (in particular the Human Rights Council) has declined

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?id=266&lang=EN&mode=g

- some strategic partnerships may be incompatible with each other (EU-China versus EU-Japan or EU-Africa versus EU-China)
- in some areas where the EU has taken a global leadership role, the US has been absent or actively working against the EU e.g. the Kyoto-Protocol, the International Criminal Court, UN reform, global financial regulation and crisis management
- emerging countries, led by China, are increasingly blocking the EU's priorities such as in the WTO Doha Development Round, the UN Human Rights Council, the post-Kyoto climate change process or its Africa strategy.

The list reveals that the EU needs to develop a strategy to deal with the de-Westernisation of globalisation, with competition from and cooperation with emerging players (mainly from Asia) and its future role as a normative power and a power for peace and global governance – roles it has assigned to itself and gotten used to without thinking much about the perspective of the would-be norm-takers.

At this point in time an Asian century may be a simplification at the same level as the end of history and the clash of civilizations and a mixture of wishful thinking and undeniable economic and demographic realities. The coming decades will most likely be marked by a plurality of countries and regions, not one or two poles. Nevertheless, the de-Westernisation of globalization is a reality fuelled by the economic dynamics of Asia and China in particular. But does China's rise necessarily imply a fundamental conflict between democracy and authoritarianism, the West and the rest? This question is crucial as it will determine future patterns of international relations.

China has been singled out (alongside Russia) as one key actor for such a conflictual hypothesis of the return of authoritarianism. Analogies with the rise of capitalist authoritarianism (Japan, Germany, Italy) in the 1930 have served to dramatise this hypothesis². This paper will look at this problem from two angles: Chinese tradition and China's interaction with the world – Europe and the developing world (Africa) in particular. Ideological rivalry with China has been construed mainly by US analysts and politicians around the core Western (universal) values of democracy, human rights and the liberal market economy. The question of universality of these concepts – and the 'holy trinity' they supposedly form together - is at the heart of a global discussion, because the market economy seems to function increasingly without democracy and human rights in China and has also undermined democracy and the rule of law (in the sense of Rechtsstaat) in the West and developing countries³. To some extent the "Washington Consensus", now quite dead, also focused on only one part of this trinity, neglecting domestic democratic accountability, core state capacity, tasks needed for regulation and providing public and social services, something which is at the heart of the European concept of good governance and also of Asian views on society and the state.

1. Confucius and Asian values as an alternative narrative to democracy and human rights?

In a paper such as this we can only simplify and provoke some reflections, rather than rigorously analyse such a complex issue.

Arguably democracy is a concept developed in the Greek polis, more or less at the same time as Confucianism was developing at the other end of the Eurasian continent. Confucianism

² Azar Gat: The return of authoritarian Great Powers. *Foreign Affairs* vol 86 N°4 July/August 2007. 59-69.

³ Mireille Delmas-Marty: La construction d'un Etat de Droit en Chine dans le contexte de la mondialisation. In: Mireille Delmas-Marty et Pierre-Etienne Will (eds) *La Chine et la démocratie*. Paris (Seuil) 2005 p 551-576.

remained the dominant political ethic in China – rather than a particular form of social or state organization - until the early 1900s (with sometimes radical variations and interpretations) due to the unification of the Empire in 221 BC and authoritarian rule. Democracy developed erratically in the West through the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, re-appearing in political reality after the French Revolution in the particular development context of Europe and the United States. It was denied to their colonial territories and racial minorities until the 1960s based on a wrong belief of white cultural superiority. The universality of democracy and the associated human rights is a relatively recent Western discourse and it is rooted in a particular tradition of part of mankind, but with universal appeal (and universal endorsement through the UN system). Effectively, in the discussions on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the advocates of universality could be found among the Chinese and non-European representatives including the US (which supported anti-colonialism, but had their domestic issue of racial discrimination to address.⁴)

Universalist aspirations were also harboured by neo-Confucianist thinkers at the end of the 1890s (Kang Youwei), but these last aspirations of Confucianism were discredited in China when the monarchy collapsed (1911) and a profound modernization drive started which is still under way. The radical anti-Confucian movement at the turn of the 19th/20th century held Confucianism responsible for autocratic rule in China and the backwardness of Chinese civilization. Chinese intellectuals used this term to reject everything which was part of traditional Chinese culture which was perceived as an obstacle to modernization.

Confucianism was also discredited in European thought at that time (slave mentality) and held responsible for the economic decline of China and Asia relative to the protestant ethics underlying the success of capitalism in the West (Max Weber). Earlier, though, during the Enlightenment, Confucian ethics were admired by European philosophers for the higher achievements of Chinese civilization.

In reality, Confucianism has never actually been an operational social concept and even less an economic model. It was rather an elite view and norm of social organisation of the state on the basis of hierarchy. In its contemporary form, this is still true and of course therefore is in stark contrast to the equality principle of democracy (which Aristotle formulated roughly at the same time as Confucius and Mencius formulated their view of the state-society concept). Praise for Confucian values re-emerged, paradoxically with similar, but diametrically opposed arguments in the 1980s/90s with the discourse on Asian values. Confucianism suddenly explained Asia's economic superiority through values such as group spirit, family, hard work, thriftiness and respect for hierarchy. These values were, so the argument by Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and others went, responsible for the economic success of Japan, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and less explicitly China). It was a convenient narrative to bridge the gap between economic progress and socio-political stagnation. The 1997 Asian financial crisis contributed to shelving this debate until the present.

We can see from these paradoxical interpretations of the same "Confucianism", that the argument about Confucian values versus Western democracy is based on ideas of the rise of Asia and the decline of the West and definitions of identity versus modernity rather than on intrinsic cultural or doctrinal features. Japan's modernization which kept its identity intact was very different from the self-destruction of China's modernization in the early 1900s. It also shows – like present-day Korea or Taiwan - that democracy and Western style rule of law are in fact a part of Asian identity. In South Korea and Taiwan democracy and human rights were achieved through genuine people movements opposing 'Confucian' elites.

The debate about Asian values was instrumentalising Confucianism as opposed to Western democracy models. However, the diversity of Asian forms of government was not captured by

⁴ Muehlhahn, Klaus: Zwischen Ablehnung und Akzeptanz – Menschenrechte und Geschichte im modernen China. In: China aktuell 1/2006 pp 7-40.

this simplifying globalisation narrative (democracy in Korea, Taiwan, Japan, authoritarian rule in Singapore).

2. The EU a normative power?

The above section showed that Asia's and China's worldviews are different from Europe's, but that this does not mean an inevitable clash of Western and Asian values, first of all because some countries in Asia do not share the equation of Asian values = authoritarian rule and second because China acts in line with its own history in a centennial modernisation process which has not yet reached a conclusion. What is new in China's modernisation process at the beginning of the 21st century, is that it is now no longer only conceivable in a Western way (as Japan's was in the 20th century), but that it is an interactive process with a changing world driven by globalisation. This two-way street could also be an opportunity for Europe, as Europe's own model of society and benign global governance appeals to those Asians who are concerned about ultra-individualism, missionary zeal and unilateralism as practiced by the USA.

Yet, at present, European norms promotion is in a difficult period. The EU has been quite successful to extend human rights and democracy over virtually the entire European continent through the successive enlargements (in the 1980s formerly fascist countries in the Mediterranean became democratic EU members, in 2004 and 2007 the formerly communist countries joined). The record of democracy and human rights promotion in other parts of the world is more modest, as the EU disposes only of limited instruments and power to pull or push other countries along this path. The EU provides incentives (e.g. increased development aid, special funding programmes such as the EIDHR and trade measures), and can apply sanctions (visa restrictions, reduced development aid and trade). Those are mainly effective in aid dependent countries for example in Africa (Niger, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cameroon, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Zimbabwe all were sanctioned), but are of limited impact in countries such as China or resource-rich countries that are powerful enough to withstand EU pressure.

BOX The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

The European Union believes that democracy and human rights are universal values that should be vigorously promoted around the world. They are integral to effective work on poverty alleviation and conflict prevention and resolution, in addition to being valuable bulwarks against terrorism.

In 2006, the Community established the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). This financial instrument allows the EU to provide support for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide.

The EU believes that international agendas have begun to highlight the important role played by human rights, the rule of law and inclusive democracy when it comes to securing a better future for the developing world. Only when these issues are dealt with can people hope to live in enough peace and security to focus their efforts on making economic improvements.

Development and democratisation processes must be locally owned if they are to play an influential role in society. This means engaging governments and leading stakeholders in decision-making, which can be difficult to achieve if the EU's relations with partner countries is restricted to government channels.

In this context, EIDHR aims to strengthen the role of civil society in the promotion of human rights, political pluralism and democratic participation and representation.

Five distinct objectives have been identified for the period 2007-2010:

- 1) *Enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in countries and regions where they are most at risk;*
- 2) *Strengthening the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic reform, in supporting the peaceful conciliation of group interests and in consolidating political participation and representation;*
- 3) *Supporting actions on human rights and democracy issues in areas covered by EU Guidelines, including on human rights dialogues, on human rights defenders, on the death penalty, on torture, and on children and armed conflict;*
- 4) *Supporting and strengthening the international and regional framework for the protection of human rights, justice, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy;*
- 5) *Building confidence in and enhancing the reliability and transparency of democratic electoral processes, in particular through EU Election Observation Missions⁵*

However, since 1995 the EU has systematically included democratic principles and human rights observance as an essential element in all its formal agreements with other countries (so-called human rights clause), no matter whether they are democratic industrialised countries or developing countries⁶.

The inclusion of an essential elements clause was not intended to signify a negative or punitive approach. It was meant to promote dialogue and positive measures, such as joint support for democracy and human rights, the accession, ratification and implementation of international human rights instruments and the prevention of crises through the establishment of a consistent and long-term relationship. Thus the Cotonou agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States⁷ also foresees in its Art. 96 a dialogue process before sanctions are applied (which explains the different reactions of Australia and the EU after the 2007 coup in Fiji).

For some, the human rights clause does not go far enough, while for others it goes too far. Some view human rights conditionality as legally unacceptable, morally unjustifiable or outside the competence of the EU. Others have questioned its effectiveness. Its existence and use have given rise to considerable debate, both within and outside the EU⁸. But it has the advantage – unlike unilateral sanctions – to be in conformity with international law, mutually agreed and to promote democracy and human rights by consensus. Of course, the development of democracy and human rights in any country depend on domestic factors rather than on external ones. The EU therefore now privileges the use of incentives to help indigenous processes. For example, in the African context, the EU supports the African Peer Review Mechanism which is a mutually agreed instrument voluntarily acceded to by the Member States of the African Union (AU) to monitor AU member countries' performance regarding good governance⁹.

For sceptics the EU-China dialogue on human rights is a case in point. In the absence of concrete criteria for measuring impacts or establishing causal links to China's domestic development, it is difficult to make the case that the dialogue as such has improved the human

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/intro/index.htm

⁶ This was because the Vienna Convention on the Law of the Treaties would not permit the automatic termination of a treaty for human rights violations and thus would make EU sanctions illegal. With the inclusion of human rights as an essential element of the treaty, a breach of this commitment constitutes a legally valid reason to suspend a treaty and apply sanctions.

⁷ <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/fr/lvb/r12101.htm>

⁸ Cf. UK House of Commons Research Paper 04/33: The Human Rights Clause in the EU's External Agreements <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2004/rp04-033.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.aprm-international.org/>

rights situation in China. In fact, in the absence of visible progress there is a certain degree of frustration in the EU, as witnessed by the 2007 EU-China summit statement requesting more substantial cooperation. Currently the negotiations of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with China also include the essential elements clause and there is a discussion in China about the pros and cons of this clause¹⁰.

BOX The EU's structured human rights dialogues with China

In 1994, the EU accepted a proposal from China to engage in a regular dialogue on human rights. For China this was a means to avoid critical motions in the UN Human Rights Commission. Since 1995, with few exceptions, the EU-China human rights dialogue has taken place once every six months, alternatingly in China and in Europe. The formal dialogue has been complemented by EU-China human rights legal seminars bringing together officials, academics and representatives of the NGO community.

The EU-China human rights dialogue has been a useful channel of communication, a platform for the EU to express concern on a number of issues and to seek information about human rights developments in China. The dialogue has been a way to expose Chinese officials to international human rights standards and EU practices. It has allowed the Commission to identify human rights co-operation priorities and for both sides to agree on future projects. On the other hand, the dialogue remains an incremental process which aims to generate long-term improvement. Progress is therefore rather slow. On many issues, the dialogue is not likely to generate immediate change but to contribute to establishing a favourable environment for gradual or experimental improvements. Although the impact of the dialogue is difficult to measure, positive steps have come out of the process, such as China's greater engagement with UN human rights mechanisms (for example invitations to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and to UN Special Rapporteurs, signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, signing and ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). EU partners carried out in 2004 a comprehensive evaluation of the dialogue. The EU Council of Ministers concluded that the dialogue and its related legal seminars remained useful instruments to engage China on human rights and trigger positive change in the long run.

Europe's soft power and ethical dilemma

Europe generally seeks support from others and to a large extent depends on goodwill when it lacks the means to exert pressure. Success is therefore easier in areas, where shared interests exist or where Europe pursues the promotion of global public goods (environment, development¹¹) or fights global "bads" such as climate change or HIV/AIDS. Europe also supports the UN system and tends to ratify most of the international conventions and treaties, but support for its positions are eroding in sensitive areas such as Human Rights¹². At the same time, Europe has to struggle with a dilemma of normative idealism and real interests (those of the EU proper and the Member States of the EU)¹³. Therefore it is easily accused of double standards in fields such as human rights or democracy, notably in its relations with developing and emerging countries. Critics – many of which can be found in the European

¹⁰ Zhang Hua: The problem of the human rights clause and the China-Europe partnership agreement. In: Xiandai Guoji Guanxi n°8 August 2008 pp. 40-47.

¹¹ The EU collectively provides ca. 60% of global official development assistance.

¹² Gowan, Richard, Brantner, Franziska (2008) A Global Force for Human Rights? An Audit of European Power at the UN. ECFR 2008.

¹³ Lisbeth Aggestam: Introduction: Ethical Power Europe? International Affairs 84: 1 (2008) 1–11

Parliament – argue that the EU too easily bows to Chinese pressure for the sake of commercial interests and uses the HR dialogue as a 'fig leaf'.

Given the power shifts in the last few years, Europe has to learn to pursue its normative approach in international relations in a more interactive mode and to live with contradictions in a complex environment.

Europe has to overcome its euro-centric view of the world and stop "preaching" from a self-assigned position of moral superiority. Europe merely is one of many regions in the world that have to shoulder their share of the common responsibility for the global good while pursuing its interests. Europe has to listen to and understand the world better. This would enhance its legitimacy in the eyes of others. In fact, Europe is well equipped in theory, as its own unity in diversity requires permanent efforts to listen and negotiate common solutions catering for a relatively high common denominator. In practice, these permanent coordination efforts make the EU inward looking. This can produce a certain degree of inflexibility and one size fits all approaches shrouded in rhetorical veils. The EU therefore has started to review its internal coordination and its rhetoric. It should concentrate on credible and legitimate action and explain its contradictions to the outside world. The EU also needs to concentrate its energies on a number of priority areas where it is expected to exercise responsibility and to make a difference (e.g. for harmful GHG emissions, environment, fair trade and promotion of sustainable development), negotiate rules (instead of trying to impose them) and be more focused on action than on declarations, notably deliver on its promises and commitments (e.g. Financing for Development).

3. Europe's relations with Africa and Chinese competition: the conditionality trap

Africa seems to have become a battleground between the EU and China, which after all proclaim a strategic partnership. Does China undermine the EU's ethical foreign policy – promoting sustainable development, the Millennium Development Goals and good governance, democracy and human rights - in Africa?

The EU, driven by the European Commission to 'europeanise' development and Africa policies, has refocused on ownership at continental, regional and national levels in Africa and launched an ambitious package to rationalise the EU aid effort. It has backtracked from "conditionality" and now offers political and financial incentives for good governance (Africa-EU strategic partnership 2007¹⁴). This marks a change from both the unconditional support to African dictators in return for strategic benefits during the Cold War and the overly prescriptive approach of the Washington Consensus.

China may have become a factor in accelerating a process of re-orientation of the EU-Africa partnership. China's no-strings-attached business-like approach provides African countries with alternatives to the post-Cold War development model. Since China has increased its engagement on the African continent¹⁵, dealing with development on the continent has become a more complex undertaking for the EU. The EU has realised that the partnership with Africa requires new foundations and more trust: With the 2007 Lisbon summit the old donor-recipient relationship was meant to be transformed into a modern partnership designed to respond to common global challenges. Globalisation, the commodity boom and the tectonic shifts in global politics in the nearly two decades since the end of the Cold War have

¹⁴ <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/>

¹⁵ Ironically the first FOCAC in 2000 passed almost unnoticed – it was in the same year that the EU and ACP countries signed the Cotonou agreement and the AU was born.

profoundly changed the way Africa, China and Europe look at each other. Whether this pattern will be a cooperative one or lead to confrontation is an urgent challenge for policymakers.

China emphasises different international norms than the EU when basing its policy in Africa on the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. In terms of values and norms Pang¹⁶ bemoans the EU's tendency to expect China to take on board its norms and policies instead of treating China as an equal. He points to the positive, rather than the negative, side of this clash of values arguing that it may lead to the evolution of globally owned norms rather than imposed Western ones. Pang goes as far as to describe the role of the EU in China's international socialisation process as that of a teacher. Other Chinese commentators are much harsher in their rejection of Western criticism¹⁷.

China's external development policy is closely linked with its own development path. In view of international differences and mounting discontent in Africa itself, China has started to review its strategies. Competition in Africa takes place in a harsh environment and with companies from other emerging economies. Beijing underestimated the "collateral damage" of unintended interference in social affairs through commercial interaction and lacked contemporary concepts about aid-coordination, ownership and political development such as good governance.

China's fundamental problem is that it has to balance national interest (based on interdependent key domestic and subordinate foreign policy goals) and pressure from international society.

China's African non-conditionality trap

The question of sovereignty and the principle of non-interference will therefore become a dilemma for China as it is engaging more and more in the international field and investing abroad including in countries which are fragile or quasi-states where the concept of sovereignty has only a very limited meaning and may be at the mercy of a coup d'Etat or a heart attack. Hence, China's insistence in principle not to interfere in other countries' domestic affairs works only so far in its interest as these countries do not take decisions which affect vital Chinese interests, such as the security of Chinese nationals (killings or kidnappings in Ethiopia, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Zambia, Nigeria, Sudan) or investments as well as the Taiwan issue. Beyond that point it gets counterproductive, as it creates a credibility trap if China *does* interfere to protect its interests.

A shared agenda?

These issues are the ones sensitive to the diverging views on national sovereignty and international responsibility. However, in many cases divergence on principle between the EU and China does not necessarily mean absence of shared interests. This space of common

¹⁶ Pang, Zhongying (2007) 'Some Approaches to boost China's pivotal role in tackling global challenges', in: *FES Briefing Paper, New Powers for Global Change?*, p.24/25.

¹⁷ Li, Ruogu (2007) 'Zhengqu renshi fazhanzhong guojia de zhaiwu kezhiyu wenti' (Correct understanding of debt sustainability of developing countries), in: *World Economics and Politics*, 4/2007, pp. 63-72

interest will often provide a stepping stone for functional cooperation and an advancement of multilateral solutions, which are better suited to address interdependent issues¹⁸.

The European Commission has therefore proposed to set up a pragmatic trilateral dialogue and cooperation between the EU, Africa and China in order to reconcile some of these tensions in a bottom-up approach¹⁹.

Conclusions

The paper has argued that there is no foregone conclusion that the world is heading towards ideological competition (authoritarianism versus liberal democracy) or that China actively promotes authoritarian counter-models in the world. However, Europe has to carefully but purposefully review its own policy towards China, the developing world and the European domestic discourse on globalization if its liberal and multilateral concept of global governance is to survive in a democratically, socially and internationally accepted form. The partnerships that the EU is forging in this period of transformation may well determine the trajectory of conflictual multipolarity or cooperative multilateralism. Whether we use 'ideology' (and China threat theories) or functional approaches to the global challenges, is therefore a key issue for policymakers in the West and in Asia alike. The conclusion is therefore a question: What is the price for China to pay in exchange of a de-Westernisation of globalisation? What international norms can be made with China?

¹⁸ Wissenbach, Uwe (2007) The EU's effective multilateralism—but with whom? Functional multilateralism and the rise of China, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, International Politikanalyse.

¹⁹ European Commission (2008) The EU, Africa and China: Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels: European Commission, COM(2008)654 final, 17.10.2008