

Diplomatic Relations and Mutual Strategic Perceptions: China and the European Union

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During the last quarter of the 21st century, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the European Community/European Union (EC/EU) have been similar and different, compatible and incompatible players at the same time. Both remain "unfinished" international actors, China because of a lack of functioning state institutions, and the EU because its component members survived as nation states. And whereas the partial opening-up of the vast Chinese market under Deng Xiaoping very much corresponded to structural changes in Western Europe and two European recessions, their respective approaches to world order issues were mutually contradictory in fundamental respects. On the European side, stable democracies had subscribed, as a matter of principle, to the liberal paradigm of non-violent conflict solution and to the universal applicability of human rights. At the same time, the PRC had judged it necessary to strengthen its sovereignty in the interest of a national agenda that bordered on the nationalistic and irredentist, thus keeping its option open, as a matter of principle, to resolve conflicts through force. During the 1980s, Sino-American irritations followed by the gradual demise of the Soviet bloc slowly invalidated the basic strategic framework for EU-China relations. Subsequent attempts at building a new framework have thus far remained unconvincing.

During much of the period under review, the PRC had a choice of dealing either with "Europe" as an abstract amalgam of industrialized West European nation states, or with the EC/EU as the concrete yet fuzzy and at times frustrating technical framework of "Europe." At first sight, due to its own political tradition and world view, China felt closer to "Europe" than it did to EC/EU, and has sometimes actually tried to play the former against the latter. At the same time, however, EC/EU was recognized as the possible nucleus of a future global actor whose "political" approach to problems of international security was being praised and whose future defence co-operation China was trying to come to terms with. At the time of writing, however, Beijing, due to lingering uncertainties as to the future shape of international relations, remains just as confused about the EU as, arguably, the Union itself remains, a state of affairs that explains past contradictions while promising future ones.

If, during the 20-odd years analysed here, these contradictions have not led to serious open tension, then this is so mostly because of geographical distance and the lack of will and means on both sides so far to reap major strategic benefits from their mutual relationship. At the turn of the century, both China and the EU have come under pressure to redefine their respective roles under conditions of accelerated globalization in which geography may have lost some of its relevance as a shaping factor of international relations. Therefore, in attempting to set in periods the recent history of PRC-Europe relations, this paper is interested in the

impact of both internal dynamics and the international environment on the Sino-European relationship. In this attempt, the choice of “watersheds” (1989 and 1997) was mainly determined by the way the EC/EU approached the human rights issue.

1978–88: Restrained Strategic Partners

Prelude: the establishment of official relations. In 1975, when the PRC and the EC established diplomatic relations, both sides had enhanced their respective international standing. Beijing had entered into an anti-Soviet partnership with Washington in 1971/72, and the EC in 1970 had launched European Political Co-operation (EPC) as the point of departure for a future Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The role of the European Parliament (EP) had been strengthened in 1974 with the first direct elections scheduled for 1979. Also in 1974, EC heads of state and government had agreed henceforth to convene as the European Council, a de facto executive. The EC Commission was authorized to collect its own revenues and to advance into new areas of co-operation such as common trade policies.

At the same time, however, the respective futures of the Chinese and European projects could not be taken for granted. The PRC was ruled by an unstable coalition of radicals and conservatives that was soon to break up; in Brussels, further progress towards the establishment of an economic and monetary union (EMU) had been slowed down, and so had political reform. In this sense, by establishing diplomatic relations in September 1975,¹ both sides, rather than making a direct impact on the international balance of powers, acknowledged the other’s future international potential. China hoped that the EC would assume a higher political and even military profile, thus playing a more active role in containing Soviet hegemonism while contributing to the PRC’s own economic and technological modernization. On the European side, balancing considerations were mostly confined to conservative circles, but the launching in 1975 of Prime Minister Zhou Enlai’s “Four Modernizations” project had resuscitated the age-old dream of opening up the greatest consumer market in the world.

And yet, most mutual expectations were to be frustrated to different degrees. Beijing soon understood that in Europe neither political and military union nor the abandonment of West-East détente were on the cards and subsequently started to emphasize the importance of a US military presence in the framework of NATO.² Economic relations were enhanced, but given the ongoing “two lines” struggle in the PRC, perspectives were not immediately promising. Much of this was to change before the end of the decade, and some of it in a rather dramatic sense.

1. The PRC accredited an ambassador with the EC in 1975. The EC Commission opened a mission in Beijing in 1988.

2. Harish Kapur, *Distant Neighbours. China and Europe* (London, New York: Pinter, 1990), pp. 124–25.

By July 1977, Deng Xiaoping had been reinstated as vice-chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by the Third Plenary of the Tenth Central Committee. The following year, the Third Plenary of the 11th Central Committee decreed an end to “large-scale turbulent class struggles of a mass character” and signalled the victory of Deng’s pragmatic line over what remained of the Left. China adopted an active policy of improving relations with all countries outside the Soviet orbit, established full diplomatic relations with the US and tried to commit Japan to a more proactive anti-Soviet line. A trade agreement was signed with the EC on 3 April 1978, and the PRC was granted certain trade preferences in the European market. Washington had earlier encouraged its European partners to sell certain weapons to the PRC which the US itself, due to domestic constraints, was still unable to sell. This initiative inspired the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU)³ to table a draft resolution in May 1978 recommending a careful examination of “the role China can play regarding European security” as well as favourable consideration of “the rising Chinese demands for industrial technology.”⁴ As in the case of many other Assembly recommendations, however, there was no follow-up.

1979–88: the strategic imperative fades. In 1979, the second oil crisis sent Europe into a three-year recession that stimulated the desire for further progress in community building and for the opening-up of overseas markets. In that year, French President Valérie Giscard d’Estaing and German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt devised the European Monetary System (EMS) as a first step towards monetary union. In 1980, the EC demonstrated its ability to develop joint foreign policy positions by issuing its Venice Declaration which recognized the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland. In November 1981, the foreign ministers of Italy and Germany, Genscher and Colombo, jointly proposed further steps towards enhanced political co-operation. Most of their suggestions were adopted by the European Council in its 1983 “Solemn Declaration on the European Union” which was the basis, in turn, for revisions and amendments made to the Treaty of Rome in the 1986 Single European Act. Among other things, this document allowed for qualified majority decisions in certain Council votes and brought the EP closer to EPC. Earlier, the EC Commission had drafted a schedule to launch a

3. Founded in 1954 as a collective security pact by the United Kingdom, France, the Benelux states, Italy and Germany, and succeeding the previous Brussels Pact uniting the former three against a possible resurgence of German militarism, the WEU had come close to oblivion by the 1970s because it lacked military structures of its own. It was revived ten years later, however, after EPC had failed to make a difference during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In 1987, the WEU witnessed some institutional strengthening and was charged with co-ordinating EC-members’ out-of-area activities. Spain and Portugal became members in 1990, Greece joined in 1995.

4. Frederick Bennett, *La Chine et la sécurité européenne (China and European Security)* (Paris: West European Union, 1978), p. 14 as quoted in Kapur, *Distant Neighbours*, p. 144–49.

single internal market by 31 December 1992, a plan that inspired new confidence in the European economy.

At the same time, the PRC had gone through three important policy shifts. As early as 1978, Deng Xiaoping had reaffirmed the primacy of the new economic imperative over all other policies. Four years later, China started hinting at an “independent” stance vis-à-vis both superpowers, a line that was subsequently approved by the 12th CCP Congress in September 1982. In 1985, Deng officially did away with the Maoist thesis of the inevitability of a nuclear world war and became more supportive of disarmament and détente as a matter of principle. In all three respects, Europe as a whole was to be given special consideration. According to Deng himself,

In analysing the international situation, we pay particular attention to Europe, for Europe plays a key role in determining if there will be peace or war. For many years our relations with Eastern Europe were abnormal. Now, basing ourselves on an objective judgement, we are of the opinion that both Western and Eastern Europe are a force for maintaining peace. Both Eastern and Western Europe need to develop, and the more they develop the stronger force for peace they become.⁵

From the mid-1980s onwards, it was Western Europe’s potential role as a new pole in a future multipolar world rather than as a bulwark against “Soviet hegemonism” that attracted Beijing’s attention.⁶ This was not only due to China’s own strategic about turn, but also to a growing realization that European integration would, in the medium-term, fall short of overcoming the nation state. At the same time, however, the PRC leadership seemed to understand that the EU – as different from NATO – would have a major role to play in the gradual political emancipation of Eastern Europe from Moscow.⁷ It was with this expectation in mind

5. *Renmin ribao (People’s Daily)*, 2 April 1980 as quoted in Kapur, *Distant Neighbours*, p. 164.

6. Ding Hong/Zhang Baoxiang, *Opportunity, Policy and Role: On Western Europe’s Role in Present-Day World* (Beijing: China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, 1987), p. 2, as quoted in Kapur, *Distant Neighbours*, p. 171. As early as 1981, Chinese analysts had referred to a multipolar perspective in this framework and had interpreted the European role as characterized by a compromise between the traditional dependence on the US and greater autonomy in the future. Guo Fengmin, “XiOu guojia waijiao zhengcede jiben sixiang (“Basic thinking in the foreign politics of West European countries”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (Journal of International Studies)*, No. 2 (1981), pp. 25–34.

7. The theme of a united Europe appears in official Chinese statements in the second half of the 1980s. Whereas Deng Xiaoping, for example, talking to Dutch Prime Minister Wilfred Martens in April 1985, stressed the importance of a “strong and united Western Europe,” CCP secretary General Hu Yaobang one year later expressed his hope for “Eastern and Western Europe uniting and jointly conducting a policy of independence and self-reliance in opposition to war,” Xinhua News Agency in English, 17 April 1985 as quoted in *Ostinformationen* (Bonn: Federal Press and Information Office), 28 April 1985, p. 24; *Radio Beijing International* in German, 15 April 1986 as quoted in *ibid.*, 16 April 1986, p. 30. Speaking during an official visit to the Netherlands in May 1987, Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang said: “The unification of Europe, its growth and strength, the strengthening of the co-operation between China and Western Europe, and the rapprochement between Eastern and Western Europe will play an important role for the maintenance of global peace.” *Radio Beijing* in Chinese, 11 May 1987, as quoted in *ibid.*, 12 May 1987, pp. 29–30. Two days later, Deng Xiaoping called for the establishment of a “united, strong, and developing Europe,” *China Daily*, 13 May 1987, p. 1.

that Beijing, during the 1980s, tried to strengthen relations with the different institutions of the EC.

At the same time, increased economic and technological co-operation inspired a broadening of relations into other areas. The 1978 EC-China trade agreement and the 1984 trade and co-operation agreement had provided for the creation of a Joint Committee in the framework of which annual meetings were held at the directorate level. Whereas these discussions were mostly confined to technical problems related to the implementation of the two agreements, high-level consultations at the ministerial/commissarial level were launched in 1983 to address a wider range of issues.⁸ Furthermore, biannual meetings were initiated between the political affairs director of the country holding the EC presidency and the Chinese ambassador to the country concerned.

Also in the early 1980s, Beijing started establishing relations with the EP through an exchange of delegations with the PRC National People's Congress (NPC). Obviously, the EP had few powers then and remains the weakest player in the EU system, a fact that cannot have escaped PRC policy-makers. However, the legislature had until then consistently supported the strengthening of Sino-European ties and had urged the Commission and the Council, among other things, to promote China's accession to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).⁹

In sum, Sino-European relations between 1975 and 1989 were driven by political and economic imperatives that could both be considered strategic in the sense that they reflected world order aspirations that overlapped to a certain extent (containing the USSR while preventing the emergence of a unipolar world). Upon closer examination, however, neither side's vital strategic interests were truly global, actual policies reflected tactical or economic adjustments rather than a joint grand design and, considerable increases in contacts notwithstanding, the overall relationship appeared to be high on rhetoric and low on substance. At no point was Beijing able to block intra-European détente, and neither could Brussels expect to replace the US as China's strategic partner in either economic or military terms. One could argue that this was a "time of innocence" during which both sides courted each other without having a clear-cut design for the future. As the decade approached its end, one might have suspected that this happy state of affairs would not last. If neither China nor the EC was prepared for subsequent major changes, this, too, was a proof of their lack of global perspectives.

1989–96: Reluctant Strategic Partners

1989–91: collapse. It was not only Tiananmen that made an impact on relations between the EC and the PRC during the final years of the 1980s.

8. These meetings were normally held on the fringes of the annual UN General Assembly session.

9. Document A2.56/87 (Brussels European Communities, *European Parliament Working Documents*, 18 May 1987), p. 6. As quoted in Kapur, *Distant Neighbours*, p. 174.

In Eastern Europe communism had crumbled, in the Soviet Union communism was shaky, the Berlin Wall had come down, and a “third wave of democratization” had begun to sweep the globe.¹⁰ There was uncertainty in Europe as to American willingness to remain engaged on the continent, and the future of NATO was being questioned. The unification of Germany cast doubt on the principle of territorial integrity enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Charter, and the subsequent violent break-up of Yugoslavia seemed to confirm such doubt. At the same time, Washington was pressing for greater European support in military operations beyond the alliance’s contractual reach. In early 1991, the allied intervention in the Gulf came as a spectacular example of what “out-of-area” might mean in the future.

In China, Deng’s reforms had resulted in high inflation and rampant official corruption at a time when students and workers were inspired by the dramatic changes that had occurred in Eastern Europe. The CCP leadership realized that accommodating these aspirations would cost it its power and decided to go neither the Polish nor the Romanian way.

As a matter of principle, these changes made the PRC more defensive and Europe more proactive, but geographical distance made it possible for both sides to play down resulting contradictions. At the same time, however, the EC took a further integrational step that was to raise its international profile in both moral and material terms. In June 1990 negotiations were launched in Dublin on the establishment of European Monetary Union (EMU) and a political union. CFSP also featured on the agenda of the December 1991 Intergovernmental Conference on EMU and EPC in Rome, and proposals were made for the incorporation of EPC into the EC. “However, prevailing divisions between Atlanticists and Europeanists and between intergovernmentalists and federalists, as well as the pressing political problems of the day, resulted in the postponement of CFSP until the 1991 Maastricht summit.”¹¹

Arguably, the 4 June 1989 massacre on and around Tiananmen Square and related issues such as Tibet haunt Sino-European relations to this day. From that day onwards, the China policies of the EC/EU and its member states have been under strong internal and external scrutiny. A divide became visible between the lines adopted by Brussels on the one hand and member states on the other, and the ever-present gap between the rhetoric and policies of both China and Europe further deepened. At the time, the European side, while trying to respond to public opinion, showed an early interest not to let the incident derail relations with Beijing over the longer term. In late May 1989, the EP adopted a

10. According to Huntington, the “Third Wave” had started on the Iberian peninsula as early as 1974. Previous “waves” refer to the period between 1945 and the mid-1960s and to the time of the American and French revolutions, respectively. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman OK, London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

11. Kjell A. Eliassen, “Introduction: the new European foreign and security agenda,” in Kjell A. Eliassen (ed.), *Foreign and Security Policy in the European Union* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 1998), p. 5.

resolution in which the Chinese government was urged to enter into a dialogue with students in response to the ongoing demonstrations.¹² On 5 June, the EC Commission published a statement in which it deplored “the brutal repression of the people of Beijing” as a consequence of which “the co-operation between China and the Community can only suffer ... and would risk being permanently affected if the policy of the Chinese Government were to start on a course which would put at risk the policy of openness and reform followed until now.”¹³ The PRC was asked to adopt measures to guarantee the security of the citizens of EC-member states in China.¹⁴

The following day, the Twelve condemned the violent suppression of China’s democracy movement and suspended all high-level contacts with the PRC. The Chinese leadership was urged to stop using force against unarmed civilians and to resolve the crisis through dialogue.¹⁵

On 7 June, the Twelve decided to suspend economic and cultural relations with China. Because of German objections, however, the decision was translated into non-binding unilateral commitments.¹⁶

On 27 June, the Council called on China to refrain from further executions, announced its intention to initiate a human rights debate in international institutions, and suspended arms exports to the PRC. Cultural, scientific and technological co-operation projects were to be reduced, and applications for the extension of visas by Chinese students to be treated favourably.¹⁷

On 20 July, the ambassadors to Beijing of Ireland, France and Spain jointly called on the PRC government to admit independent observers to trials of dissidents. The Chinese side turned the request down after having denounced it as an interference in its internal affairs.¹⁸ On 2 August, the EC granted an emergency loan worth US\$70 million for humanitarian flood relief in Sichuan Province.¹⁹ On 30 September, EC ambassadors in Beijing attended a reception on the occasion of the PRC’s 40th anniversary but left before the subsequent cultural presentation.²⁰

On 4 July, EC foreign ministers announced their intention to re-establish political contacts with China.²¹ On 28 September, the foreign ministers of Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg met their Chinese colleague Qian

12. Werner Weidenfeld and Wolfgang Wessels (eds.), *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1989/90 (Yearbook of European Integration 1989/90)* (Bonn: Institut für Europäische Politik, Europa Union Verlag, 1990), p. 459.

13. *The Guardian*, 6 June 1998, as quoted in Anja Feege, *Internationale Reaktionen auf den 4. Juni 1989 in der VR China, Zwischen Solidarisierung, Schweigen und Sanktionen (International Responses to June 4 1989 in the PRC, Between Solidarity, Silence, and Sanctions)* (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, 1992), p. 65.

14. *Le Monde*, 7 June 1989, as quoted in *ibid.* p. 66.

15. *European Political Cooperation Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Florence: European University Institute, 1990), p. 187.

16. *Le Monde*, 8 June 1989, as quoted in Feege, *Internationale Reaktionen*, p. 66.

17. *European Political Cooperation Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 195–96.

18. Feege, *Internationale Reaktionen*, p. 66.

19. *Ibid.* p. 129.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

Qichen on the fringe of the UN General Assembly. According to the official Chinese news agency Xinhua,

Italian Foreign Minister de Michelis said that under the present complex international situation, to strengthen the ties between the EC and China is of great importance to world peace and stability.²²

Italy subsequently began to lobby other member states to relax sanctions.²³

Qian also met his British counterpart, who had been given permission to continue his contacts with PRC representatives because of pending negotiations over the future of Hong Kong.²⁴ In September 1990, it was alleged in the EP that the UK had violated the embargo by issuing permits to GEC Marconi to sell radar equipment for fighter planes.²⁵

From now on, not to be outdone by the Americans and Japanese, the Europeans increased their efforts at normalization. Washington had never shut down its more discrete channels of high-level consultations and was lobbying Beijing over sanctions against Iraq in the UN Security Council. In May 1990, President Bush had extended most-favoured nation treatment to the PRC by another year. During the mid-July G7 summit in Houston, Japan had been given permission to lift its sanctions for “reasons of geography.” The summit reopened the World Bank’s credit line for PRC projects, including non-humanitarian ones.

On 22 October 1990, EC foreign ministers decided gradually to resume economic co-operation and to re-establish high-level contacts.²⁶ French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas explained the decision with “China’s support of the Western countries’ stand on the Iraqi incident.”²⁷ A representative of the PRC government commented:

Now (China) has to wait and see ... the European Community includes many countries which may take different actions.²⁸

EC foreign ministers also decided to dispatch their Spanish colleague Fernandez-Ordoñez to Beijing to discuss a gradual normalization of relations. Before his departure on 22 November, Fernandez-Ordoñez in an interview with Xinhua explained

that it is necessary for Spain to develop relations with China, which is a big country and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council ... He indicated the belief that other Western European countries will take actions to improve their ties with China in the next several months.²⁹

22. Xinhua, 30 September 1989, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB)*, FE/0576/C/1–11 of 2 October 1989.

23. Feege, *Internationale Reaktionen*, p. 130.

24. Portugal had been granted the same privilege. *Ibid.* p. 269.

25. *European Political Cooperation Bulletin*, Vol. 6 (Florence: European University Institute, 1990), p. 322.

26. *Ibid.* p. 454.

27. Feege, *Internationale Reaktionen*, p. 130.

28. Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Shen Jueren in an interview with *The Bangkok Post* as quoted in *ibid.*

29. Quoted in *ibid.* p. 132.

The emissary had “friendly and serious” talks with Qian Qichen, Foreign Trade Minister Zheng Tuobin and Prime Minister Li Peng, in which human rights seem to have played a minor part.³⁰ Apart from an exchange of information on each side’s international activities, Fernandez-Ordoñez proposed to create a joint commission on trade, and Chinese President Yang Shangkun praised Spain for its “consistent friendly policies” vis-à-vis Beijing and its efforts to improve China-EC relations.³¹

In February and March 1991, Qian Qichen visited Portugal, Spain and Greece. Visits to Luxembourg (which then held the EC Presidency) and Bonn did not materialize because of the latter’s refusal to rank the visit as official. In April, PRC Deputy Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visited the EC Commission. Zhu emphasized Beijing’s continued commitment to economic reform and opening-up.³² At that time, the Commission was debating new guidelines to make economic assistance offered to third parties contingent on political criteria such as the human rights situation.

1992–1996: human rights and the rush for the Chinese market. Signed on 7 February 1992, the Treaty of Maastricht laid the groundwork for CFSP and a future common defence policy. It provided the new political union with three different “pillars” (Economic Community/EMU, CFSP, and co-operation in legal and home affairs), each under the direction of a different institution and each with particular decision-making processes. The European Council was to decide what areas should become areas of joint action and define matters on which decisions were to be taken by a qualified majority.³³ The Commission was accorded a right of initiative on CFSP.³⁴ The WEU was requested “to elaborate and implement decisions and actions which have defence implications.”³⁵ The development of such common defence policies would take place within NATO with respective members being offered dual membership.³⁶

As noted by Arnhild and David Spence,

The significance of the pillar structure for CFSP was that policy making was to be largely shielded from the institutional mechanisms and traditions of the European Community (first pillar). This meant exclusion of involvement of the European Parliament, the European Court of Justice and, in particular, the increasingly transparent decision-making processes of the EC with their evolution in most EC policy areas to qualified majority voting and the indispensable involvement of the

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.* p. 131.

32. Werner Weidenfeld and Wolfgang Wessels (eds.), *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1991/92* (Bonn, 1992), p. 456.

33. Treaty on European Union, Title V, Article J.3.1–2 (Maastricht, 7 February 1992, as quoted in: <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/mt/top.html>). Article 228 provides for economic sanctions to be imposed by a qualified majority in the Council of Ministers upon a proposal from the Commission. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.* Article J.8.3.

35. *Ibid.* Article J.4.1

36. Marit Sjøvaag, “The Single European Act,” in Eliassen (ed.), *Foreign and Security Policy*, pp. 22–42 (32). Denmark and Ireland, which did not wish to join the WEU as full members, were granted observer status.

European Commission. With CFSP defined as a separate pillar of the Union, co-operation was to operate on intergovernmental lines ... The paradox was that there was a fundamental ambiguity; a single institutional framework was an objective countermanded by the pillar structure in theory and, as later became clear, by policy making in practice.³⁷

The authors point out, for example, that the external representation of the EU was the shared responsibility of the Presidency and the Commission, the latter being in charge of areas falling within the competence of the EC (i.e. mainly trade policy), and the Presidency representing the Union in CFSP (i.e. supposedly “high policy”).³⁸ At the same time, it seemed highly unlikely that a majority vote would ever be taken. “If CFSP has proved a disappointment to those who hoped the European Union would now assert its identity on the international scene, one conclusion might sensibly be that one cannot simply decree political will by creating new procedures.”³⁹

This fact was dramatically highlighted by the EU’s initial failure to agree on joint action in the former Yugoslavia. Starting with military conflict in Slovenia in 1991 and ending, for the time being, with the Dayton agreements of 14 December 1995, the history of the European intervention in the Balkans was marked by a lack of common purpose and common capabilities,⁴⁰ a fact that did not escape the attention of Beijing. If developments such as German unification, with its potential risks for European unity, had initially been viewed with scepticism,⁴¹ the PRC apparently changed its mind by 1993 and began to view the EC’s more important components as more promising partners on the road towards multipolarity than Maastricht Europe itself. Germany was to become the first test case,⁴² with France taking over in the second half of the decade.

In this context, and as subsequently developed, the Chinese argument ran as follows: Maastricht was mainly a German initiative by which the FRG had replaced France in the “driver’s seat” of European integration, thus changing the EU’s internal balance of powers. The introduction of a common currency would divide the Union into two separate camps, and its widening would further contribute to a “Europe at two different speeds.”

37. Arnhold and David Spence, “The common foreign and security policy from Maastricht to Amsterdam,” in Eliassen (ed), *Foreign and Security Policy*, pp. 43–58 (45).

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.* p. 51.

40. Reinhard Mutz, “Der verschleppte Frieden. Europas Versagen auf den Balkan” (“The obstructed peace. Europe’s failure in the Balkans”), *Friedensgutachten 1996* (Münster: Hessische Stiftung Friedensund Konfliktforschung/LiT-Verlag, 1996), pp. 105–116.

41. The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 had caught Beijing as much by surprise as the rest of the world. Official reports vacillated between echoing widespread concern about German reunification and veiled criticism of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact for “concocting schemes” to prevent German reunification. Kay Möller, “Germany and China: A continental temptation,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 147 (September 1996), pp. 706–725 (p. 711).

42. By 1993, a Beijing foreign policy think-tank had identified Germany as the dominant power in Europe and thus a “big power sharing world leadership with the United States.” Su Huimin, “‘Ouzhoude Deguo’ haishi ‘Deguode Ouzhou’” (“‘European Germany’ or ‘German Europe’”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu (International Studies)*, Beijing, No. 1 (1993), pp. 20–22.

At the same time, as proved by subsequent elections in France and Germany, the citizens of Europe would only adopt the new political project if the common currency contributed to economic growth rather than endangering it, something that could not be confidently assumed.⁴³

As far as enlargement was concerned, Beijing applied the now familiar multipolarity yardstick. Accession to the EU by East European countries was welcome, accession to NATO was not. In this context, the Sino-Russian “strategic partnership for the 21st century” proclaimed by Jiang Zemin and Boris Yeltsin in April 1996 did play a role, but obviously not the only one. The PRC was sensible enough at this stage not to address possible contradictions between a defensive Russian great power and an expanding potential European great power.

Adopted and signed in 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam tried to remedy some of these shortcomings by proposing that joint actions should “address specific situations where an operational role by the Union is deemed to be required” and that common strategies would “be implemented by the Union in areas where the member states have important interests in common.” Qualified majority voting was introduced for adopting such common positions and joint actions as might result from common strategies, but the principle was immediately weakened by the introduction of “constructive abstention” and provisions to veto an action.⁴⁴ It was at the operational level that Amsterdam brought some real progress. The Presidency of the Council, assisted by the Secretary-General of the Council as High Representative for CFSP, assumed responsibility, in association with the Commission, for the implementation of common measures and external representation.

The European urge to restore relations with China in the early 1990s had more to do with a new round of recession, driven, among other things, by high interest rates as a result of German unification, than with concrete plans to play a global role after the “end of history.” In the PRC, spectacular economic growth had resumed after a phase of austerity,⁴⁵ relations with Washington were on the mend, and there were signals that Beijing might be willing to play a constructive role on both the regional and global stages. On the European side, human rights and the conditioning of co-operation through human rights were promoted to the CFSP level, thus actually freeing bilateral relations between individual member states and China from the more irritating aspects.⁴⁶ By 1995, Beijing had come to view the EU as an experiment more or less

43. Qian Nengxin, “Ouzhou lianhe: chengjiu he wei’ji” (“European integration: achievements and crisis”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 1 (1998), pp. 17–20.

44. Franco Algieri, “The European Asia policy,” *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1999), pp. 81–99 (94).

45. During this time, Western Europe became the PRC’s most important source for technologies, industrial plants and government loans.

46. Stefan Friedrich, “Europa und China in den neunziger Jahren. Verlust der neugewonnenen politischen Bedeutung der EU?” (“Europe and China in the 1990s: has the EU lost its recently acquired political importance?”), *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, No. B27 (26 June 1998), pp. 36–46 (39).

depending on German compliance, the success of which therefore could not be guaranteed.⁴⁷ It was no coincidence that Jiang Zemin's "Four Principles for the Development of the Relationship between China and Western Europe" of 12 September 1994 had been spelled out in Paris instead of Brussels and had avoided any reference to specific policies.⁴⁸ Subsequent theoretical attempts at defining Europe's place in a changing world acknowledged US-dominated unipolarity as the overall framework while reducing the EU's strategic role to economic competition with the US.⁴⁹ Furthermore, whereas the PRC's own economic interest consisted in having good relations with individual member countries, economic relations with Brussels were increasingly fraught with disputes over quotas, anti-dumping measures etc. A similar situation emerged in the field of human rights.

Since 1990, the EU had sponsored resolutions critical of the PRC in the UN's Geneva Human Rights Commission. The only year Europeans and Americans were able to muster a majority for having the draft debated was 1995, and it was only because of a change of mind of the Russian delegation that Beijing escaped condemnation at that time⁵⁰ (cf. the article by Philip Baker in this issue).

The PRC was clearly impressed and responded with a combination of concessions in form and pressures in substance. In the spring of 1992, both Prime Minister Li Peng and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen visited Western Europe, and Qian's itinerary included the EC Commission in Brussels. During his stay in Bonn, he addressed the German Society for Foreign Affairs and summarized communalities between Europe and China as follows: both support the transition from a bipolar to a multipolar system of international relations; both are promoting peace and stability and have been trying to solve international problems through consultations rather than use of force; both acknowledge the UN's leading role in conflict resolution; the two sides are highly complementary in economic terms. However, to maximize benefits from this promising relationship, the "principle of non-interference" would have to be respected.⁵¹

Beijing had attentively observed fissures in Western solidarity and further encouraged them through economic diplomacy. When the politburo's standing committee decided in September 1993 not to make human rights concessions vis-à-vis Washington, this was explained in

47. Comment by Qiu Yuanlun, Director of the Institute of West European Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, at a symposium on international problems. *Beijing Rundschau*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (1995), pp. 11–12.

48. The four principles were: (1) development of relations with a view to the 21st century, (2) mutual respect, search for common ground, downplaying of differences, (3) mutual benefit, and (4) resolution of all international problems through consultation and co-operation. *Beijing Rundschau*, Vol. 31, No. 38 (1994), p. 22.

49. Xue Mouhong, Deputy President of the Society for Asian and African Studies, *Beijing Rundschau*, Vol. 32, No. 39 (1995), pp. 17–22.

50. Friedrich, "Europa und China in den neunziger Jahren," p. 39.

51. Bulletin of the Embassy of the PRC in Bonn, 12 March 1992.

terms of “serious internal contradictions in the West, which prevent the US from making their relations with China completely acute.”⁵²

In early 1995, Li Peng wrote letters to several EU colleagues urging them to drop their support for the joint resolution “in recognition of the favourable state of economic relations.”⁵³ The previous year, Beijing and Brussels had upgraded their political dialogue,⁵⁴ and the PRC had signalled its interest in having a special regular dialogue on human rights which the European side intended to be “constructive,” i.e. related to technical assistance.⁵⁵ It was no coincidence that the first meeting in this framework was scheduled for February 1995, just a few weeks before the annual session of the UN Human Rights Commission, but if Beijing had expected to be able to influence the EU’s voting behaviour, this expectation – for the time being – turned out to be mistaken. On the contrary, in December 1995, the Fifteen expressed their concern about the gaoling without due process of long-standing Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng.⁵⁶

In October 1995, the EU Commission followed an earlier German example and published “A Long-Term Policy for Relations between China and Europe.”⁵⁷ This was basically an attempt to reconcile the abstract human rights imperative with real economic interests on the ground. In the document, the European interest was defined as relating to the global and regional engagement of China and encouragement of domestic reform as well as the need to be present “on the world’s most dynamic market.”⁵⁸ Borrowing the term “constructive engagement” which was then being used by the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN) for describing its rather uneasy relationship with the Burmese junta, the EU expressed its hope to see China fully participate in the international community, thereby opening itself to “a freer flow of ideas and co-operation” and refrain from using its increasing military weight. Multilateral and bilateral forums on nuclear proliferation in Korea and the Spratlys territorial dispute were cited as appropriate venues for Europe “to promote a responsible and constructive Chinese role in the region.” At the global level, disarmament and arms control issues were mentioned.

On the human rights front, “effectiveness” came across as the key word. To achieve effectiveness, the EU proposed to act at three different

52. *Tangtai* (Hong Kong), 15 September 1993, p. 3 as quoted in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, No. 178 (1993), p. 10.

53. “Bonn muß nicht mit Vergeltung Rechnen” (“Bonn need not fear retributions”), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 March 1995, p. 11.

54. Existing dialogues between the PRC and the European “troika” were upgraded to foreign ministers-level, and there was an agreement on ad hoc meetings, most of which were subsequently held on the fringe of the annual UN General Assembly.

55. In December 1997, the EU and China agreed on a human rights co-operation project including the training of Chinese lawyers, judges and prosecutors in European legal systems as well as support for village elections and the fight against poverty in Yunnan province. “China lobt Zurückhaltung der EU” (“China praises EU restraint”), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 February 1998, p. 9.

56. Werner Weidenfeld and Wolfgang Wessels (eds.), *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1995/96* (Bonn, 1996), p. 477.

57. *A Long-Term Policy for Relations between China and Europe*, Bulletin Quotidien Europe, No. 1954/1955 (12 October 1995).

58. *Ibid.* p. 2.

levels: by supporting efforts from within China “to open up and liberalize all areas of Chinese life,” by “systematically and regularly” raising human rights issues in bilateral dialogue, and by engaging the international community in frameworks such as the UN. Remaining obstacles were listed. The autonomy promised to Hong Kong and Macau was mentioned as an area of special concern.⁵⁹

On economic relations, reform of China’s state-owned industry, creation of a social security system and establishment of a legal framework were marked “key challenges for the future.” The EU offered to share its experience through various training programmes. Beijing’s membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) was supported in principle, and the G7 was called upon to establish a suitable channel of communication. The trade deficit was mentioned as was the disappointing share in direct European investments.⁶⁰

The Chinese side was quick to applaud this recognition of its international importance while passing over the details.⁶¹ After all, 1995–96 represented a new low in US-PRC relations, a situation European business was tempted to exploit and Beijing appeared willing to let be exploited. From the Chinese point of view, the remaining obstacle to improving this partnership consisted in the EU’s unchanged position in the Geneva Commission. To bring this point across, the PRC suspended its human rights dialogue with the EU right after the May 1996 session.

1997–2001: A “Strategic Partnership” High on Rhetoric

In late 1997, the PRC and its leadership looked sufficiently stable to inspire renewed international confidence in China’s survival as a Leninist state and rise to great power status. The “strategic partnership” with Moscow had been translated into military agreements and common positions on world order. The takeover of Hong Kong had been uneventful. Jiang Zemin had consolidated his position as “primus inter pares” at a successful 15th Party Congress. Even the subsequent East Asian crisis at first glance made China appear as a rock of reliability in stormy waters. And yet, there were underlying currents to these and other events that would modify the rosy picture in due time, and a few of these currents had a European angle.

On 1 January 1999, the euro became the official currency of eleven EU member states and a European Central Bank was opened in Frankfurt, Germany. Like other countries, the PRC signalled an interest in converting parts of its foreign exchange reserves into euros.⁶² However, the new

59. *Ibid.* p. 4.

60. *Ibid.* pp. 6–10.

61. Xing Zhigang, “Fortschritte der Beziehungen zwischen der EG und China” (“Progress in the EC-China relationship”), *Beijing Rundschau*, Vol. 32, No. 15 (15 August 1995), pp. 24–25.

62. According to official Chinese sources, 40% of the PRC’s foreign exchange reserves could be exchanged for euros in the medium-term, provided that the new currency would gain the same worldwide trust as the US dollar. Quoted from *China Aktuell* (Hamburg: Institute für Asienkunde), Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 1999), p. 6.

currency's subsequent decline soon appeared to rule out any major movement in that direction over the medium-term. Like other potential buyers, Beijing was keeping its bets.⁶³

In December 1999, the Helsinki summit decided to offer EU membership to associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as to Cyprus and Turkey. Altogether, there were 13 candidates for membership, and negotiations were under way with 12 of them by early 2000, but as the Amsterdam summit had failed to agree on respective institutional reforms, progress was unlikely to be quick for countries other than Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus (Chinese observers realistically expected the entire process to require ten to 20 years before completion⁶⁴).

In February 2001, the Nice summit and treaty sent mixed signals to the citizens of the EU. On the one hand, it tried to lay the missing institutional foundations for enlargement by strengthening the voting power of larger members and by granting small "core groups" of members the privilege of moving faster on integration. On the other hand, the veto was maintained for substantial issue areas. And whereas it became increasingly clear that any further progress would require a constitutional debate, little enthusiasm was discernible among members to enter such a debate.⁶⁵

During the second half of the decade, the Council took a renewed interest in human rights in the PRC, albeit along rather different lines than had previously been the case. As early as 1996, Paris had signalled its displeasure with the annual procedure at Geneva.⁶⁶ The following year, France withdrew its support for the annual resolution and Germany, Italy, Spain and Greece followed suit (cf. the article by Philip Baker in this issue). The following reasons were offered: (1) since 1990, the joint resolution had never been passed, (2) China had declared its readiness to sign the UN covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, and (3) the cause of human rights would be better served by dialogue.⁶⁷ It was not mentioned that President Jacques Chirac the previous year had instructed his government to fight unemployment with more China trade and to deny the US export leadership in the Chinese market.⁶⁸ Chirac himself

63. Chinese experts expect the EU and US to "compete and co-operate" over financial matters in the foreseeable future and the euro to contribute to multipolarity only in the long run. See e.g. Shen Guoliang, "Implications of the advent of the euro for Europe-US relations," *International Strategic Studies* (China Institute for International Strategic Studies), No. 2 (1999), pp. 33–36.

64. See e.g. Luo Songtao, "Tongyi Ouzhoude da zhanlüe – Oumeng dong kuo lun" ("Grand strategy for unifying Europe – the EU's eastwards expansion"), *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (*International Studies*), No. 4 (2000), pp. 51–53.

65. "Der Vertrag von Nizza und der Zeitgeist" ("The Treaty of Nice and the Zeitgeist"), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 24 February 2001, p. 9; "Europa braucht einen Montesquieu" ("Europe needs a Montesquieu"), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 February 2001, p. 9.

66. Cf. the interview with President Jacques Chirac in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 22 May 1997, pp. 24–26.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Kay Möller, "The West and China: crusaders and cynics," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (March 1998), pp. 351–68 (360).

visited Beijing in May 1997 to launch a “long-term comprehensive partnership” and to preside over the signing of contracts for the sale of passenger aircraft to China. Both the British government and EU trade commissioner Leon Brittan criticized the abandonment of the previous consensus for weakening the Union’s internal cohesion and external political clout.⁶⁹ The draft prepared by the Dutch presidency was subsequently presented by Denmark and supported, among others, by the US, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Norway. As a consequence, Denmark and the Netherlands experienced diplomatic and economic problems in the PRC.⁷⁰ The EU-China human rights dialogue was resumed in November 1997 and was now characterized by the European side as forming part of a “deep political dialogue.” The following year, and recommendations by the EP notwithstanding, the Council agreed that no joint draft resolution would be submitted and that no individual member would submit a draft of its own. Instead, the Presidency would refer to the human rights situation in China in the EU opening statement in Geneva.⁷¹ This policy has since been maintained.

1997–98 witnessed the short-lived height of a Sino-American honeymoon that produced the proclamation of a future “constructive partnership.” On 2 April 1998 the first EU-PRC summit took place in the context of the second Asia-Europe-Meeting (ASEM) in London. One week earlier, the EU Commission had presented a new strategy paper entitled “Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China.”⁷² This time, hardly any doubts remained as to the PRC’s future global role, and the human rights problem was put into perspective. The rationale given for abandoning the original “long-term strategy” after less than 30 months consisted in (1) China’s endorsement of market reform and global integration during the CCP’s 15th Congress, (2) Beijing’s more responsible foreign policies as demonstrated in Cambodia, Korea and Hong Kong,⁷³ (3)

69. Claudie Gardet, “Chine-Union européenne: vers un ‘partenariat global’?” (“China-EU: towards a ‘global partnership’?”), *Le courrier des pays de l’Est*, No. 435 (December 1998), pp. 3–17 (12). This attitude somewhat contrasted with Brittan’s 1995 call to refrain from a strong condemnation, *China Aktuell*, Vol. 24, No. 7 (July 1995), p. 551, no source given.

70. During a subsequent visit to Beijing, Leon Brittan warned the Chinese government not to launch retaliatory measures against Denmark or the Netherlands (13–16 October 1997).

71. Gardet, “Chine-Union européenne,” p. 13. This was further facilitated by the PRC’s signing, in December 1997, of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the apparently smooth return of Hong Kong on 1 July 1997, and Beijing’s willingness to receive both the UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights and a EU delegation planning to visit Tibet. In 1998, China agreed to the creation of a joint EU/PRC experts group to discuss details of the signing and ratification of both human rights covenants. *Europe* (Brussels, Agence-Europe), 18 March 1998, p. 4.

72. *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* (Brussels: EU Commission, 25 March 1998, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/china/com_98/index.htm).

73. Prior to Beijing’s takeover of Hong Kong, the Fifteen had re-emphasized their interest in the preservation of democracy in the territory and the holding of free and fair elections to a new Hong Kong Legislative Council at the earliest possible date. *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1997/98* (Bonn, 1998), p. 495. After the handover, Commission and Parliament agreed that the transition had been smooth. However, the EP listed setbacks for the democratic process, freedom of expression, and the rule of law in the territory. *Europe*, 10 October 1998, p. 10.

pressures reflecting on China in the context of the East Asian crisis, and (4) changes in the EU “that will lead China to adjust its own strategic vision of the European continent.”⁷⁴

Two months earlier, the Chinese side had encouraged the EU’s new advances by emphasizing “extensive common interests in maintaining world peace and stability, and improving common economic development” (sic).⁷⁵

Whereas the listed areas of co-operation (global, regional, bilateral) were not very different from the 1995 paper, the suggested spectrum was wider (e.g. by proposing dialogue with China on Burma, the Indo-Chinese and Central Asian states), and recommendations were more detailed in areas such as WTO accession where general declarations were no longer considered sufficient.⁷⁶ On human rights, not only did the authors go out of their way to assert improvements “over the last 20 years,” they almost appeared to adopt PRC arguments when establishing a close linkage between the observation of human rights on the one hand, “economic prosperity, as well as the long-term social and political stability of any country” on the other.⁷⁷ The merits of dialogue were emphasized, and so was the training of lawyers and judges and “China’s agreement in principle on a co-operation programme designed to strengthen the rule of law and promote civil, political, economic and social rights.”⁷⁸ On economics, the paper was much more proactive (e.g. in promoting European investment and the euro) and upbeat than its predecessor had been.

To bring these objectives closer to realization, the Commission called for annual summits, more ministerial-level meetings, and meetings between political directors.⁷⁹ The London summit was attended by Prime Minister Tony Blair as president of the Council, President of the Commission Jacques Santer, and Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji. European insistence on “visible progress” in the human rights dialogue apart, the summary of conclusions read like a collection of common-places.⁸⁰ The second summit took place in Beijing between 29 October and 3 November 1998 and focused on economic issues. The human rights problem was addressed by Santer in a speech delivered at a civil servants’ training institute.

The third summit (Beijing, 23 October 2000) continued an earlier discussion on taking joint action against trafficking in human beings and illegal immigration, a proposal that had been adopted in principle by Zhu Rongji when visiting Brussels in July. There was no parallel move on

74. *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China*.

75. *Xinhua* in English, 19 February 1998, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/3157/G/6 of 21 February 1998.

76. In May 2000, the EU and China signed a bilateral agreement paving the way for Beijing’s WTO accession.

77. *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China*.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*

80. The only concrete outcome was an EU pledge to assist the PRC in “adapting” its financial sector. *Europe*, 3 April 1998, p. 4.

organized crime, the drugs trade and money-laundering, and Commission President Romano Prodi called for a “more results-oriented” human rights dialogue.⁸¹

Since the 1980s, the EP had taken a new interest in Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong and Macau, and the human rights situation in China. When the PRC tried to intimidate Taiwanese voters during the March 1996 presidential elections by staging military manoeuvres and missile tests in waters surrounding the island, the Parliament protested and expressed its support for “the people of Taiwan.”⁸² In October, Wei Jingsheng was awarded the EP’s Sacharev Prize. The following year, MEPs demanded a peaceful solution of the Taiwan issue, maintenance of the arms embargo vis-à-vis Beijing,⁸³ pluralistic elections in Hong Kong, preservation of Macau’s legislature, negotiations between China and the Dalai Lama, a “better representation (of Taiwan) within international organizations in the fields of human and labour rights, economic affairs, the environment, and development co-operation” as well as the opening of an EU information office in Taipei.⁸⁴ Any new co-operation agreement with the PRC should contain the same human rights clause as similar EU agreements with third countries.⁸⁵ The foreign affairs committee of the PRC’s National People’s Congress condemned the resolution as a “brutal interference” that had “poisoned the atmosphere of Sino-Europe relations,”⁸⁶ and the Parliament’s 1999 comment sounded much more cautious. On Taiwan, for example, members expressed their hope “for a development that makes it possible for Taiwan to keep its government, its armed forces, and its political system while nevertheless participating without limitations in the fate (sic) of the Chinese nation.”⁸⁷ In April 2000, parliamentarians welcomed the result of Taiwan’s presidential elections while calling on both sides to refrain from “provocative acts” and resume their dialogue.⁸⁸

In reality, Beijing paid little attention to what EU institutions had to say. Instead, the PRC took an active interest in the forces suspected to be at work behind these institutions. In 1999, for example, Chinese scholars

81. *Europe*, 23 October 2000, p. 5. Earlier, the EU Commission had suggested co-operation on drugs etc. *Ibid.*, 9 September 2000, p. 9. As far as illegal immigration was concerned, Beijing apparently remained opposed to the European demand to take its emigrants back. “Peking kündigt Ratifizierung von UN-Sozialpakt an” (“Peking announces ratification of UN Social Pact”), *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 October 2000, p. 2.

82. European Parliament Resolution, 14 March 1996 (<http://www3.europarl.eu.int/>). This somewhat contrasted with the Fifteen’s parallel appeal to the PRC to abstain from the use of force combined with a call on both sides to resume their bilateral contacts. *Jahrbuch der Europäischen Integration 1996/97* (Bonn, 1997), p. 462.

83. In the latter half of the 1990s, EU governments held inconclusive consultations on the eventual termination of the arms embargo.

84. European Parliament Resolution, 12 June 1997 (<http://www3.europarl.eu.int/>).

85. *Europe*, 14 June 1997, pp. 4–5.

86. Xinhua in Chinese, 13 June 1997 as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/2946/G/1 of 16 June 1997.

87. *Europe*, 12 February 1999 (my translation).

88. European Parliament, tentative protocol of the 13 April 2000 session (<http://www3.europarl.eu.int/>).

noted the European “third way debate” as a possible unifying element,⁸⁹ while continuing to view European unification in realist terms, i.e. as mainly driven by a German-French “axis” recently complemented by closer British-French relations to form a power triangle.⁹⁰

On security issues, Beijing preferred dealing with “Europe” rather than the EU, even though the latter’s initial “political approach” to crises in the former Yugoslavia had earned it some praise.⁹¹ When political turned into military, however, this was viewed as obstructing the supposedly emerging multipolarity and therefore condemned.

When NATO, in July 1997, decided to admit Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to the alliance two years later, Beijing accused the US of using enlargement for the “further consolidation of its control over Europe” while refusing to bear the respective costs,⁹² a leitmotif that was to reappear during the 1999 Kosovo campaign.

As early as 1995, China had condemned Nato’s airstrikes in Bosnia, albeit at a lower propagandist level than had Russia.⁹³ Following the December 1995 Dayton agreements, the PRC grudgingly opened the way for NATO’s military intervention by abstaining from the respective Security Council vote. When violence erupted in Kosovo in early 1998, China pronounced the conflict an “internal affair of Yugoslavia” while vilifying the Kosovo-Albanians as “separatists and terrorists”⁹⁴ and opposing any involvement by the UN Security Council.⁹⁵ It protested at the beginning of NATO air strikes in March 1999 after China and Russia had refused to grant NATO a UN mandate for this purpose. Official Chinese media highlighted subsequent demonstrations in EU countries and predicted a protracted guerilla war,⁹⁶ and certain PRC sources hinted that China itself could become a future victim of similar “aggression.”⁹⁷ For some time, it looked as though the PRC might turn inward once again and review its previous “active internationalism.”

In this context, European NATO members were treated with a mixture of warnings and threats. It was alleged that the US would use the conflict

89. Cui Hongjian, “‘Di san tiao daolu’ chuzhe” (“A brief analysis of the ‘Third Way’ ”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 2 (1999), pp. 30–33.

90. Liu Jiansheng, “De-Fa-Ying sanjiao guanxi hudong poushi” (“Looking into the interplay of the German-French-British-triangle”), *ibid.* pp. 26–29.

91. Early on in the Bosnian conflict, semi-official Chinese sources had favourably contrasted the EC’s “political” and “neutral” approach with US plans to isolate and boycott Serbia. Jin Gu, “Nanxilafu lianbangde jieti yu minzu wenti” (“The problems of the fragmentation of the Yugoslav Federation and ethnicity”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 3 (1992), pp. 19–23 (23).

92. Xinhua in Chinese, 9 July 1997, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/2970/G/1–2, 14 July 1997.

93. Xinhua in Chinese, 14 September 1995, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/2409/G/1, 15 September 1995.

94. *Beijing Rundschau*, Vol. 36, No. 8 (23 February 1999), pp. 7–8.

95. Xinhua in English, 10 March 1998, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/3173/G/1, 12 March 1998.

96. Xinhua in Chinese, 28 March 1999, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/3495/G/6–7 of 29 March 1999.

97. Excerpts from an article by Professor Zhang Zhaozhong of the National Defence University entitled “NATO’s next step,” published by *Nanfang zhoumo*’s website on 16 April 1999, quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/3512/G/5–6 of 19 April 1999.

to assert its hegemony and later leave refugees and reconstruction to the EU. Germany was initially singled out for having damaged the “present international order.”⁹⁸ Following the bombing of the PRC’s Belgrade embassy on 7 May 1999, China organized mass demonstrations not only outside the US and British embassies. The German consulate-general in Guangzhou was attacked and partially damaged. Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder had an official visit scheduled for mid-May and used the occasion to apologize on behalf of NATO. Both sides agreed that the UN Security Council should now seek a political solution. Jiang Zemin said that China wanted to continue its co-operative relationship with the FRG.⁹⁹

However, almost all Chinese comments on allied air strikes against Serbia referred to “NATO under US leadership,” and some of them depicted Europe as the second loser of the campaign.¹⁰⁰

On 8 June 1999 the EU’s special envoy for Kosovo, Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, visited Beijing to explain the G7 draft for a Security Council resolution that had already been approved by Moscow and Belgrade. Two days later, the Council passed resolution no. 1244. The PRC delegate abstained from the vote. To placate China, NATO had stopped its air strikes just before the Council’s decision.

Chinese observers viewed the April 1999 Washington Declaration and NATO’s new strategic concept as another means of turning the Alliance into a “tool” of US hegemonism that obliges Europeans to fight for American interests anywhere in the world and to fight for themselves where American interests are limited. As a consequence, they expected Europeans rapidly to develop an interest in having an alliance of their own.¹⁰¹

The argument contained a grain of truth. In 1996, the old idea of a “European Defence Identity” was further developed at a French-German summit. Already before the war in Kosovo, Britain and France had stressed the need to base any European defence policy on a stronger military foundation. As a first step, the WEU launched a survey of members’ military capabilities and its own limited infrastructure. In July

98. *China Aktuell*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (April 1999), p. 328, no source given.

99. Xinhua in Chinese, 12 May 1999, as quoted in *Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE/3534/G/3–4 of 14 May 1999.

100. Gudrun Wacker, “Machtpolitik und Hegemoniestreben der USA: China und der NATO-Einsatz in Jugoslawien” (“Power politics and US hegemonial ambitions: China and NATO’s campaign in Yugoslavia”) *Aktuelle Analysen* (Cologne: Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien), No. 21 (24 June 1999), p. 3.

101. Jiang Jianqing, “Beiyue ershiyi shiji xin zhanlue jiqi yingxiang” (“NATO’s new strategy for the 21st century and its consequences”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 3 (1999), pp. 15–19 (16–7). Practical problems with carrying out such a project are highlighted in Liu Jiansheng, “Lun Oumeng gongtong anquan fangwu zhengce” (“On common security policies and defence of the EU”), *ibid.*, No. 1 (2000), pp. 29–33. Two other Chinese authors believe that the US views the European defence entity in NATO as a means to add to the alliance’s “overall strength and the responsibilities borne by West European allies and to placate their demand on their independent defence so as to relax US-European contradictions.” Wang Naicheng and Jun Xiu, “Whither NATO?” *International Strategic Studies*, No. 2 (1999), pp. 27–32 (30–31).

1999, Britain and Italy suggested the need to define “convergence criteria” for the defence readiness of member states which would then be used to encourage members to improve their rapid deployment capacities.¹⁰² In February 2000, defence ministers agreed to integrate the WEU into the EU by the end of that year and to create a 60,000 strong rapid-reaction force by 2003.¹⁰³

By early 2001, Sino-US relations looked set for another downturn with President George Bush Jr. having qualified Beijing as a strategic competitor rather than partner. In this context, smouldering tensions over Washington’s missile defence projects put increasing pressure on the European side to clarify its stance, particularly as East Asian missile technology risked threatening Europe much sooner than the continental US. With the exception of a favourable United Kingdom, neither the EU nor its members had made up their minds on National Missile Defence (NMD) at this point. However, a tentative debate had begun on the merits of a “positive” transatlantic dialogue on NMD’s technical and strategic implications.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, Chinese observers continued to emphasize the earlier European scepticism pointing to the continent’s supposed sensibility for perceptions of a Russian threat and likely response.¹⁰⁵

Should the US-PRC relationship come under additional strain over the side effects of Beijing’s own power transfer from 2002 onwards, and should such developments have a negative impact on regional security, the EU and its members would find themselves confronted with an ever-growing dilemma.

Multipolarity Nipped in the Bud?

Any China policy will necessarily be a mix of three major elements: economic considerations, world order considerations, and considerations of regional (East Asian) order and security. Unsurprisingly, the EU has been strongest on the economy, weakest on the region, and wavering on world order, which is a clear contrast with the attempts made by successive US administrations somehow to balance all three. I have argued before¹⁰⁶ that from 1994 onwards, American policies towards China went through a certain extent of “Europeanization” marked by the adoption of the term “constructive engagement,” first used in the EU Commission’s 1995 strategy paper. Obviously, “Europeanization” had its limits, but repeated attempts made by Washington to reinvigorate the relationship whenever it was threatened were at least partly due to a fear

102. David Buchan, “A tethered superpower,” *The Financial Times*, 27 July 1999, p. 13.

103. “EU Minister einigen sich auf Zeitplan für die Eingreiftruppe” (“EU ministers agree on time schedule for rapid reaction force”), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 February 2000, p. 9.

104. “Dem einen Schurke, dem anderen Partner,” (“Rogue to the one, partner to the other”), *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 9 March 2001, p. 7.

105. See e.g. Su Huimin, “Mei (xi) Ou Ede zhengduo taishi ji qi liyi chongtu” (“A situation of rivalry and conflicts of interest among the US, (Western) Europe, and Russia”), *Guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 3 (2000), pp. 17–22 (21).

106. Möller, “The West and China.”

of “Europeans eagerly stepping into the gap.”¹⁰⁷ In this context, the US has been particularly concerned about the possibility of EU members resuming their arms sales to the PRC.¹⁰⁸

Otherwise, the EU’s China policies often appear as being driven by events (including the Union’s own institutional evolution) rather than driving events. At no point during the 1970s or 1980s was the European side ready to take the lead in the West, a fact that remained valid during the interval of “Commission rule” during the first half of the 1990s. The upgrading of relations during the latter half of the decade, while somewhat benefiting from Washington’s problems with Beijing, was at the same time driven by the very dynamics of the China-US, China-Russia and even China-Japan relationships.

The – almost “Chinese” – urge, witnessed since the mid-1990s, to present long-term China strategies in writing, is first the result of a CFSP high in ambition and low in content. It is no surprise that different strategy papers dealing with different parts of the world have not had an overall global strategy to draw from and will therefore either be revised at ever shorter intervals or remain frozen in rhetoric. The idea, prevailing until the mid-1990s, that China was sufficiently distant and sufficiently irrelevant to be left to CFSP has not proved sustainable, and it is just as possible that China will at some point make a comeback to the highest levels of EU diplomacy.

As far as the PRC itself is concerned, it would not be an oversimplification to say that interest in Europe has been a variable of China’s unstable relationship with Washington. In this context, what interests Beijing is multipolarity, the tapping of Europe’s markets and technologies and, perhaps most important in everyday affairs, the prevention of further Taiwanese advances on the international stage. China has not stopped viewing the EU as a continental European power with a role to play in stabilizing Eastern Europe and perhaps the Mediterranean, but neither expects nor wants it to play a security role in other parts of the world, especially not in East Asia. Multipolarity, as the Chinese view it, defies alliances and is rather anchored in economic competition. It is hoped that at some point transatlantic rivalry over trade and investments, much as US-Japan rivalry, will break up existing alliance configurations, but given its own unfinished transformation to great power status, the PRC will probably hope for this to be a gradual process rather than a sudden event.

And yet, both China and Europe could be wrong, and multipolarity could simply not be in the making. Suppose the Wall Street bubble does not burst, the US continues successfully to ride the wave of globalization, and opponents of globalization will witness a steady erosion of their

107. See e.g. Henry Kissinger as quoted in the *International Herald Tribune*, 24 July 1995, p. 6.

108. Since the mid-1990s, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy have expressed an interest in resuming their arms sales and have actually tested the waters by selling some dual-use technology. “La rivalité entre les Quinze menace leur influence en Chine” (“Rivalry among the Fifteen threatens their influence on China”), *Le Figaro*, 30 November 2000, p. v.

status as international players, the transatlantic link would be strengthened rather than weakened, and there would be a new round of enlargement along the PRC's periphery. Both China's and Europe's problems with defining their future international roles could be indicators of such a move away from the old realist paradigm, and as a consequence, their bilateral relationship would become ever more complicated in the future. In the meantime, and before globalization weakens the US itself as a national actor, Pax Americana would be a bulwark sufficiently strong to protect the rest of Asia for the new world, and Europe would be as happy with that state of affairs as it has been over the last 50 years.