



# THE EU-CHINA SECURITY PARADOX

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COOPERATION AGAINST  
ALL ODDS?

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**JULIA GUROL**



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Julia Gurol



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# List of Abbreviations

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEF	Asia Europe Forum
ASEM	Asia Europe Meeting
BASIC	Brazil, South Africa, India and China
BCM	Bilateral Consultation Mechanism
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAFTA	China-ASEAN Free Trade Area
CAI	Comprehensive Agreement on Investment
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
CBDR	Common But Differentiated Responsibilities
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCS	Carbon Capture and Storage
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CGPCS	Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia
CMF	Combined Maritime Forces
CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
COP	Conference of the Parties
COSTIND	Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSP	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
CTF	Combined Task Forces
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIA	Energy Information Administration
EP	European Parliament
ESS	European Security Strategy
ETIC	East Turkestan Information Center
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamist Movement
ETLO	East Turkestan Liberation Organization
EU NAVFOR	European Union Naval Force Somalia

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EUMSS	European Maritime Security Strategy
EUROPOL	European Police Office
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GoA	Gulf of Aden
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
IEA	International Energy Agency
INF	Intermediate–Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
IS-K	Islamic State Khorasan
JCPoA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LMDC	Like-Minded Developing Countries on Climate Change
MEE	Ministry of Ecology and Environment
MND	Ministry of National Defence
MOOTW	Military Operations Other Than War
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
NATCG	National Anti-Terrorism Coordination Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDB	New Development Bank
NEA	National Energy Administration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NISCSS	China’s National Institute for South China Sea Studies
NSC	National Security Commission
OFDI	Outbound Foreign Direct Investment
PA	Paris Agreement
PAP	People’s Armed Police Forces
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People’s Republic of China
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
RATS	Regional Antiterrorism Structure
RBMP	EU–China River Basin Management Programme
ROC	Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SCS	South China Sea
SHADE	Shared Awareness and Deconfliction
SLOC	Sea Line of Communication
TIP	Turkistan Islamic Party
UNCLOS	UN Convention on the Law of the Sea



UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNOCT	UN Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US EIA	US Energy Information Administration
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization
WUYC	World Uyghur Youth Congress
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

## About the Author

Julia Gurol is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Chair for International Relations at Freiburg University. Her publications have appeared in numerous well-ranked political science and international relations journals such as *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* and *Chinese Journal for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*. She has also contributed several chapters to edited volumes published by Oxford University Press, Routledge, Edward Elgar and NOMOS, and has published a number of policy papers for non-academic research outlets.

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# The EU and China in a Changing International Environment

## Introduction

Few international actors are presently under such scrutiny as the EU and China. They are undoubtedly two of the most decisive actors in current world politics. As COVID-19 continues to ravage economies globally and with major powers such as the United States finding solace in increased protectionism, more eyes are on the EU and China when it comes to shaping international politics. Yet their relationship with each other is all but straightforward and both struggle with defining their respective roles. China is an important partner for the EU on climate protection and other issues of global governance. However, it is also a competitor in trade and technology and even a systemic rival on issues of governance, values and multilateralism (European Commission, 2019a). It is therefore not surprising that the overall EU–China relationship struggles between efficacious collaboration on the one hand, and profound challenges and recurring skirmishes on the other. In times of a constantly changing international environment, the global pandemic and uncertainty concerning the development of US foreign policy under the administration of Joe Biden, EU–China relations face an uncertain future that is vastly determined by broader geoeconomic and geopolitical developments.

Strikingly, it is the security realm in which the EU and China often manage to set aside contradicting ideological and normative motivations, and establish cooperation against all odds. Although economy, trade and investment policies are still the main drivers of their relationship, security has developed into one of the most vital pillars of EU–China relations. While the economy still dominates the EU–China agenda, the security realm is all but tenuous. Instead, it has risen in significance over time and now complements the economic and political pillars of the bilateral

relationship, not only because of the deepening economy–security nexus, but also because of the rise of transnational security challenges such as climate and energy security, maritime security, and food security that equally affect the EU and China. Since 2003, there have been an increasing number of attempts by the EU and China to set their security policies on common ground. This is puzzling as the EU and China follow very different approaches to key principles of foreign and security policy and of interstate relations. Their stances on questions of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference often are diametrically opposed. For example, the EU puts great effort and resources into the promotion of democratic norms and values, good governance, the rule of law, and human rights, while China’s foreign and security policy can primarily be characterized as state-centric and pragmatic. Although these principles are still adhered to today and lead to increasing political friction, the intensity and scope of EU–China security cooperation have widened, encompassing a broad array of traditional and non-traditional security issues. Even though a lot has been written about EU–China economic affairs, their relationship in the security realm suffers from scholarly neglect. In particular, their cooperation in the security realm has hitherto received only scant academic attention. This pattern certainly requires empirical examination in order to gain a more encompassing understanding of EU–China relations in the context of geopolitical skirmishes and political tensions.

This book puts forward the argument that it would be mistaken to monolithically typify China as either a threat or an opportunity for the EU, given the complex nature of convergences and divergences in their security relations. On the one hand, the EU and China are increasingly bound in complex entanglements that render them interdependent and hence lead to security cooperation as neither can resolve issues of global importance, such as transnational security concerns, on its own. On the other hand, mistrust and tensions prevail that stem from the inherently different ways in which the EU and China view world politics and their respective positions in it. Hence, the question is not of whether but rather of how and why the EU and China cooperate in the security realm despite deepening political tensions. How do they view their respective positions within international security governance? And finally, how do they balance adverse interests and values? Addressing these questions is an important requisite to understanding the modes and mechanisms of EU–China security cooperation as well as the continuities and future paths of development in the bilateral relationship between these two important actors of global governance.

Resolving the puzzle of EU–China security cooperation is at the core of this book. It seeks to disentangle the complexity of the EU–China security relationship by providing two perspectives: First, it sheds light on

the temporal dimension, examining the impact of changing geopolitical settings on EU–China security relations over time. Second, it provides three exemplary case studies to illustrate whether, how and why cooperation unfolds on the ground in the fields of anti-terrorism, anti-piracy, and climate and energy security. This cross-sectional examination offers key insight into the rationales, dynamics and consequences of EU–China security cooperation despite political tensions in other policy fields. The book provides an innovative perspective on international cooperation, unifying explanations from different rationalist and constructivist theoretical strands, thereby offering a novel conceptual framework for the analysis of cooperation and non-cooperation in international politics. It assesses the question of how complex interdependence in a context of uncertainty regarding the future of globalization and the emergence of new security challenges, as well as differing mutual perceptions and perceived roles of the EU and China, affect their relationship in the security realm. In doing so, the book provides a comprehensive assessment of EU–China security relations in the context of political tensions and shows how and why security cooperation takes place against all odds.

### **Main arguments and structure of the book**

It is the essence of this book to show how complex and multifaceted EU–China relations are. It argues that while economy and trade remain firmly at the heart of EU–China relations, the security dimension of their relationship is all but tenuous. Having developed a solid, institutionalized partnership, interests often seem to trump values when it comes to cooperation. In fact, based on their important positions in world politics, the EU and China have reached a stage at which it is no longer valid to simply discard each other as opponents in normative or ideological terms. The book puts forward the argument that monolithically characterizing China as either a threat or an opportunity for the EU, given the complex nature of convergences and divergences in their security relations. On a more structural level, the EU and China are bound in complex entanglements on the global stage that facilitate security cooperation. However, on an actor level, mistrust and tensions prevail that stem from the respective role conceptions of the EU and China on this global stage as well as from their diverging principles of foreign and security policy making. In that regard, it is one of the main contributions of this book to reassess the changing nature of international cooperation and non-cooperation.

Along the lines of its ten chapters, the book explores the drivers of EU–China cooperation in the wider sense of security as such and sheds light particularly on the widening scope of non-military EU–China security cooperation. It is the focus on role conceptions and mutual perceptions in

the context of deepening global entanglements and interdependencies that renders this book innovative. Accordingly, one of the baselines that structure the ten chapters of this book is that the EU–China relationship is anything but black and white. Instead, the book outlines in a detailed and context-sensitive manner the specific points of convergence as well as the remaining hindrances to security cooperation.

The book begins by outlining the underlying foreign and security policy principles of the EU and China that constitute the ‘odds’ in EU–China security cooperation (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, the key concepts used as heuristic tools throughout the analysis are introduced. This chapter also explains the merits of a theory-guided approach to EU–China security cooperation and introduces the potential of a multidimensional analytical prism. It argues that discarding EU–China security relations as being primarily driven by material factors and rationalist considerations would neglect the impact of role conceptions and mutual perceptions. Instead of focusing on one single theoretical entry point, this book seeks to employ a more complex analytical framework by combining the structure and actor dimensions. In particular, it uses two interest-driven (rationalist) and two experience-driven (constructivist) concepts to disentangle the complex nature of EU–China security cooperation. In that regard, it sheds light on the role of complex interdependence, economic interests, and the EU’s and China’s framing of security as well as mutual perceptions.

The subsequent five analytical chapters are informed by a mixed comparison, which assesses temporal variations (Chapters 4 and 5) as well as variations among different areas of security cooperation (Chapters 6–8), thereby combining diachronic and synchronic comparisons. The analyses are structured along the lines of four major concepts or themes that are introduced in Chapter 3.

Covering both the temporal dynamics as well as diving into three selected case studies has two major advantages. That EU–China security relations are assessed over the selected period of study (from 1998 to 2020) reflects the changing dynamics and takes into consideration the impact of the overall geopolitical setting in which the two are embedded. By diving into three selected security issues, it is possible further to examine the rationales of cooperation in greater depth. For the analysis of specific security issues, anti-terrorism (Chapter 6), maritime security and anti-piracy (Chapter 7), and climate and energy security (Chapter 8) were selected. This selection stems from the reference that European and Chinese policy papers make to these issues. Moreover, the level and depth of cooperation between the EU and China in these three areas vary considerably. While the EU and China declare the will to cooperate on anti-terrorism, actual cooperation is not visible. Instead, normative contradictions prevail, which become most apparent in the European criticism of how China links anti-terrorism measures to its

Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang. In maritime security and anti-piracy, by contrast, the EU and China cooperate in the context of the EU's Atalanta mission, while in the case of climate and energy security both bilateral cooperation as well as multilateral efforts in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) can be observed. This variation renders these three cases promising for analysis, as it can be expected that they induce different cooperation characteristics and that different dynamics are at play, which lead to cooperation, non-cooperation or even conflict.

Yet no analysis of EU–China relations would be complete without addressing the ‘elephant in the room’. Therefore, in [Chapter 9](#), the book examines the role of the US for EU–China security cooperation. The deepening tensions between the US and China, and the development of the US into a ‘withdrawing hegemon’ have put the EU in a tough spot. Hence, the former ‘strategic triangle’ between the US, China and the EU has become more of a ‘crooked’ triangle. In particular, [Chapter 9](#) sheds light on the dynamics that unfolded during the four years of Donald Trump’s presidency and explores the implications of the disorderly retreat of the US under his administration from global governance for EU–China security relations. Finally, the book concludes by discussing the main findings against the backdrop of a changing international landscape and points towards avenues for future developments of EU–China relations.

The analytical chapters are based on original interview data,<sup>1</sup> official policy documents, white papers and declarations, as well as a number of newspaper articles and media reports collected from both the European and the Chinese sides (for further information concerning data, see [Chapter 2](#)).

### **The level of analysis: region-to-state relations**

What are the merits of analysing EU–China security relations on a region-to-state level? The following sections briefly explain why the analytical focus in this book is on the EU as a unitary actor, not on distinct EU member states. So far, there are very different approaches in the scholarly literature on how to conceptualize EU–China relations, as they do not conform to the definitions of either interregional or bilateral state-to-state relationships. While a plethora of studies situates EU–China security relations in the light of a third party, which is most commonly the US or Russia ([Alden, 2005](#); [Hackenesch, 2011](#); [Stahl, 2011](#)), the focus of this book is on direct EU–China region-to-state relations.<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars describe EU–China relations as a one-sided affair when it comes to the security realm, implying that the EU lacks actorness and manifest military capabilities. There is no consensus among either European or Chinese scholars on whether the EU can or does hold an important



position as a security actor within the international system (Liquin, 2008; Zhang, 2016a). Thus, most scholars focus on what is commonly referred to as ‘Sino-European’ relations, namely the relations of individual EU member states with China. The main argument justifying this focus is that the development of foreign and security policies remains largely the prerogative of the individual EU member states (Smith and Xie, 2010; Maher, 2016). Researchers who situate themselves within this strand of literature argue that it is not useful to consider the EU and China equal counterparts. They pledge analyses on the bilateral level, as some EU member states – for example France and the UK – have much longer and more involved security relations with China. Furthermore, researchers of this skein of thought put forward the argument that the policymaking process of an institutional body like the EU is a complex and interwoven process of formulation of common interests, which spans so many levels (supranational, national and subnational) that it is difficult to compare EU foreign policy and China’s foreign policy, let alone to find commonalities and differences (Algieri, 2008).

This conception, albeit revealing the cracks and breaks of EU actorness, disregards two mutually reinforcing aspects. First, the perception of the EU as a weak security actor stems from the fact that the EU’s security actorness is often unduly compared to that of the US. Second, such an approach neglects the non-military capabilities, of which the EU disposes a large toolkit. In that regard, this conception overemphasizes traditional security issues over non-traditional ones,<sup>3</sup> as it primarily assesses the EU’s security role in military terms. Hence, looking at EU–China security relations with a focus on non-traditional security issues bears the potential to shed light on so far under-researched dynamics, modes and mechanisms of cooperation. This notion has been picked up during the growing discussion about the EU’s evolving role as a security actor, which has gathered speed since roughly 2003, with the EU being seen as an international actor of increasing substance and rising agency (Wallace, 1983; Lan, 2005; Doidge, 2011). Advocates of this strand of research denote that the EU’s role has mainly been attached to economic influence and normativity. While the US has been regarded as the most important security provider (Chaban et al, 2017), the EU’s role as a security actor has increased and so has its impact on EU–China security relations, they argue. Therefore, it is also of analytical value to assess EU–China relations on a region-to-state level and to treat the EU and China as two global actors with increasing importance (Kirchner, 2015; Gurol, 2020a).

Although it is true that China also relates separately to individual EU member states and that those bilateral relations, especially with Germany and France – and formerly also the UK – are certainly more established than EU–China relations, research assessing EU–China security relations on

a region-to-state level can be beneficial. Beyond the activity and actorness of the supranational institutions, the EU has to reflect the interests of its member states. These do not only have to find a common position when it comes to stressing EU foreign policy principles and policies but also maintain the autonomy to develop the EU's own policy strategies towards other states, such as China (Christiansen et al, 2019). EU–China relations thus have their own dynamics and are meaningful and consequential in the context of global governance (Christiansen, 2016).

## Setting the scene: the evolution of EU–China relations

To interpret the directions in which the EU and China are moving and to understand what is peculiar about their cooperation in the security realm, it is necessary to understand their history. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975, the EU and China have been caught in what might be called a 'love-hate relationship', moving back and forth between deeper alignment and recurring tensions. In particular, three phases characterize this development. After an initial period of careful convergence, very much kicked off by the first EU policy paper on China in 1995, the conclusion of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2003 marked the beginning of the EU–China 'honeymoon'. This heyday did not last long. Already around 2005–6, unsettled skirmishes and discord returned to the fore. As a result, the relationship between the EU and China became more fragmented, with different degrees of cooperation and conflict in different areas of their relationship. Finally, the official launch of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 marks the beginning of a third phase, during which the aim has been to find a more realistic balance between accelerated economic and security cooperation, and deepening political, systemic and normative tensions.

### *Phase 1: the EU–China 'convergence myth'*

Despite the official establishment of diplomatic ties in 1975, the EU and China devoted little attention to each other in their foreign policy strategies in the beginning. They only started taking notice of each other much later. After a short phase of careful convergence, the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 forced the EU to place its position towards China in a broader context that included international law, political principles and human rights (Christiansen et al, 2019).<sup>4</sup> The first EU policy paper on China, 'A Long-Term Policy for China–Europe Relations', published in 1995 by the European Commission, clearly tried to balance strategic economic interests and normative concerns (European Commission, 1995). It mentions the 'global significance' of China's economy but also says that

‘there is a danger that relying solely on [...] declarations [of improving the human rights situation in China] will dilute the message or lead to knee-jerk reactions’ from China. This policy paper set the stage for subsequent developments and marked the beginning of what would be a long-term institutionalization of EU–China relations. In terms of subjects, it still focused predominantly on trade, investment and economic relations. However, it was also among the first attempts to establish a human rights dialogue with China.

Three years later, in 1998, a new EU policy paper on China was issued ahead of the first EU–China summit, titled ‘Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China’. Based on the increasing engagement of China in world politics and the expanded powers of the EU after the Treaty of Amsterdam and the creation of the office of a High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP),<sup>5</sup> the paper focused on an expansion of EU–China relations to issues beyond the economic realm (European Commission, 1998). The main aim was to further institutionalize economic relations and thereby achieve a wider political reform within China, in line with EU norms and values. The underlying paradigm or expectation that drove this aim was the ‘convergence myth’ (Godement and Vasselier, 2017), namely the assumption that China could be integrated into the existing (liberal) world order through trade and economic cooperation. The 1998 policy paper focused on a long-term ‘integration of China into the international community’ and the world economy. The 2001 policy paper, ‘EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a More Effective EU Policy’, further reviewed and stressed these points, adding concrete suggestions for action (European Commission, 2001).

All in all, in the first phase of EU–China relations, the EU took the active role. In contrast to China, whose first policy paper on the EU was not published until 2003, the EU took an interest in China much earlier and sought extended dialogue. Yet the EU’s outreach to China in that phase was still very much driven by the convergence myth.

### *Phase 2: from ‘honeymoon’ to deepening divergences*

With the upgrade of their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP) in 2003, the EU and China entered the second phase of their relationship, which began with a ‘honeymoon period’ (Li et al, 2017, p 35). Relations flourished and some observers even contended that EU–China relations had the potential to become an ‘emerging axis’ in world affairs (Shambaugh, 2005, p. 1). In this context, the scope of EU–China relations was expanded considerably. New issues broadened their agenda, mainly to non-traditional security realms such as anti-terrorism, non-proliferation, and

public health and health security (Christiansen et al, 2019). In comparison to economic and trade relations, the policy field of security had been relatively marginal in EU–China relations so far, but it was incorporated into the EU–China cooperation agenda for the first time in 2003. At the same time, the EU started strengthening its security profile with the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003.

In the aftermath of the establishment of the CSP, both sides issued policy papers. The EU's policy paper on China did not differ significantly from its predecessor. However, it mentioned a 'new maturity in EU–China relations' that was 'characterised by increasingly close policy coordination in many areas' (European Commission, 2003, p 5). In contrast, China's policy paper on the EU – the first of its kind – included a number of conditions for the EU formulated by the Chinese regime. For instance, it demanded that the EU strictly adhere to the One-China principle and neither initiate any arms deals nor upgrade its economic relations with Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> In addition, China formulated clear requests like granting it the status of a market economy in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and lifting the EU's arms embargo on China (MFA, 2003). This embargo had been imposed by the EU in 1989, after the Chinese military had brutally cracked down the Tiananmen Square protests, and remains in place until today.

These demands led to an intensification of the initial frictions. In some policy fields, EU–China political relations were even characterized by retrogression so that their overall position towards each other went from the goodwill of the honeymoon period to betrayed hopes and disappointment. This mainly affected trade and economic relations, which still constituted the main pillar of EU–China relations. It seemed to be easier for the EU and China to overcome their differences in fields such as international climate governance and security than to find solutions for the recurring competition in direct bilateral economic and political relations. China's trade and investment policies in particular began to constitute a growing challenge for the EU and the convergence myth started to crumble. In the political field, the severe human rights problems in China hindered deeper alignment and little progress was made in the China–EU dialogue on human rights (Li et al, 2017).

However, as setbacks were detrimental to both sides' political and economic interests, the EU and China put significant effort into normalizing their relations. When Premier Minister Wen Jiabao (in office 2003–13) travelled to European countries in 2009, he actively tried to rebuild the confidence both countries had built after the conclusion of the CSP (Willis, 2009). This upsurge of renewed confidence led to the expansion of the existing EU–China dialogue structure. On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the CSP in 2013, China and the EU used the opportunity to issue the 'EU–China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation', in which they articulated

mutual trust and support and expressed the desire to further coordinate their foreign and security policies (EEAS, 2013) until 2020.

*Phase 3: convergence, divergence and the vital space in between*

The third phase of EU–China relations (since 2013), can be described as a love-hate relationship and can be located somewhere between convergence and divergence. Realizing the need to cooperate, the EU and China have entered a stage in their relations in which the main goal seems to be to build a ‘realistic’ and ‘all-dimensional’ strategic partnership (European Commission, 2019a, p 1), and to find a more nuanced position towards each other (MFA, 2018a). This phase is simultaneously characterized by augmenting cooperation and deepening mistrust.

On the European side, the 2016 communication of the European Commission to the European Parliament (EP) and the European Council, ‘Elements for a New Strategy on China’, was the first official document to reflect this shift towards more realistic policies (European Commission, 2016a). It suggested reassessing and remodelling the European strategy towards China and put the EU’s interests at the forefront of the relationship. Differences and controversies were named explicitly, for example, China’s authoritarian response to domestic issues and the dire human rights situation in the country. However, the new strategy also made clear that existing differences should be managed ‘constructively’ (European Commission, 2016a, p 7). While the EU discovered the need to defend its own interests more robustly vis-à-vis China, the 2014 policy paper that China issued on the EU focused on the internal challenges the EU was grappling with after the international financial crisis. It revealed that the Chinese regime considered the EU as mainly occupied with internal problems for the time being. Yet it left no doubt that China still regarded the EU as a ‘global player of great strategic importance and a key part in the evolving international landscape’ (MFA, 2014, np). Moreover, in a similar vein as the 2016 EU policy paper, it stressed the deepening of ‘disagreements and frictions on issues of value such as human rights as well as economic and trade issues’, naming controversies openly and explicitly.

While intending to overcome the growing divergences, the Chinese regime elevated the level of the EU among its overall foreign policy priorities. Earlier, China’s relations with the EU, or Europe more broadly, had been one of the key responsibilities of the Chinese premier. When Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, this task was transferred to the Chinese president. Only EU–China relations on macroeconomic issues and urbanization were left to the premier (then Li Keqiang). This constituted a significant shift. Previous Chinese presidents had mostly been in charge of handling relations with the United States. Therefore, this organizational change represented a substantive elevation of the importance of EU–China relations on the Chinese side.

But this was not the only change that took place in 2013. More importantly, this year marked the beginning of the implementation of the BRI and thereby of a more expansive Chinese foreign policy. The most recent strategy paper of the European Commission, ‘A Strategic Outlook’, published in March 2019, reflected these changes and described the European approach towards China as ‘multifaceted’ (European Commission, 2019a, p 1). Moreover, it stated that China was ‘simultaneously [...] a cooperation partner [...], an economic competitor, [...] and a systemic rival’ for the EU, alluding to a sector-by-sector approach towards China. Furthermore, it pointed out that the EU could tighten the rules on Chinese investments in Europe if China did not change its behaviour on issues such as corporate state subsidies or public procurement. In a similar vein, China’s 2018 policy paper stated that, against the backdrop of ‘growing instabilities and uncertainties, with unilateralism, protectionism and de-globalisation on the rise’, the EU and China should develop a realistic partnership that takes into consideration both divergences and commonalities (MFA, 2018a, np). Thus, there have been attempts on both sides to manage differences through enhanced dialogue and to find complementary foreign and security policy strategies in a realistic way.

The year 2020 was meant to be a year of progress in EU–China relations. Prevailing differences were to be addressed and decisive progress was to be made in the bilateral relationship. Against the backdrop of the German presidency of the EU Council, preparations had started early to enable an unprecedented gathering of all EU heads of state and government, and their Chinese counterpart. Instead, 2020 brought to the fore disillusion and disenchantment, and the EU–China summit did not conclude with any deliverables (Huotari et al, 2020). China’s hardline stance on the movement in Hong Kong overstrained EU–China relations, and the global COVID-19 pandemic further strained the loosening bond.

Yet, negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) continued, sparking increasing debates about the nature and future of EU–China relations. In early 2021, after about seven years of tough negotiations (Wang and Li, 2021; Zeng, 2021), the EU and China finally managed to finalize the CAI.<sup>7</sup> At first glance, the agreement seems to create a level playing field between the EU and China, granting the EU enhanced access to the Chinese market in sectors such as health services, chemicals, electric vehicles and telecom. It also further enhances legal protections for EU investments in China, eliminates equity caps and quantitative restrictions, eases requirements for joint ventures and increases transparency in the Chinese market (European Commission, 2021). The European Commission celebrated the agreement as a major achievement and a booster for future EU–China relations, calling it ‘the most ambitious agreement’ that China has ever concluded (European Commission, 2020c, np). However, not all

that glitters is gold. At second glance, the CAI seems to be more of a win for China than for the EU. As the CAI encourages increased investments by European firms in China, it will certainly fuel China's economy and technological development. As the agreement does not make any references to the dire human rights situation in China or to recent developments in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Xinjiang, it can be interpreted as a silent legitimization of the Chinese regime. This fuels the overall critique that the EU often sacrifices criticism of China for the sake of economic relations. Finally, the timing of the agreement plays an important role. Being finalized only days before the Biden administration took office in the US, it bears the risk of pre-empting policy coordination on China between the EU and the US (for further discussion, see [Chapter 9](#)).

### **Security as a policy field in EU–China relations**

Security is a policy field that has hitherto not received a lot of scholarly attention in the realm of EU–China relations. During the first 25 years of EU–China relations, collaboration on economic and trade issues has been the main subject of cooperation ([Stanzel, 2007](#); [Maher, 2016](#)). While the main drivers continue to be economic, mainly concerning trade, investment, monetary and intellectual property issues, security has become a growing topic ([Giessmann, 2008](#); [Kirchner et al, 2015](#)). Moreover, since 2010, the CSP has also encompassed foreign affairs, security issues and global challenges, including climate change, global economic governance, combatting terrorism, illegal migration and maritime security ([European Commission, 2006](#)). This similarly played out in the EU–China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation (2013), which names peace and security as one of the most important policy fields of cooperation. Moreover, during his visit to the EU in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping characterized EU–China affairs as ‘reaching a higher strategic level – based not just on trade but also on security’ ([Fallon, 2014](#), p 181).

A closer look at the policy papers that the EU and China have issued on their mutual relationship between 1995 and 2020 as well as at their Joint Declarations following the annual EU–China summits paints a clear picture in that regard. These documents reveal very clearly that security has become the second most important pillar in EU–China relations, after economy (see [Figure 1.1](#)) and is mentioned with increasing frequency.

Thus, over time, a strong security element has emerged in addition to the economy in EU–China relations. In this regard, two observations should be mentioned. First, it should be noted that the CSP's agenda mostly involves non-traditional security issues. Moreover, it is interesting that the ‘Joint Statement on Deepening the EU–China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit’ ([European Commission, 2014a](#)),

**Figure 1.1:** Mentions of policy fields in EU–China relations, 1995–2019

Note: Figures 1.1 and 1.2 are based on the number of mentions of the different policy fields and security issues in the text corpus, including all policy papers the EU and China have issued about their relations as well as the joint declarations following the annual EU-China summits.

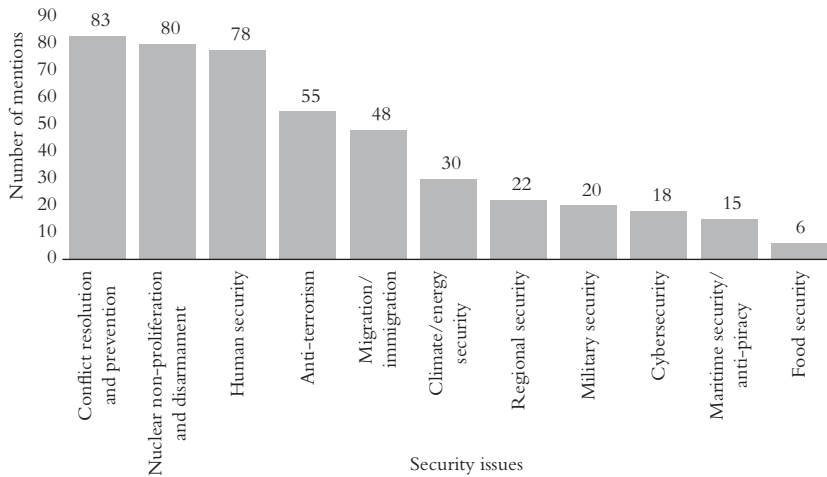
Source: Author.

for example, highlights the need to review the security situations in Iran, Syria and Ukraine to deepen cooperation. However, it does not contain any statements on the risk of conflict in the South China Sea (SCS) or the rising tensions in the Korean Peninsula. This shows that the EU recognizes China's strategic interests in the EU's neighbourhood, but that China still manages to stave off any interference into the internal affairs of countries in its own backyard.

In line with the evolving EU–China security partnership, their cooperation architecture has genuinely grown and more institutionalized dialogue formats have been established over time. Examples are the High Level Political Dialogue (2012), the High Level Strategic Dialogue (2013) and the Security Dialogue (2012). The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Dialogue (2004), the Security and Defence Dialogue (2014), the Political China-EU Dialogue on the Middle East and North Africa (2014), and the EU–China Peace and Security Forum (2017) are additional channels for security cooperation that were established under the framework of the CSP.

Zooming in on the security realm, a snapshot of 11 security issues shows that China and the EU emphasize some security issues over others. These 11 issues are regional security, conflict resolution and prevention, food security, military security, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, cybersecurity, anti-terrorism, climate and energy security, maritime security and anti-piracy, human security, and migration. These issues are explicitly mentioned



**Figure 1.2:** Mentions of security issues in EU–China relations, 1998–2019

Source: Author.

by the EU and China in their official policy papers and joint declarations. As [Figure 1.2](#) shows, conflict resolution and prevention is the issue that is mentioned most often by the EU and China in their respective policy papers and joint documents. Similarly, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and anti-terrorism and human security are also frequently referenced.

Yet the fact that these issues are frequently mentioned does not imply that they are subject to cooperation between the EU in China. In contrast, the security issues that are most often mentioned in the official policy papers and joint declarations are many times controversial. This book scrutinizes three security issues that display different amounts of cooperation. These are (1) anti-terrorism, which is frequently discussed but on which differences and even rivalry prevail, (2) maritime security and anti-piracy, which has been subject to robust and highly institutionalized cooperation between the EU since 2008, and (3) climate and energy security, which can be considered a flagship of security cooperation between the EU and China. As discussed earlier in the introduction, this finding renders these three cases promising for a cross-cut analysis of EU–China security cooperation as different dynamics and thus different mechanisms and rationales are at play and lead to varying forms and depths of (non-)cooperation.

## Conclusion

The introduction has highlighted the most crucial issues that this book will deal with in the following chapters. It has contextualized the policy field of security within the overall EU–China partnership and has shown how the EU

and China have developed this partnership within a changing international environment, thereby emphasizing how multifaceted EU–China relations are. EU–China relations are all but black and white. China does not constitute merely a threat to the EU, nor does it provide only opportunities. Instead, EU–China relations in general, and in the security realm in particular, are characterized by a complex mixture of opportunities and obstacles.

Empirically, the book provides an insight into the Chinese perspective and discourse on EU–China relations beyond the economic realm. Thereby, it reacts to the predominantly Eurocentric focus of many European scholars, who concentrate primarily on the European experience and on the EU’s strategies towards a rising China and less often take into account the Chinese perspective, due to reasons of accessibility of data, language barriers or the strong Western focus of international relations (IR) scholarship. The book seeks to be sensitive to regional specificities and cultural contexts, especially when examining information stemming from Chinese sources. In order to avoid this Eurocentric focus, data sources from the EU and China, both in English and Chinese were meticulously compiled.

Finally, yet importantly, the book combines usually contrary theoretical approaches to offer an innovative entry point to understanding the conditions for and rationales of cooperation. It combines structural macro-level elements like complex interdependence with more actor-centred aspects like identity and mutual perceptions. Thereby, it takes into consideration the influence of rational strategic culture dominated by *realpolitik* thinking, but also looks at the impact of values, norms and interactions between states that shape and change their behaviour as well as the overall structures of the international community. This theoretically eclectic approach translates into an understanding of cooperation that will not only be assessed through agreements or actions, but also takes into account the rhetoric level of cooperation from a constructivist perspective. In EU–China relations, many prospects for cooperation remain at the level of discourse and have not yet been implemented.

To conclude, in the following nine chapters this book will address a hitherto scarcely researched topic, walking the reader step-by-step through the rationales and dynamics of the EU–China security relationship in order to explain why they engage in security cooperation against all odds.

# Analytical Framework: Towards Multidimensionality

## Introduction

This chapter outlines the analytical framework that guides this book. It rests on research on international cooperation and develops a multidimensional concept of (non-)cooperation. The chapter further details the areas in which the book provides new theoretical insights to research on international cooperation and highlights the book's contribution to the study of cooperation and non-cooperation in international politics. Finally, the chapter concludes with a section discussing the key concepts for the subsequent analysis and orients the reader on the empirical material scrutinized in this book.

Elucidating the odds of cooperation between international actors is one of the primary concerns of IR research and a core element of most theoretical debates. Also, in Chinese IR research, cooperation (referred to as *hezuo* 合作) is an important concept, albeit one that is only vaguely defined. In IR, which depicts the international system as an anarchic environment cooperation is a puzzle per se. Even more striking is the observation of cooperation between actors that are so inherently different as the EU and China. To understand what motivates them to cooperate, it is necessary to understand the underlying modes and mechanisms of cooperation and non-cooperation in international politics in general. The book will now turn to the messiness of different definitions of cooperation and non-cooperation in international politics, also referring to the Chinese understanding of international cooperation, as deeply rooted in Confucianism. The chapter seeks to make sense of this messiness by briefly outlining existing definitions of cooperation and non-cooperation. Based on these definitions, a novel multidimensional lens on (non-)cooperation is developed that understands

(non-)cooperation in four different dimensions: the action, formal, institutional and rhetorical dimensions. Finally, the chapter outlines the main concepts that are used as heuristic tools for the ensuing analysis of EU–China security cooperation and concludes by operationalizing these central concepts.

## **Embracing messiness: (non-)cooperation in international politics**

There are a multitude of different and contested conceptualizations of terms such as cooperation, non-cooperation, competition and conflict. Before discussing the understanding of (non-)cooperation as used throughout this book, it needs to be flagged that the Western and Chinese worldviews and basic interpretations of the international community are vastly different. This fact notwithstanding, there are interesting commonalities concerning the interpretation of cooperation as a phenomenon that is inherently social and relational, while at the same time being driven by individual interests, as put forward by Chinese IR scholars (Qin, 2009; 2010; 2011; 2018) and Western IR's framing of cooperation as offered by liberal-institutionalist and constructivist scholars.

Western scholars, at some point, have agreed upon the working definition of (international) cooperation put forth by Keohane. According to this definition, cooperation occurs 'when actors adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination' (Keohane, 2005, p 67). This definition of cooperation implies two aspects. First, it assumes that actors behave consciously and that their behaviour is inherently goal-seeking. Second, it suggests that cooperation provides the cooperating actors with certain gains or rewards. Following Keohane's approach that cooperation and discord or non-cooperation are closely linked and that it is necessary to understand the absence or failure of cooperation to explain cooperation (Keohane, 1988), it is also required to define what cooperation is not. Cooperation can broadly be distinguished from competition, conflict and non-cooperation. While competition or conflict is usually understood as 'goal-seeking behaviour that strives to reduce the gains available to others or to impede their want-satisfaction' (Milner, 1992, p 476), non-cooperation implies a mere absence of cooperation. Hence, non-cooperation can be understood as a broader category that entails all three understandings – the absence of cooperation, as well as direct competition and conflict. Often, IR literature focuses on the dichotomy between cooperation and competition or conflict. However, one could argue that this distinction does not go far enough, as it neglects the political meaning and impact of non-cooperation. Revoking a formal agreement or disrupting an existing dialogue format does not necessarily

have to be the result of underlying competitive or conflictive relations, yet it has huge political consequences. Similarly, the conscious decision not to cooperate with another actor has a significant political meaning and sends a clear message. This shows that competition or conflict is not necessarily the other side of the coin when talking about cooperation in IR.

## **Theorizing cooperation in international politics**

As has been previously discussed, explaining cooperation between different actors on the international stages is one of the primary concerns of IR and at the core of most theoretical debates in this discipline. A closer look at the literature reveals that in research on international cooperation two epistemological schools compete for explanatory pre-eminence (Rüland, 2018). The first school of thought can be summarized under the heading of rationalism, which posits that social interactions between international actors follow a ‘logic of consequentialism’. The second school of thought may be broadly labelled as constructivism, which postulates that such interactions rest on a ‘logic of appropriateness’. These two schools of thought form the main theoretical axes in international politics (Adler, 2002; Kratochvíl and Tulmets, 2010) and suggest a number of meta-theoretical assumptions about the nature, constitution and interaction of actors in the international system (Wendt, 1999). They further advance different expectations about the relationship of structures and actors as well as about the underlying logic that drives the behaviour of these actors. The following sections will show that these two schools of thought are more complementary than often assumed. In addition, it suggests a bridge-building approach to combining these lines of thought into a multidimensional frame of (non-) cooperation and outlines the main concepts they suggest for explaining (non-)cooperation.

### *Rationalist reading of (international) cooperation*

Rationalists follow a ‘logic of consequentialism’, which implies that actors are instrumental and rational; they primarily seek to maximize their own gains and therefore act strategically. Rationalism holds that all actors in the international system can be studied as actors per se (Oakeshott, 1991; Glaser, 1994), independent of the social structures within which they (inter) act. In this regard, actors follow an instrumental-strategic logic and pursue rationalist preferences to safeguard their own power and security to survive in the anarchic international environment. All forms of (non-)cooperation are assumed to be the outcomes of goal-directed choices of rational actors.

Two broad strands of rationalist theory can be differentiated: realism and liberalism or institutionalism. Realist rationalists are more pessimistic

as regards cooperation, due to the so-called problem of relative gains and the security dilemma. Both derive from the structural imperatives of the international system (Herz, 1950; Jervis, 1978; Glaser, 1994; Collins, 1997), in which all states are situated in a context of uncertainty and bounded rationality. According to the relative gains problem, states not only intend to maximize their absolute gains, but also attempt to achieve more in relation to other states (Grieco, 1988, 1990; Waltz, 2000). They mostly ignore the mutual benefits of cooperation because they fear that other states might gain more (Carr, 1964; Krasner, 1976; Morgenthau and Thompson, 1993; Waltz, 2000). The security dilemma means that perceived external threats create insecurity within states. As a result, states are more inclined towards competitive or unilateral policies, while cooperative policies are not among their priorities (Glaser, 2010). Cooperating with others does not follow the logic of consequentialism and the primacy of national security impedes cooperation as a non-rational behaviour. However, cooperation can occur even under a premise of strategic realist rationality, namely as a means of balancing or bandwagoning. Balancing means that two states cooperate to balance a powerful state and prevent it from striving for unipolarity (Mearsheimer, 1994; Walt, 1997). Bandwagoning refers to situations in which a weaker state forms an alliance with a more powerful state to survive and to pursue national interests.

Rationalist liberalists or institutionalists, although adhering to the same underlying premises about the anarchic structure of the international system, are more positive when it comes to assessing the likelihood of cooperation. They assume that cooperation occurs whenever it is a state's most rational action for maximizing utilities (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986; Nye, 1990; Keohane and Martin, 1995). Each state behaves according to self-directed national interests, assigns costs and benefits to possible policy choices and then acts upon this calculation. In this reading, cooperation means 'that the actions of separate individuals or organisations – which are not in pre-existent harmony – be brought into conformity with one another through a process of policy coordination' (Keohane, 1988, p 380).

### *Constructivist reading of (international) cooperation*

Constructivists follow a 'logic of appropriateness', which implies that all actors strive for appropriate behaviour, complying with international rules and norms instead of optimizing strategic aims. In contrast to rationalism, constructivism supposes that the world is constituted by social action and intersubjectivity. This means that actors cannot be studied as priors, but rather in relation to the surrounding structures (Onuf, 1985; Wendt, 1992; 1994). Constructivism juxtaposes rationalist assumptions and argues that states engage within and contribute to an ongoing process that shapes the

structures of the international system (Finnemore, 1996). Within this process, (non-)cooperation would emerge due to converging or diverging norms, values or identities (Cerny, 1990; Moravcsik, 1997b):

Human actors are imagined to follow rules that associate particular identities to particular situations, approaching individual opportunities for action by assessing similarities between current identities and choice dilemmas and more general concepts of self and identities. (March and Olsen, 1989, p 951)

In this regard, common norms as intersubjective beliefs about the world and its constitution, confirmed by social practice, are the primary trigger for collaboration instead of the rationalist ‘fundamental interest in self-preservation and material well-being’ (Owen, 1994, p 94). Hence, state-society relations matter for constructivists in a way they do not for rationalists. In fact, they oppose the thought that the balance of material power structures the international system. Instead, they flag up states’ identities and interests and locate actors in social structures that influence the actors and at the same time are shaped by their interactions (Checkel, 1997).

### *Towards multidimensionality: conceptualizing (non-)cooperation*

The discussion of cooperation as the main theme in the analysis of EU–China security relations raises important questions about how to operationalize and measure developments in this respect. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate on the different categories used to assess cooperation.

Why is (non-)cooperation inherently multidimensional? First and foremost, it is possible to distinguish between different dimensions in which (non-)cooperation can unfold. In this book, cooperation and non-cooperation are essentially assessed in four different dimensions. These are: (1) the action dimension, (2) the formal dimension, (3) the institutional dimension and (4) the rhetorical dimension (see Table 2.1).

These dimensions can be linked back to the manifold theoretical debates about cooperation in international politics. For instance, most scholars measure cooperation either by the number of joint institutions and agreements or by the extent to which actors engage in joint actions (Keohane and Martin, 1995; Mitchell and Hensel, 2006). However, the rhetoric dimension deserves more explanation. Communication plays an important role in IR, as it is costless and non-binding, but increases the amount of information about the communicating actors (Keohane, 1988). For instance, communication in the form of rhetoric can affect outcomes in game-theoretical settings that would otherwise lead to conflict, and can thereby lead to interactions having more cooperative results (Awaya

**Table 2.1:** The concept of (non-)cooperation

<b>Conceptualization of (non-)cooperation</b>							
Unilateral hostility	Revocation of formal agreement	Disruption of institutionalized dialogue	Criticism or explication of differences	Articulation of will to cooperate or deepen cooperation	Institutionalized dialogue	Formal agreement	Joint activity
<i>Action dimension</i>	<i>Formal dimension</i>	<i>Institutional dimension</i>	<i>Rhetorical dimension</i>	<i>Rhetorical dimension</i>	<i>Institutional dimension</i>	<i>Formal dimension</i>	<i>Action dimension</i>
<b>Type of (non-)cooperation</b>							

Source: Author.



and Krishna, 2019). As Majeski and Fricke state, ‘communication allows groups to exchange an understanding of the game structure, to state that mutual cooperation is beneficial if only they can coordinate and trust’ (1995, p 628). Since communication abounds in the interaction of actors within the international system, not counting rhetorical acts such as the articulation of a will to cooperate as a form of cooperation might lead to unsatisfying results (Caldwell, 1976; Orbell et al, 1984; Dawes, 2008). Also, Chinese IR research stresses the power of rhetoric and discourse, referred to as *huayu quan* (话语权), referencing the ability of states to promote their concepts and narratives, and to shape international discussions through communication. Therefore, the rhetorical dimension was incorporated into the conceptualization of cooperation.

The four dimensions imply certain forms of either cooperative or non-cooperative behaviour of international actors.<sup>1</sup> The first is through *joint activities* in which the actors engage, either on the bilateral level or within multilateral frameworks. The second is through *formal agreements*, memoranda of understanding, or the signing and ratification of conventions. Third, the establishment of *institutionalized dialogue* formats is understood as a form of cooperation. Such institutionalized dialogue formats include all forms of dialogue that take place within the institutional policymaking settings of both actors.<sup>2</sup> And fourth, on a rhetorical level, the *articulation of a will to cooperate* or to deepen cooperation is counted as a type of cooperation.

Non-cooperation is assessed as *unilateral hostilities* directed against the other, including purposive activities to harm the other. On a formal level, non-cooperation can play out as the *revocation of formal agreements* or the interruption of processes that lead to the conclusion of a formal agreement. On an institutional level, *disrupting existing institutionalized dialogue* formats or refusing to continue discussions around a certain issue represents a form of non-cooperation. And last but not least, *criticism*, as well as explicating differences or expressing dissatisfaction over a certain behaviour of the other, can be a form of non-cooperation. Hence, this book understands (non-) cooperation as a continuum ranging from unilateral hostility as the most extreme kind of non-cooperation to joint activity as the strongest form of cooperation (see Table 2.1).

## Central concepts in the analysis of EU–China security cooperation

In this book, rationalist or interest-driven and constructivist or experience-driven approaches shall be combined. There are several reasons for doing that. First and foremost, the majority of studies that analyse EU–China relations tend to privilege interest-driven explanations and focus on material structures and their influence on the relationship. In this reading, China’s

main stance towards the EU is often presented as inherently interest-driven, focusing on trade and investments to boost China's economy. Sometimes scholars also suggest that China regards the EU mainly as an opportunity to balance US hegemony. Rationalist studies on the EU's stance towards China focus predominantly on economic entanglements and interpret the implications of China's rise for the EU mostly in terms of competition and threat. Without doubt, such rationalist or interest-driven approaches provide helpful heuristic tools for the analysis of EU–China security cooperation. For instance, they are well suited to take into consideration rational strategic culture dominated by *realpolitik* thinking and rationales driven by cost-benefit calculations. Interest-driven international theories build on the 'economism' of game theory and put national interests, complex interdependence and economic benefits to the fore – certainly dominant features in the overall EU–China relationship and significant drivers of cooperation.

However, such economy-centred explanations fall short of providing an encompassing picture of the main drivers of cooperation, the mutual perceptions of the EU and China, as well as their changing roles within the international system. Thus, it is crucial to also understand their respective identities and roles, as well as the way they interact with each other (Wong, 2013).

Accordingly, the book offers a second perspective aside from the rationalist/interest-driven approaches by focusing on mutual perceptions and identity construction, as well as on how security and certain security issues are framed by the EU and China. Surprisingly few book-length studies have addressed China's international identity, let alone the constructed arrangement of the EU–China relationship (one exception is Harnisch et al, 2016). Instead, China's identity is often taken as a 'given' – that of a recidivist fast-rising power. In addition, the focus of most studies that do consider China's identity is usually on the identity of one of China's interlocutors, be it the US, Japan, or the EU, rather than of China itself (Breslin, 2013). This book wants to appreciate the identities and perceptions that China and the EU bring to the EU–China relationship and argues that these are key to understanding the rules and the vicissitudes of this social arrangement. Smith and Vichitsorasatra (2010), for example, argue that the EU's strategic papers about its relationship with China are internally rather than externally directed. They hold that these strategy papers, rather than being a means to modify China's behaviour, serve an integrative function, expressing the desire for a collective EU position on China and reflecting the idea of a common EU identity in a changing international landscape.

From the various perspectives from which international cooperation can be viewed, two approaches – one rationalist/interest-driven and one

**Table 2.2:** Central concepts in the analysis of EU–China security cooperation

Central concepts	Rationalist or interest-driven explanation (liberal institutionalism)	Constructivist or experience-driven explanation (social constructivism)
	1) complex interdependence 2) economic interests	3) common problem understanding 4) mutual perceptions

Source: Author.

constructivist/experience-driven – seem to be most helpful in assessing EU–China security cooperation. These are liberal-institutionalism and social constructivism. The liberal-institutionalist lens offers insight into the rationalist drivers to cooperation by focusing on the economic dimension. It emphasizes economic preferences and economic benefits as dominant drivers of cooperation. Similarly, liberal institutionalism underlines the impact of complex interdependence on international cooperation, resulting from globalization and the ongoing interconnection of economies worldwide. Looking at EU–China security cooperation from a social constructivist prism, in turn, helps to explain how the EU and China understand their own roles vis-à-vis each other as well as how they perceive the respective ‘other’. It further offers a way of understanding the two actors’ converging and diverging conceptions of security and how these framings translate into cooperation or non-cooperation.

These two approaches suggest four major concepts to assess EU–China security cooperation: complex interdependence, economic interests, (a common) problem understanding and mutual perceptions (see [Table 2.2](#)).

The analysis in the following chapters will be guided by these four concepts that serve as heuristic tools to examine the empirical case studies.

### *Complex interdependence*

Complex interdependence is defined, following Keohane and Nye (1977), as a form of mutual dependence. It refers to situations that are characterized by reciprocal entanglements between two countries. Complex interdependence describes the degree to which security cooperation is driven by the need to work together, either based on economic entanglements or because of the global and interconnected nature of many security issues on the international stage. The underlying argument is that if states are bound in complex interdependence, they are inclined to cooperate. Interdependence should not be confused with connectedness. Interdependence is only present if interaction has costs for both the EU and China, albeit not necessarily in a symmetrical way. Whenever interaction does not have such costs, we can speak of connectedness. Interdependence evolves in the context of

globalization as ‘an array of multiple transboundary forces and processes that reduce national control over what happens within national boundaries and enable a set of new political actors to project social, economic, and political influence over a long distance’ (Zhao and Liu, 2010, p 2). Therefore, economically interdependent actors such as the EU and China are believed to have a strong interest in avoiding conflict and preserving peace. However, interdependence can also take other forms and evolve in the context of global governance issues within which states are interdependent because none of them can tackle these issues unilaterally.

Two important indicators for complex interdependence are sensitivity and vulnerability. Interdependent actors are bound to cooperate rather than to not cooperate or to compete, because interdependence increases the sensitivity and vulnerability of actors and reduces the possibility of meeting common needs unilaterally since the realization of mutual interests depends equally on both sides’ decisions and actions. ‘Sensitivity involves degrees of responsiveness within a policy framework’ (Keohane and Nye, 1977, p 12) and includes costs that occur if a state does not react to changes in a connected state. ‘Vulnerability can be defined as an actor’s liability to suffer costs imposed by external events even after policies have been altered’ (Keohane and Nye, 1977, p 13) and implies costs that occur despite political reactions to changes in another state. In other words, vulnerability is high if either the EU or China has to adopt long-term political measures to adapt to changes caused by the other. The dimension of vulnerability is more influential for EU–China interactions and is particularly relevant for the analysis of the structure of relations between the two. Thus, interdependence can be both the condition and cause for EU–China security cooperation. It is expected that the higher the degree of complex interdependence between the EU and China, the more likely security cooperation becomes.

Besides the two mentioned indicators, complex interdependence can be assessed through the following three factors. First, by the existence of multiple channels of communication that connect the EU and China on formal and informal levels. Second, the agenda of the EU–China security relationship is believed to consist of several issues that do not have a clear hierarchy. Accordingly, there is an absence of hierarchy among issues. This implies, among other things, that military security does not dominate the agenda and that the distinction between domestic and foreign policy issues becomes blurred. It is assumed that these policies require constant coordination in order to avoid costs emanating from inadequate handling. Another impact of this blurring is that different issues can generate different forms of relationships between the EU and China. While they engage in cooperation on one issue (e.g., security), they can compete on another (e.g., human rights). And finally, complex interdependence is assessed by the absence of the use of military force.

**Table 2.3:** Operationalization of the concept of ‘complex interdependence’

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
Multiple channels of communication	Communication channels exist on various levels between the EU and China – interstate, transgovernmental and transnational
Absence of hierarchy among issues	Implies that the distinction between domestic and foreign policy becomes blurred → foreign policies touch domestic activity
Absence of use of force	Implies that the EU and China are not engaged in any form of violent or military conflict in which the use of force or the threat of such use is prevalent
Vulnerability	Implies all forms of costs that occur through non-cooperation, applies whenever the EU and/or China mention the ‘necessity’, ‘urgency’ or ‘inevitableness’ of cooperation, or point towards possible costs that might emanate from non-cooperation
Sensitivity	Involves degrees of responsiveness: policies in China are sensitive to policies in the EU and vice versa

Table 2.3 summarizes how the different indicators of complex interdependence are understood and applied throughout the analysis.

### *Economic interests and commercial preferences*

Cooperation between the EU and China in the security realm can also stem from pre-existing complementary state preferences (Keohane and Martin, 1995; Keohane, 2005). Despite the individualist logic that states follow, they may find themselves in situations in which pursuing their own interests individually can lead to suboptimal outcomes (Rittberger and Zürn, 1990; Zürn, 1992). Such situations spark the necessity and desire to find cooperative solutions and thereby avoid a suboptimal outcome. To solve common problems and to gain benefits in areas of complementary interests, the EU and China need to cooperate to achieve their goals (Nye, 1990). Hence, cooperation is considered to create win-win situations within the anarchic international system. However, complementary interests in themselves do not lead to cooperation. Keohane argues that it is crucial to distinguish sharply between cooperation, harmony and discord. When harmony prevails among states, it inevitably leads to increased policy conformity. When discord dominates, none of the actors has an incentive to change its behaviour towards more cooperation (Keohane, 1988). As mentioned before, cooperation ‘requires that the actions of separate individuals or organisations – which are not in pre-existent harmony – be brought into conformity with one another through a process of policy coordination’ (Keohane, 1988, p 380). In this regard, it is not only the configuration of capabilities (as in realism) or of institutions (as

in institutionalism) that matter, but also the configuration of state preferences (Oye, 1986; Moravcsik, 1997b). Accordingly, cooperation is considered an outcome of strategic considerations by the actors involved after they weigh the costs and benefits of each course of action.

Departing from this, cooperation between the EU and China in the security realm is supposed to emerge when it fosters economic benefits and serves commercial or material interests, or when the actors share a ‘fundamental interest in self-preservation and material well-being’ (Owen, 1994, p 89). Competition or conflict, in contrast, arises when commercial interests contradict each other or when gains for one imply losses for the other. Such an approach to international cooperation does not consider cooperation as a ‘zero-sum game’, where the gains of one would be the losses of the other. Instead, cooperation is characterized as a ‘positive-sum game’ that enhances prosperity and gains on both sides (Powell, 1991b; Keohane and Martin, 1995; Moravcsik, 1997b). This does not imply that conflict or competition does not exist, but that the focus is on the economic benefits that can be gained from cooperation. Therefore, cooperation is most likely to emerge when it either serves domestic economic interests or prevents economic losses. It is expected that the more economic interests are at stake, the more security cooperation emerges between the EU and China.

The liberal-institutionalist principles informing this assumption find very interesting parallels in the Confucian concept of reciprocity, which puts forward that in a relational world, interests are best achieved through joint actions. As Qin contends, from a Chinese perspective, ‘reciprocity is thus the golden rule for the realisation of self-interest’ (Qin, 2018, p 303).

To get an idea of the role of economic interests and commercial preferences in the emergence of EU–China security cooperation, the first indicator is statistical information about trade flows, imports and exports that concern security in general or particular security issues. As these indicators can only be detected for some security issues yet not for all, statements about economic interests or threats to those can alternatively indicate whether economic interests or commercial preferences play a role. Hence, the data is examined for indications that point towards economic interests or commercial preferences, including all references to economic interests in the realm of security or ‘threats to economic interests’,<sup>3</sup> including all references to possible damage of economic interests that potentially or actually emanate from a certain security threat.

Table 2.4 sums up how these two different indicators are understood and applied throughout the analysis.

### *Identity and mutual perceptions*

Constructivist explanations of international cooperation emphasize the role of norms, ideas and perceptions (Wendt, 1992; Katzenstein, 1996). They

**Table 2.4:** Operationalization of the concept of ‘economic interests and commercial preferences’

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
Economic interests	Includes all indications of economic interests and current or future economic projects that touch upon security or a particular security issue
Threats to economic interests	Includes all indications that point towards threats to economic interests or national wellbeing

contend that the perceptions and identities of decision-makers are shaped by domestic processes of socialization, social learning and norm diffusion (Kodré and Müller, 2003; Checkel, 2011). This book follows Katzenstein’s understanding of identity as a shorthand for varying constructions of nationhood and statehood, national ideologies, collective distinctiveness, and purpose Katzenstein, 1996, p 24. All interactions between individuals, states, governments or international organizations are social constructions with particular patterns and rules (Onuf, 1985). Appreciating their respective identities can add value to analyses of the development and construction of a (social) relationship. This assumption is based on the argument that identity is always relational and only shows itself during moments of interaction, when one actor interacts with another and forms an image of the ‘self’ and the respective ‘other’. As states ‘act [...] on the basis of meanings grounded in the conceptions that they hold vis-à-vis themselves and other states’ (Wendt, 1992, p 397), there is a connection between states’ mutual perceptions and their foreign policy behaviour.

This understanding also reveals that identities are not only based on states’ beliefs about themselves, but also on the beliefs that they hold about others. In addition, ‘through repeated acts of reciprocal cooperation, actors form mutual expectations that enable them to continue cooperating’ (Wendt, 1994, p 390). This notion is also prominent in Chinese IR literature, which puts the impact of relationality to the forefront, focusing on the relational aspects of state interactions. Indeed, the Chinese view of the international community sees international relations as taking place between related actors (Qin, 2016). Hence, it is assumed, in line with Wendt’s understanding, that human actors are more likely to cooperate the more positively related they are to each other (Qin, 2018). This assumption is closely connected to the Confucian belief in humaneness and intimacy (親親 *qinqin*) as one of the drivers of cooperation.

Changes in the identities of actors can lead to altered prospects for cooperation (Bengtsson and Elgström, 2012; Thies and Breuning, 2012). While early constructivists developed different identity conceptions and

focused on the ego dimension, namely the 'self' (Holsti, 1970, 1992), this concept was expanded to incorporate an alter dimension. It also finds references in Chinese IR:

It is in the practices and processes that the normative and ideational structure of the international system is produced and developed. Intersubjectivity not only forms rules and norms, but also reflects the dynamism of the ego-alter relationship in a context based on these norms and rules, enabling action in interaction to gain shared meaning. (Qin, 2009, p 9)

In this regard, cooperation is considered to be one specific type of interaction that states choose deliberately when their identities vis-à-vis each other match. This does not mean that mutual perceptions necessarily have to converge for the emergence of cooperation in a specific policy area, but it does indicate that at least some of the underlying beliefs and ideas have to be compatible. Thus, the 'character of the interaction depends on the degree of congruence in norms and worldviews between the partners and their relative positions in the international system, ranging from competitive to accordant' (Michalski and Pan, 2017, p 612). When examining the emergence of cooperative agreements, constructivists tend to put identity at the centre of their analysis (Checkel, 2011). According to social constructivism, the meaning and construction of anarchy at the international level as well as the interest distribution among states depends to a high degree on the respective perceptions that states hold of each other (Wendt, 1994; Katzenstein, 1996).

Three different cultures of perceptions of the 'other' in the international system can be distinguished: 'enmity', 'rivalry' and 'friendship' (Wendt, 1999). The main assumption deriving from this distinction is that states act differently towards each other depending on the perception of the other as either a friend, a rival or an enemy. Likewise, the rules and logics of interaction and engagement of states with each other vary according to their perceptions (of one another). While friends tend to form alliances or deepen their overall alignment, rivals or competitors pursue more pragmatic interactions. Enemies might not interact at all or might act to harm the other. This differentiation is an important analytical raster when it comes to assessing the emergence and depth of (non-)cooperation between actors in the international system. For instance, Owen argues that ideologies might be the most crucial factor in influencing two actors to form an alliance (Owen, 1994). However, others argue that national interests – although socially constructed through states and their citizens – can determine who joins which alliances (Finnemore, 1996). Interactions of various kinds can lead to gradual shifts in a country's strategic culture, the norms of international behaviour and ultimately their conceptions of the 'self' and the 'other'.



The reference to mechanisms such as persuasion and socialization indicates a strong interactionist component of constructivism (Michalski and Pan, 2017; Klose, 2018). Interaction can not only alter actors' identities, but also affect mutual perceptions. While certain structural demands of the international system are fixed, perceptions of other agents can change whenever states interact with each other. The literature suggests that two elements of socialization are dominant in EU–China relations: emulation and (social) learning. While the latter emphasizes interaction and conscious adoption of alternative frames of mind, emulation is less interactive and less conscious (Simmons and Elkins, 2004). Social learning seems more suited to explain the emergence of cooperation. From Wendt's structural conception it follows that the status of states as international actors and the role(s) they play in the international system influence a state's position in the international social order (Wendt, 1992). Thies and Breuning (2012) concretize this by linking state socialization and foreign policy, which they describe as a socialization game that takes place through the interaction among states that negotiate over the attribution of identities in the international system.

Thus, socialization – understood as a process not an outcome, as the re-negotiation of the social order implies (Thies and Breuning, 2012) – is a prominent driver of cooperation in the international system. Socialization can be described as a continuous process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community. Accordingly, the longer states interact with each other, the stronger the effects of socialization become. Socialization is therefore primarily a social process. Following this path, socialization becomes the key to a process of mutual constitution in which the structure is defined in social terms through shared ideas and understandings, and the ideas and understandings in turn define the units' identity and interests. Thus, socialization has a strong interactionist component. The general emphasis of socialization is on the effects that continuous interaction has on relations between states as well as on their perceptions of rules and norms.

The constructivist understanding of socialization includes both a time component and norm diffusion. The main assumption is that actors participating in institutional arrangements, be it on the bilateral or the multilateral level, are likely to develop similar perceptions of rules and norms. The longer two or more actors participate in an institutional arrangement and the more intense the contact is, the more likely socialization effects become. These effects change the perception of what is appropriate behaviour and how the actors involved perceive each other. Interaction between states can affect states' external expectations (Qin, 2009, 2018) of each other and increases the density of reciprocal information.

Over the course of the analysis, mutual perceptions in EU–China relations shall be examined using five major categories that capture different forms of perceptions. Building on, yet extending Wendt's distinction between

‘friends’, ‘rivals’ and ‘enemies’ (Wendt, 1999), these categories range from very positive (friend) towards very negative (enemy):

- friend
- partner
- necessary counterpart
- rival
- enemy

Wendt’s distinction is a good starting point. ‘Friends’ tend to be bound in alliances and trust each other. If they cooperate it is because of an alignment of ideas, norms or values. Furthermore, they identify with and are empathetic with each other. Rivals, in contrast, compete with each other, which can include the use of violence, albeit in a limited and calculated manner. ‘Enemies’ consider each other threatening adversaries and intend to harm the other, including with the use of force.

Nevertheless, two categories are added with the aim of capturing in a more differentiated manner the different perceptions that the EU and China have of each other. The development of the additional two categories is further informed by the knowledge gained during the mapping. A preliminary glimpse at parts of the empirical material showed that there were perceptions that were not positive enough to be characterized as ‘friendly’ yet not negative enough to be coded as ‘rival’. Accordingly, ‘partner’ and ‘necessary counterpart’ were added. ‘Partner’ implies that the EU and China align

**Table 2.5:** Operationalization of the concept of ‘mutual perceptions’

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
Friend	Friends tend to be bound in alliances, trust each other and do not necessarily expect something in return for services; their relationship extends beyond pragmatic win-win constellations that promote mutual benefits to cooperation because of aligning ideas, norms and values
Partner	Partners align for the purpose of creating win-win situations and mutual benefits or reduced costs; their relationship is often limited to certain situations (temporally) or issue areas; partners trust each other
Necessary counterpart	Necessary counterparts work together although they might lack trust; ideas, norms and values might be diverging and cooperation only occurs because of the necessity to do so or because an issue can only be tackled through collaboration; their relationship is always limited to certain situations (temporally) or issue areas
Rival	Rivals compete with each other, including through the limited and calculated use of violence to maximize interests
Enemy	Enemies are characterized by threatening each other with violent actions

for the purpose of creating win-win situations and mutual benefits or reduced costs. The relationship of ‘partners’ is limited to certain situations (temporally) or issue areas. Like friends, partners also trust each other. Yet the main difference between partners and friends is that the alignment of friends is driven by a notion of appropriateness and derives from converging norms and values. To be partners, norms and values do not necessarily need to converge. ‘Necessary counterparts’ work together although they might lack trust. Their respective ideas, norms and values might diverge and cooperation only occurs out of necessity or because an issue can only be tackled through collaboration. These different perceptions have different rules of engagement, interaction logics and systemic tendencies. Table 2.5 sums up how the different categories can be understood in detail.

### *Convergent framing and understanding of the problem*

Besides mutual perceptions, a convergent understanding of a certain security issue or security threat is one possible motive for seeking cooperation. In general, the understanding of threats and the reactions to them has been a key topic in research on intergroup conflicts as well as in research on cooperation in IR (see for example [Jervis, 1976](#); [Benford and Snow, 2000](#)). Common understandings and intersubjective beliefs ([Hasenclever et al, 1996, 1997, 2000](#)) about the world and its constitution are confirmed by social practice ([Wendt, 1992](#); [Farrell, 2002](#)) as the primary trigger for collaboration. Common understandings are not only the aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but [also] the outcome of negotiating shared meaning ([Gamson, 1992](#)). As states share properties concerning their corporate identity, they have complementary interests ([Wendt, 1994](#)). Therefore, constructivists stress the importance of common goals for cooperation. In the case of security relations, such common goals and mutual interests can derive from a similar definition of a problem:

Before states can agree on whether and how to deal collectively with a specific problem, they must reach some consensus about the nature and the scope of the problem and also about the manner in which the problem relates to other concerns in the same and additional issue-areas. ([Haas, 1992](#), p 29)

Vice versa, a lack of shared understanding of a problem can impede cooperation. This assumption is closely related to Mancur Olson’s description of a collective action problem ([Olson, 1965](#); [Hardin, 1982](#)), which arises when two actors lack the ability to create collective interests and overcome their purely national self-interests ([Olson, 1965](#); [Wendt, 1994](#)). Such a lack of common understanding can be a constraint for further cooperation ([Pan,](#)

2010; Gottwald and Duggan, 2012) but does not necessarily impede it. Thus, a minimum shared understanding concerning the issue at stake is necessary to agree on a form of cooperation (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986). Kratochwil and Ruggie call this a ‘principled and shared understanding’ (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986, p 764) and thereby name the convergence of expectations as an important condition or constitutive basis for cooperation. Cooperation can then either arise tacitly, as the actors’ expectations converge (Axelrod and Keohane, 1985), or after a process of communication in which the actors informed each other about their understanding of the issue under scrutiny.

To compare the Chinese and European understanding of security as a policy field or of specific security issues, different categories are examined throughout the analysis:

- scope of definition
- type of security
- target
- institutional responsibility
- extent of salience
- political values

The *scope of definition* can either be very narrow and specific, or rather broad and vague. For a specific or narrow definition, one would expect very

**Table 2.6:** Operationalization of the concept of ‘common framing and understanding of the problem’

Indicator	Description
Scope of definition	Includes whether the EU’s and China’s definitions of security or a particular security issue is narrow and specific, or broad and vague
Target	Includes which target the EU and China consider most important, relevant or affected by a security issue/threat (e.g. does it affect domestic concerns or global concerns?)
Institutional responsibility	Includes the institutional framework within which the security issue is handled (e.g. whether it is embedded in the foreign and security policymaking apparatus or in homeland security, whether it takes place within multilateral frameworks or on a bilateral level)
Extent of salience	Includes whether security as a policy field or the respective security issue is of high, medium or low salience for the EU and China based on their exposure to the issue and possible vulnerability
Type of security	Includes whether the security issue is defined as a traditional or non-traditional aspect of security
Political values	Includes the political values that are attached to the security issue and to threats that emanate from it (e.g. human rights, sovereignty, territorial integrity)

concrete information about what constitutes security. A broad or vague definition, in contrast, would leave room for interpretation and questions, and would not describe the phenomenon specifically. The *type of security* describes whether the EU and China view the security issues under scrutiny as traditional or non-traditional security issues. The *target* specifies whom the EU and China see as the main target of security threats. These can be domestic targets, international targets, specific institutions or geographical areas. *Institutional responsibility* captures how the security issue is tackled within the political institutions of the EU and China. The *extent of salience* describes whether security/the respective security issue is of high, medium or low salience for the EU and China based on their exposure to the issue and possible vulnerability. Furthermore, the book examines which *political values* or foreign policy principles are attached to the security issue (see [Chapter 3](#)).

Table 2.6 sums up how these categories should be understood in detail.

### **Data collection: researching ‘security’ in sensitive settings**

Having introduced the merits of a combinatory, theory-led approach to explaining EU–China security cooperation, some reflection about the process of data collection is required in order to explain the eclectic choice of data sources. In what follows, this section will briefly discuss the pitfalls of researching ‘security’ in a politically sensitive setting like authoritarian China and will briefly explain the strategies employed to collect data. It further outlines the types of data collected for the analysis and explains their respective potentials and disadvantages.

Researching security in an authoritarian state is all but straightforward ([Sieber and Stanley, 1988](#); [Renzetti and Lee, 1993](#); [Ansorg, 2019](#); [Grimm et al, 2020](#); [Gurok and Wetterich, 2020](#)). One of the main challenges during the process of data collection in security-sensitive settings is to find a balance between searching for access to data and the risk of bad data quality due to biased information or low data saturation ([Glasius et al, 2018](#)). These challenges are especially high if the researched topic is sensitive, like the policy field of security in EU–China relations. Without adhering to the assumption that ‘work on authoritarian regimes should obviously not be held to the same evidentiary standards as work on the advanced industrial democracies’ ([Art, 2012](#), p 365), it is nevertheless crucial to critically discuss methods to work around the risks of low data saturation, biased information and restricted access to the field.

Lack of transparency when it comes to written sources, difficulties in accessing the field and the sensitivity of the subject under study are some of the major limitations of researching EU–China security cooperation.

Even though China frequently publishes policy papers and white papers, this does not automatically mean that the data is comprehensive or accurate. Yet, for the purpose of analysis, these government sources have been used despite the incongruities.

Keeping these discrepancies in mind, official policy documents, white papers, reports or declarations, if treated carefully, are critical sources to capture the official narratives on the EU built by the Chinese government. They thus help to retrace official discourses and partly provide insight into dominant thinking sets in Chinese foreign policy, and partly reveal how the Chinese leadership communicates its relationship with the EU to the public. In other words, official policy sources add to the understanding of the elite perspective on EU–China security relations. Similarly, Speeches and other forms of communication explicitly or implicitly carry political ideas (Townshend, 2003; Charteris-Black, 2005, 2014). However, these cannot necessarily be interpreted as ‘true’ representations of what policymakers think or know about their state’s or organization’s position in the international system. Instead, the documents have been chosen precisely for their function as stylized expressions of role perceptions and role positions commonly used in diplomatic contexts directed at other states and the general public (Michalski and Pan, 2017).

Legal documents pose the risk of concealing the informal processes and considerations behind a certain decision or action (George and Bennett, 2005) in particular in authoritarian settings, so they were supplemented with a little more than 685 media documents from *China Daily*, *Global Times*, *Xinhua News Agency* and the *South China Morning Post* on the Chinese side, and the *EU Observer* and *Politico EU* on the European side.

In addition to these written forms of data, interviews can corroborate processes of action and interaction and enable inferences about what people think. In this way, they can help to reconstruct activities and decisions post-hoc (Beamer, 2002; Leech, 2002; Tansey, 2007; Gläser and Laudel, 2010; Grimm et al, 2020). Interviews are a cost-effective means of generating unique, reliable and valid data, and go beyond the official statements issued by the EU and China to extract underlying causalities. Especially in the Chinese case, interviews offer the possibility to go beyond the dominant thinking sets that have emerged in Chinese foreign policy studies (Xu and Du, 2015). These are stereotyped ways of thinking about China’s foreign policy and are prominently quoted especially in Western IR scholars’ research about China. Moreover, interviews provide the possibility to go beyond official statements and declarations, which often either convey a certain message or conceal important pieces of information, especially in the authoritarian Chinese case. Yet, interpreting information provided in interviews taken in the Chinese context, researchers need to be aware of the principle of *mianzi* (面子). *Mianzi* relates to the Chinese concept of

preserving face and could best be characterized as ‘the recognition by others of one’s social standing and position’ (Lockett, 1988, np). Hence, *mianzi* can occur in that interviewees respond in a way that might preserve their face instead of being fully honest (Buckley et al, 2006; Zhou and Baptista Nunes, 2013; Cui, 2015). This needs to be kept in mind when interpreting interviews conducted in the Chinese context.

All the abovementioned forms of data have been carefully triangulated to enhance the credibility of the analysis (Flick, 2004; Denzin, 2009; Salkind, 2010; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of EU–China security cooperation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the analytical framework of this book and introduced the main concepts that shall serve as heuristic tools for the ensuing analysis. A theory-led approach to explaining EU–China security cooperation can help to disentangle the empirical complexity and unearth the driving factors that contribute to the emergence of security cooperation. Moreover, a combinatory approach that builds a bridge between the two dominant schools of thought that are competing for superiority in IR research, namely rationalism and constructivism, by linking interest-driven concepts such as complex interdependence and economic or material preferences with experience-based concepts such as the framing of security or mutual perceptions will help to conjoin rationalist strategic culture dominated by *realpolitik* thinking and rationalist considerations of costs and benefits with norms, values, role conceptions and mutual perceptions that shape the interactions between the EU and China. This eclectic choice of concepts has the potential to better capture the complexity and messiness of EU–China security relations in their overall scope and degree (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010). In constructing substantive arguments that take this complexity into consideration, being eclectic promises to capture the interactions between different types of causal mechanisms that would otherwise be analysed in isolation. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the book aims to go beyond the binary of assessing China’s standing with the EU as either a threat or an opportunity. Thereby, the dominant thinking sets that derive from applying mostly rationalist interest-based frameworks to the analysis of EU–China relations shall be overcome and the combinatory logic of analytical eclecticism carried huge potential for developing a clearer and more encompassing picture of the context and drivers of EU–China security cooperation. Moreover, constructivist readings of international cooperation in particular find interesting parallels in Chinese IR thought – for example, the concept of relationality as opposed to the primarily systemic readings of rationalist Western IR theories. As deduced from the Confucian worldview

(Qin, 2018), notions such as reciprocity and relationality reveal the necessity to include constructivist explanations for international cooperation, while still taking into account the role of self-interest and the maximization of economic gains.

The attempt to bridge existing divides further informs the collection of data for the analysis. To go beyond the somewhat Eurocentric but very dominant thinking sets that have emerged in Western IR on the role of China in international politics and to include the Chinese perspective on security cooperation with the EU, both European and Chinese sources inform the analysis.

This chapter has further introduced the novel multidimensional frame of (non-)cooperation that incorporates the action, formal, institutional and rhetorical dimensions, and thereby stresses the importance of narratives and discourse when it comes to cooperation between the EU and China. This is based on the assumption that rhetorical acts can indeed create political momentum and thereby make a difference in everyday foreign policymaking.



# The EU's and China's Foreign and Security Policy Principles

## Introduction

The EU and China are undoubtedly very different actors in terms of their founding ideals, their normative moralities and aspirations, and the roots of their foreign and security principles. However, both are relatively new players on the international stage, both build on primarily economic integration and interests and have 'deeply ingrained preferences' (Christiansen et al, 2019, p 3) for economic wealth, stability and prosperity. To understand why it is so striking that the EU and China cooperate in the security realm, it is crucial to grasp the underlying principles on which they each base their foreign and security policymaking.

At first glance, the difference is evident: the EU is arguably a very normative actor – in terms of both its self-conception as well as how it is seen by others. It has by and large been described as a 'normative power' (Manners, 2002, p 253; Aggestam, 2008) striving for rules-based action and institution-building rather than ad hoc decision-making and interest-based politics. In the famous words of Ian Manners, the EU possesses 'the ability to define what passes for normal in world politics' (Manners, 2002, p 242). Values such as democracy, rule of law and human rights are thus at the core of the EU's identity.<sup>1</sup> This reading neatly aligns with how the EU tends to understand its own role on the international stage, following in its policymaking an inherent logic of appropriateness (Onuf, 1985; Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986; Wendt, 1992). Accordingly, the EU can be understood as a 'rule-maker' or 'norm-maker' in world politics (Björkdahl, 2005). Although this role has been increasingly contested in the past decade (Diez, 2013; Acharya, 2016) both through internal skirmishes among EU member states as well as by external challenges on the level of international politics (Gurol and Rodríguez, 2020), the EU's foreign and security policy can still be understood, above all, as one that

prioritizes normativity (Eriksen, 2014; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014; Sjursen and Rosén, 2017).

China, in contrast, is most commonly considered an inherently pragmatic and rationalist actor, following a logic of consequentialism. Its foreign policy model appears to be opposed to the normative prioritizations of the EU and to put a downright pragmatic approach to the forefront. On the international stage, China often plays with a double identity: a ‘weak power’ face and a ‘strong power’ projection. The weak power face is deeply steeped in China’s history and refers to the narrative of a century of humiliation (Christiansen et al, 2019). This century includes the Chinese experiences with imperialist powers that caused a near-destruction of China’s century-long superiority and resulted in a ‘deep sense of victimhood’ (Christiansen et al, 2019, p 56). This sense of victimhood is often invoked to nurture patriotism and request indulgence, putting forward the argument that China was treated badly by imperialists and is thus entitled to a great degree of lenience and support whenever this perception seems useful (Wu, 2004). This reveals how China’s foreign policy is deeply steeped in its past and how historic experiences are used to stress the need for national sovereignty and territorial integrity. At other times, China presents itself as a rising and strong power and wants to be treated as an equal on the international stage (Guo, 2004).

Struggling to find a balance between these two faces – maintaining national sovereignty and avoiding external influences on the one hand and integrating into the international system on the other – China’s identity can be described as neo-mercantilist and is clearly oriented towards power politics. This in turn leads to a mixture of strong internal control of the political apparatus and the upsurge of new bilateral and multilateral cooperation projects. In other words, China’s foreign policy is characterized by a bewildering mixture of closing-off and opening-up (Geeraerts, 2011). This understanding aligns with China’s refraining from articulating normative goals and focusing on economic gains and benefits. Thus, the Chinese leadership pursues a policymaking approach that is regularly described as pragmatic (Cheng, 2019), explicitly abstains from a declaration of far-reaching norms or abstract principles and concentrates on economic gains, dealing with problems in a practical way. Thereby, Chinese foreign policy is based on self-declared flexibility, informality and consensus-based pragmatism (Zhang, 2010; Grimmel and Gurol, forthcoming) that are often interpreted as a counter-model to that of the EU, challenging current structures and the modus operandi in regional and international politics (Breslin, 2013; Finamore, 2017a).

According to Grimmel and Gurol (forthcoming), the EU’s ‘compromise-based normativity’ versus China’s ‘consensus-based pragmatism’ find their way into their foreign and security policy decision-making processes. In particular, the European and the Chinese approaches differ with regard to

**Table 3.1:** Categories of normative and pragmatic prioritization

	<b>EU – normative prioritization</b>	<b>China – pragmatic prioritization</b>
<b>Basis of decision-making</b>	principles, norms	problem-specific
<b>Preference of agreements</b>	‘principled’ multilateralism	‘diminished’ multilateralism or multiple bilateralism
<b>Mode of decision-making</b>	consensus-based	compromise-based
<b>Political planning</b>	long-term	ad hoc

Source: [Grimmel and Gurol, forthcoming](#).

the basis for decision-making, the preference of agreements, their modes of decision-making and the form of political planning that they pursue (see [Table 3.1](#)).

At second glance, these fundamentally different prioritizations are only the tip of the iceberg of what influences the European and Chinese modes of foreign and security policy decision-making. Looking closer at actual policies, we can see that their underlying identities translate into certain foreign and security policy principles that can best be summarized by three major cleavages: (1) ‘sovereignty’ versus ‘integration’, (2) ‘principled’ versus Chinese multilateralism and (3) ‘good governance’ versus ‘China first’.

## **Sovereignty versus integration**

For China, its sovereignty (*zhongguo zhuquan* 中国主权) is the main principle on which it bases its foreign and security policy, followed by territorial integrity (*lingtu wanzheng* 领土完整) and non-interference (*bu ganshe* 不干涉). Those principles have been inviolable over the past decades of EU–China relations, are deeply rooted in the country’s traditions and serve the domestic concerns, such as stability and regime survival, of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ([Huotari et al, 2017](#)). These doctrines originate from the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’, formulated in the 1954 ‘Agreement on Trade and Intercourse’ between the Tibet region of China and India, and have become basic norms by now, shaping China’s relations with other states ([MFA, 1954](#)).<sup>2</sup> Even during the opening-up of Chinese foreign policy towards a more active, innovative player in the international arena in the reform era, those principles have endured ([Kejing, 2013](#)). And even more, the ‘ability to maintain China’s sovereignty internally and externally, has become the *raison d’être* of any Chinese government regardless of its ideological standing’ ([Shan, 2008](#), p 57). Despite certain shifts towards a more liberal interpretation of non-interference, the principles still feature

prominently in official Chinese rhetoric and are even part of the preamble of the Chinese constitution.

The country's adherence to more traditional approaches to sovereignty translates into a general disapproval of foreign intervention (Finamore, 2017b). Consequently, China protects its own national territorial integrity and sovereignty aggressively against any form of foreign interference and domination, as seen in the dispute over the South China Sea (SCS) and in China's behaviour towards Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan. Yet China's ambition to be perceived as a great power nation and its new responsibilities as such, have altered the principles of sovereignty and non-interference or at least changed their implementation.

While for decades, the principle of non-interference has been interpreted as a strict disapproval of any form of external intervention, China has become one of the biggest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations regarding the provision of peacekeeping personnel since the early 1990s (He, 2018). The People's Republic even voted in favour of the A/RES/60/1 Resolution at the UN World Summit in 2005, which endorsed the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P). Furthermore, it has invoked the R2P code in multiple countries since then: Congo and Burundi (2006), Darfur (2006), Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, South Sudan and Yemen (2011), Mali (2012), Somalia (2013), and Syria (2014, after a period of opposition) under the condition that all parties involved must approve of the external intervention. Yet China interprets the doctrine of responsibility to protect differently than most of the other UN member states (Fung, 2020) that adhere to this principle. It urges a constrained, multilateral approach to the application of R2P. Hence, it supports pillars one and two of the doctrine, which state that every country has the responsibility to protect its populations and that the international community has the responsibility to encourage each state to meet this objective. However, China is reluctant to activate the third pillar which says that the international community must take collective action and intervene in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter if a state is no longer able to protect its citizens on its own.

Thus, the Chinese leadership is unwilling to permit the actual use of force unless the principle is appealed to strictly within the boundaries of the 2005 World Summit Outcome language (Chen, 2016a).<sup>3</sup> Another piece of evidence that the former constitutional foreign policy paradigm of non-interference is changing or being interpreted more pragmatically (Duchâtel et al, 2014) are developments in the Middle East and Africa, where China has somehow interfered unprecedentedly in the Syrian conflict (Calabrese, 2019), has started to play a crucial and consequential role in Sudan (Large, 2008) and constructed its first military base outside China in Djibouti in 2016 (Sun and Zoubir, 2020).<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, the EU takes a very different stance towards territorial integrity and sovereignty. Already institutionally, the making of foreign policy relies on the intricate intergovernmental and supranational interaction between various actors on different levels – EU institutions such as the EU Commission or the EP, the different EU member states, interest groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This hybrid structure, which reflects intergovernmentalism and supranationalism as two constituting features of the EU in institutional terms, determines to a significant degree how the EU behaves in world politics and shapes its consensus-based process of decision-making.

In fact, state sovereignty in the EU is a contradiction in terms, as the member states decided to pool their sovereignty in various policy fields and transfer it to a European governance system (Sjursen, 2006, p 242). On the contrary, the principle of sovereignty, if understood in the Chinese way, would contradict the actual constitution of the EU, with its intergovernmental and supranational institutions, common laws and wide-ranging regulations, which the different member states adopt voluntarily. The EU, as a product of integration through law, conducts most foreign policy activities through legal agreements with third countries, and is governed by formal agreements and institutionalized arrangements that provide a certain degree of long-term stability (Christiansen et al, 2019). Thus, consensus among member states is a key characteristic of EU foreign policymaking, although it is often the biggest obstacle too, as every decision relies on the intricate interaction of a number of actors on the European and national levels.

When it comes to (military, economic or other) interventions or interferences in other countries, the EU considers itself a humanitarian actor and as such does intervene worldwide. Since 2003, it has carried out more than 30 civilian missions and military operations on three continents in reaction to crises. In June 2018, it had six ongoing military missions and ten civilian missions. With the finalization of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU expanded its powers to take a leading role in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian interventions and crisis management, using civilian and military instruments (EEAS, 2018a). Concerning the role of global governance, the EU has become one of its most vigorous promoters (Telò, 2007; Wunderlich, 2015).

## **Principled versus Chinese multilateralism**

Another principle that differs significantly between the EU and China is their approach to global governance and multilateralism or multipolarity. Multilateralism means the joint action of several states working together to increase the efficiency and practicability of their foreign policies (Ruggie, 1993; Scott, 2007). Multipolarity stems from the negative experiences of a bipolar

world order during the Cold War and focuses on balancing the heft of prevailing powers and hegemony by distributing power among multiple important actors in the international system (Odgaard and Biscop, 2007). Multilateralism contains a higher degree of cooperation, not only between the dominant great powers, but also among all states in the global environment (Ruggie, 1992). Global governance, in turn, results from both concepts and describes the attempt to manage global-scale problems. It stems from the shift towards a governance system in which political actors of all kinds, including transnational and non-state actors, intend to deal with the transnational consequences of globalization and tackle shared problems (Buchanan and Keohane, 2006).

To understand the origins of the different interpretations of multilateralism by the EU and China, we need to go back in history a little bit. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Chinese scholars started to promote an international system structured by ‘one superpower with multiple powers’ (*yi chao duo qiang* 一超多强). This concept entails an international order based on several great powers, a multipolar system. Developing not only into one of the most powerful economic players since the announcement of the ‘reform and open-door’ policy by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, but also evolving into the world’s second-highest military spender (Roser and Magdy, 2020), China has become a key pole in the international system (Geeraerts, 2011). Under the former CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao (2002–12), Chinese foreign policy was characterized by a strong adherence to multipolarity in order to tackle the international isolation of China. However, this mostly meant adherence to the so-called *tao guang yang hui* (韬光养晦) doctrine, meaning to ‘coldly observe, secure our positions, cope calmly, conceal our capabilities and bide our time, keep a low profile, never take the lead and make a contribution’ (Xiong Guangkai, quoted in Ferdinand 2016, p 941). Only at the end of his reign did Hu Jintao start to take a more active approach to actual multilateralism, increasing Chinese troop contributions to the UN and making China a key player in the BRICS group of emerging powers (Ferdinand, 2016). This tendency continued under the leadership of Xi Jinping, when China’s ambitions to reshape the regional and international world order towards an increased Chinese influence rose.

Thus, Chinese foreign policy developed from *tao guang yang hui* towards a more active contribution to international governance and multilateralism, called *fenfa you wei* (奋发有为), which can be translated as a proactive behaviour (Shi, 2015; Sørensen, 2015). In October 2017, in a speech at the 19th National Congress of the CCP, Xi announced that China was progressing towards becoming ‘a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence [...] and a proud and active member of the community of nations’ (Xi, 2017). China’s determination to become a more active player in world politics implies a certain degree of balancing against the US. Likewise, China responded to the US announcement of a

‘pivot to Asia’ in 2011 with a ‘Marching West’ strategy, namely strengthening its own position in Europe, filling the strategic void left by the US in its intention to prioritize Asia (Fallon, 2014).

Furthermore, the Chinese leadership intends to build more balanced relations with developing countries on the one hand and Western powers on the other. This results in increased enthusiasm for global and regional multilateralism in order to satisfy both target groups. For this, China is trying harder to play an active role in multilateral arms control regimes or increased its deployment to UN peacekeeping missions, as mentioned earlier. Thus, one could argue that a ‘turn towards multilateralism’ (Wu and Lansdowne, 2011) has characterized Chinese foreign policy since the late 1990s, when China started to participate in multilateral arrangements within Asia. Examples for these arrangements are ASEAN+3, SCO, but also beyond (i.e. in the context of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, FOCAC). Furthermore, China has become more active as a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), not only as the largest contributor of peacekeeping forces of all five permanent members of the UNSC, but also in crafting resolutions and presidential statements (Christensen, 2015). In addition, in 2001 China joined the WTO. Especially when it comes to the security realm, China supports UN reforms and emphasizes that having a more powerful UN is in the interest of international society (Zhang, 2010).

Hence, one could conclude that a turn towards multilateralism has taken place since the late 1990s, with China participating in multilateral regional arrangements within Asia and beyond. Yet such a conclusion would be premature and could lead us astray. There still is a considerable amount of evidence that in its security policy China chooses unilateralism or bilateralism over multilateralism if it serves its national purposes and preferences. Although it is indeed true that multilateralism features prominently in official Chinese foreign policy doctrines and that China increasingly uses multilateral channels, it mostly does so primarily to pursue national interests and to promote its own rules. Hence, China pursues an approach of ‘selective multilateralism’, embracing multilateralism only whenever it seems adequate and useful to present China as a rising power that takes responsibility in the international system. This strategy embraced in the ‘tug-of-war’ (Rüland, 2012, p 256) for institutional supremacy can also be described as forum shopping. Forman and Segaar define this as a strategic type of behaviour in which actors ‘pick and choose among the mechanisms that best fit their individual political agenda’ (Forman and Segaar, 2006, p 213). The following quote by a Chinese interviewee underlines this:

‘China always talks about promoting multilateralism, but that is only rhetoric. Actually, it pursues a strategy of selective multilateralism; only cooperating where it serves national interests.’ (Interview 1)

Moreover, it remains ambiguous whether the shift towards more multilateralism constitutes a real paradigm change in Chinese foreign policy thinking or whether it is merely a change of instruments to protect national interests more deliberately in a changing world order (Wang, 2012). Similarly, the question of whether China will use its growing international authority to transform the existing world order and arrange its rules and institutions in line with the PRC's national interests remains pertinent (Lanteigne, 2005).

This 'selective multilateralism' or 'multilateralism with Chinese characteristics' replicates a general tendency of many BRICS states that question the legitimacy of the existing multilateral architecture, which they consider a vehicle of Western countries to preserve their international influence in an era of rapid change (Rüland, 2012). This paves the way to diminishing the quality of the current global governance architecture, which can best be described as 'diminished multilateralism' (Rüland, 2012) or 'contested multilateralism' (Morse and Keohane, 2014). A vivid example that illustrates this tendency is China's contestation of the existing multilateral structure (Can and Chan, 2020) by instrumentalizing multilateral arenas, while at the same time creating its own multilateral institutions. Examples of this include the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB) (formerly called the BRICS Development Bank) (Hameiri and Jones, 2018; Feng, 2020; Kastner et al, 2020). As a consequence, the current global governance architecture is characterized by deepening contests over membership and representation in international institutions and the guiding norms, rules and procedures. The introduction of a National Security Law in Hong Kong and the hardline stance of the PRC on its Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang especially call into question whether China is actually willing to contribute to a rules-based international order (Huotari and Drinhausen, 2020) and put another heavy strain on EU–China relations. It also alludes to the corrosive consequences China's view and practice of multilateralism and in particular its ignorance of some of the obligations enshrined in binding international treaties to the 'principled' or 'liberal' multilateralism that the EU promotes and that is at the core of the liberal world order.

The EU, by contrast, is one of the main advocates of such principles and liberal multilateralism, which it considers a fundamental European value. The search for an 'effective multilateralism' has long been the main pillar of EU foreign policy, guiding its global and regional activities and reflecting its push to fortify cooperation among states (Drieskens and van Schaik, 2014). This partly explains what Keukeleire and Delreux (2014) call a structural foreign policy approach of the EU. This implies a manner of conducting external relations on the basis of formal agreements, institutionalized meetings and permanent structures that support global governance regimes, multilateral institutions and international law (Mauil,



2010; Scott, 2013; da Conceição–Heldt and Meunier, 2014). Furthermore, a sense of multilateralism is at the core of the EU’s inner structure, as the various EU member states constantly negotiate with each other (and within the EU institutions) in a process of internal multilateralism (Scott, 2013). As such, multilateralism is an inherent part of EU values and principles, and an attractive norm that is frequently emphasized. For instance, the goal to contribute to building a multilateral world was included in the Treaty on European Union. Furthermore, the EU stressed in its Security Strategy of 2003 the importance of good governance and a norm-guided foreign policy based on the notion that ‘spreading good governance [...], establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order’ (European Union, 2003, p 13). Likewise, the primary responsibility of the UNSC to safeguard international peace and security is frequently invoked (Weidong, 2017). Accordingly, the United States and the EU would prefer to integrate China into the existing global governance structures and hope for a ‘reproduction of the existing system’ (Geeraerts, 2011, p 60). Instead, China actively changes the distribution of power in the system and thereby strikes the balance between power politics and multilateralism (Wang, 2000).

Despite different stances towards the concept of multilateralism in practice, in their rhetoric, the EU and China both attach importance to multilateralism, uphold it (Cameron, 2020), emphasize the important role of the UNSC in international security issues and consider authorization from the UN and basic respect for international laws as preconditions for taking international action (Weidong, 2017).<sup>5</sup> With regard to their behaviour within the Security Council, it is remarkable that there are only a few cases in which China has actively vetoed resolutions tabled by European countries in comparison to the overall number of resolutions adopted. One example is the Chinese veto of the resolutions on Syria proposed by the UK, France, Germany and others in 2011 and 2012 (Gegout and Suzuki, 2020).

### **Good governance versus ‘China first’**

China’s main understanding of governance, or *zhili* (治理) in Chinese, is a sovereign and strong state (Stahl, 2011). Chinese foreign policy follows the aim to pursue economic and political national interests and is primarily considered an extension of domestic policy ends (Giessmann, 2008). Therefore, the concept of good governance (*shanzhi* 善治) is still a relatively new and controversial concept in Chinese intellectual and policy discourse (Li, 2020).<sup>6</sup> In this overall debate, good governance is not equated with liberal democracy, which is important to mention because it distinguishes the EU’s good governance approach from China’s. Instead, good governance, as

referred to in the context of domestic reforms, is understood as the creation of a form of governance with democratic characteristics that matches the Chinese view of reality (Keping, 2009, 2010; Chen and Liu, 2015).

The controversial and secondary nature of the concept of good governance in the Chinese discourse internally as well as in its foreign policy thinking often translates into concrete practices or policies. For instance, it leads to a ‘no strings attached’ policy in China’s bilateral commercial relations and in particular in its foreign policy towards (other) developing countries. Combining humanitarian aid with business, China does not link investments to governmental reforms as the EU does according to its good governance approach. This stems from China’s principle to not interfere in the domestic affairs of any country and serves to avoid any imperialist impetus (Kreps and Flores-Macías, 2013). This method often undermines European good governance initiatives in third countries (Zanger, 2000) and has led to competition and the exacerbation of differences between the two, in particular in Africa (Hackenesch, 2011; Duggan and Hodzi, 2021).

The EU, meanwhile, refers to good governance as transparent, efficient and democratic, and as underlying guiding principles of its foreign policy as well as of its internal constitution. However, in the last years, the European understanding of governance has undergone significant changes from a concept to describe the EU’s internal structure (Jachtenfuchs, 2001) to a concept that encompasses the EU’s main constitutional norms: human rights, democracy and rule of law (Stahl, 2011). Governance, when it appears in the EU’s official policy discourse, is therefore an expression of the EU’s normative claim (Manners, 2008). As enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, the EU is based on respect for freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. The ESS also stresses the utmost importance of good governance and a norm-guided foreign policy:

The development of a stronger international society, well-functioning international institutions and a rule based international order is our objective. [...] Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order. (European Union, 2003, p 11)

This does not only shape the EU’s foreign policy, but also plays out in situations that pose a threat either to the EU itself or to one of its partners. In such situations, following its good governance approach, the EU adheres to the human security approach to international conflict resolution and calls for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (van der Putten and Chu, 2012). Good governance is then sought mainly through

development assistance and political dialogue (Hackenesch, 2011). Likewise, the EU pursues the principles of conditionality in its external relations, meaning that it ties foreign aid and development assistance to democratic principles (Freyburg et al, 2009; Molenaers et al, 2015).

## Conclusion

The discussion has outlined and contextualized the main underlying foreign and security policy principles of the EU and China. The differing approaches to the nature of statehood and power, the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and other, more general concepts relating to foreign policy such as multilateralism and multipolarity remain elements of major incongruity between the EU and China. Despite a certain degree of convergence since the early 2000s, the main principles of foreign and security policy are still adhered to today and evidence the extent to which the world views of the EU and China conflict. Above all, they show that their perceived positions as actors on the international stage are inherently different, with the EU being a traditional rule-maker with a strong normative prioritization, and China developing from a rule-taker more and more into a rule-challenger and rule-creator. The EU, with its peculiar institutional construction of which cooperation on equal terms is an integral part, prefers to contribute to a multilateral, rules-based international system. China, in contrast, is fundamentally pragmatic and navigates the international stage based on national interests and economic benefits.

While discarding China as a mere threat to the liberal script of the West could lead us astray, the corrosive impact of China's international behaviour and the continuous undermining of international obligations enshrined in binding treaties should not be underestimated. In line with its more proactive behaviour on the international stage, driven by the doctrine of *fenfa you wei*, China has shown how effectively it can instrumentalize multilateral institutions, including the UN, to bring to the fore its own state-centric and authoritarian positions and narratives (Huotari and Drinhausen, 2020). This development does not stand for itself, but has significant implications for the EU. Especially against the backdrop of the US' disorderly retreat from global governance under Trump, the EU's leadership in terms of preserving principled and liberal multilateralism matters increasingly.

The combination of different world views, role conceptions and foreign and security policy principles stresses the main puzzle this book is assessing, which is the fact that the EU and China cooperate in the security realm against all odds and against all contradictions. The following analytical chapters will explore in more detail whether and how the vastly different approaches to international politics influence the bilateral EU–China security partnership and how this security cooperation can be explained.

# The EU and China on the Global Stage: Interests and Interdependence

## Introduction

The EU and China are, although relative newcomers to global governance, two of the most important and influential global actors. In particular, during the four years of the Trump administration and its rather protectionist and isolationist foreign policy, attention has turned towards the EU and China when it comes to issues of global governance. They do not only possess the economic strength to affect global governance (Christiansen et al, 2019), but are also decisive rule-makers on the international stage. While both the EU and China are still struggling to find their rightful place on this stage, they are already central driving forces of globalization and have become increasingly entangled in international politics and the international economy.

The question of whether this leads to increased cooperation or whether it deepens competition and rivalries divides the scholarly debate on the subject. Some observers hold that China's rule-making ambitions will unavoidably lead to deepening tensions based on the fact that China actively challenges existing rules, norms and procedures – and thereby in the end also the 'liberal script' of the current world order (Huotari and Drinhausen, 2020; Meinhardt, 2020). A frequently mentioned argument from this school of thought is that China might use its economic leverage to exert political power and create international rules and even institutions that are more in line with its own identity and interests (Geeraerts, 2011; Legarda, 2020). Critics argue that China, as one of the driving forces of current world politics, is so deeply entangled with other economies and political powers, and so reliant on integration into the international system, that it inevitably needs to seek more cooperation (see, for example, van der Putten and Chu, 2012). This

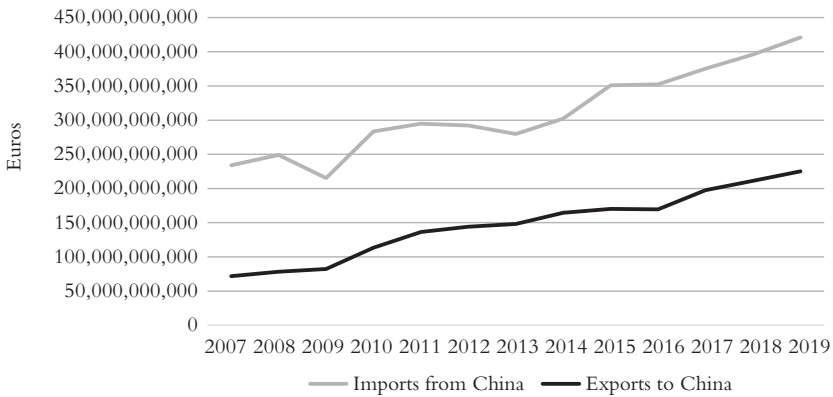
assumption dates back to the ‘convergence myth’ (see [Chapter 1](#)) and reflects the integral principles of liberal-institutionalist thinking.

This chapter examines whether, how and under which conditions the increasing global entanglement of the EU and China actually translates into security cooperation. It takes a temporal perspective to include the changing dynamics and geopolitical developments that surround the EU and China, presuming that in a globalized world, no actor’s behaviour can be understood without embedding it in a larger context. The chapter proceeds in three steps. First, it assesses growing economic entanglements and interests to explore how China and the EU pursue their interests globally. The results provide an understanding of the impact of complex interdependence on the EU–China security relationship. Second, it explores the roles of the EU and China as actors of global governance and examines their entanglements beyond the economic realm. Finally, it opens the black box of complex interdependence and scrutinizes the EU’s and China’s perspectives on global governance. This includes an examination of how the two partners understand complex interdependence and the purported ‘necessity’ to cooperate with each other. The chapter primarily relies on documentary evidence such as policy papers, joint declarations and official publications of other kinds (for example China’s white papers), as well as media reports from both sides. It enriches these sources with narrative evidence from elite and expert interviews.

### **Temporal pattern I: growing interdependence**

Over time, the EU and China have become more interconnected, especially in the economic realm. An examination of temporal patterns in their relationship shows that the increasing entanglement of the EU and China is central to the development of cooperative agreements, but also reflects variations in salience, scope and sensitivity for both. In what follows, these temporal patterns shall be examined more closely. The overall question guiding this section is whether and via which modes and mechanisms the growing interdependence unfolds and how it relates to security cooperation between the EU and China.

The ubiquitous focus on the economy in the overall EU–China relationship notwithstanding, a temporal pattern can be detected that displays the extent to which the EU and China are economically entangled. Not only has the mere volume of trade exchange between the EU and China grown over time, but the two have also become among the biggest traders in the world, together accounting for one-third of global trade. Since the beginning of their diplomatic relations, the amount of imports and exports exchanged between the two economic powers has constantly grown. Traditionally, economic ties with the EU have been very important for China, whose

**Figure 4.1:** EU–China trade flow, 2007–19

Note: Figure based on Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/home>, 1995 onwards. Responsibility for the adaptation lies entirely with Julia Gurol.

Source: Eurostat, 2020a.

economy largely depends on foreign trade. But the EU's economy has also become more dependent on trade with China, although to a lesser extent. For instance, after the 2008 global financial crisis, exports to China constituted a vital lifeline for European producers as the intra-European and US demand for goods shrunk.

Between 1999 and 2019,<sup>1</sup> the overall trade volume between the EU and China increased significantly (see Figure 4.1). In 1999, the value of EU imports from China reached €52.6 billion, while it exported goods worth €19.7 billion to China. By 2019, these numbers rose to €362 billion in EU imports from China and €198.3 billion in European exports to the PRC.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in 2019, China had a share of 9 per cent in EU exports,<sup>3</sup> making it the largest source of EU imports (19 per cent) (Eurostat, 2020a). As of 2021, China is the EU's second-biggest trading partner following the US, while the EU has become China's biggest trading partner. Thus, the relationship between the EU and China, and its development over the past decades, reflects the conditions of extensive economic interconnection.

Although this looks balanced, there is clear evidence that political factors are causing imbalances at the expense of the EU due to a lack of reciprocity in market openness and access. Moreover, since the mid-2000s, the EU has had a negative trade balance with China that has continued to grow. This signifies that in terms of economic interdependence, the EU is more vulnerable to China than vice versa. The annually published position papers of the European Chamber of Commerce in China further point towards increasing imbalances and disadvantages for European investors due to

problems with the protection of intellectual property rights and shrinking investment opportunities due to limited market access ([European Chamber of Commerce in China, 2021](#)). These imbalances are addressed in the CAI, which is expected to pave the way for a level playing field between the EU and China.

A similarly misbalanced picture evolves when looking at the development of foreign direct investment (FDI) of the EU in China and vice versa. Over time, the EU has become one of the favourite destinations for Chinese outbound foreign direct investment (OFDI). Cumulative Chinese FDI in the EU has increased from less than €2 billion in 2000 to €131.9 billion in 2017. Similarly, the EU's FDI in China has increased ever since the early 1990s and has reached €132.2 billion in 2017, which represents a growth of more than €125 billion since 2000 ([OECD, 2020](#)). This shows how important China has become as a destination for European investment ([Christiansen et al, 2019](#)). However, in terms of investment, the playing field between the EU and China is again not even, as European firms face difficulties in accessing the Chinese market as a result of complex regulatory conditions.

Regardless of these imbalances that have led to the recurrence of tensions over time, their growing economic entanglement renders the EU and China more vulnerable to each other and increases their level of interdependence. For China, the relevance of exports has grown considerably as it has developed into a strongly export-led economy. The EU, as one of the biggest destinations of its exports, is thus of great importance. Likewise, the European economy has become more dependent on trade with China, albeit to a lesser degree, which has contributed to a growing asymmetry in their relations due to a rising imbalance in trade. While, until 2000, the EU had a positive trade balance with China and its exports had been higher than its imports, this trade balance has shrunk. Simultaneously, the Chinese trade surplus has grown. In 2019, the trade deficit of the EU amounted to €163 billion ([Eurostat, 2020a](#)). Accordingly, the EU seems to be increasingly vulnerable because of the entanglement of its economy with China's and the lack of reciprocity in market access and investment opportunities (Interview 29). This certainly harms the EU's interests and makes the EU more vulnerable to China. Creating a level playing field has thus become a crucial pillar of the EU's China policy (Interview 29) and drove the negotiations leading up to the finalization of the CAI in 2021.

The economic interdependence between the EU and China is not all that has increased significantly over time. The channels of communication via which the two communicate and interact have diversified and there are clear signs of a continuous institutionalization of bilateral relations. Especially since the conclusion of the CSP in 2003, the two have begun

to interact in an increasing number of fora. These fora encompass a variety of actors from different institutional levels, ranging from governmental to policy to people-to-people. The lynchpin of this is certainly the annual summit meetings between the leaders of both sides – the European Council president and the president of the EU Commission from the European side and the prime minister from the Chinese side. During these annual meetings, the two sides exchange ideas at the highest level of government. A closer look at the EU–China dialogue architecture shows that the number of communication channels has increased over time. In particular, the number of sectoral dialogues has risen from 22 (EEAS, 2005) to more than 50 (EEAS, 2015). Beyond these official dialogue fora, there are also several non-executive dialogues such as inter-parliamentary meetings. At the transnational level, relations play out through organizations that operate regionally or globally. This mode of communication between the EU and China occurs under the UN framework or during the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the Asia Europe Forum (ASEF). Moreover, both sides highly value the continuation of communication and dialogue in EU–China security relations despite deepening tensions (Interview 8; Interview 15). Even on sensitive security issues, like terrorism, communication continues without interruption (Interview 29).

Globalization further blurs the lines between national and transnational security, which indicates an absence of a hierarchy of issues. This in turn increases the need for collaboration to address security threats (Interview 26). In its 2010 white paper on defence, China recognizes that ‘non-traditional security concerns, such as existing terrorism threats, energy, resources, [...] are on the rise’ (MND, 2011). And the ESS explicitly mentions rising transnational security threats and states that ‘Europe faces new threats which are more diverse, less visible, and less predictable’ (Council of the European Union, 2003, p 1). It is also reflected in the EU–China relationship that military security concerns do not dominate the agenda of EU–China security relations and neither China nor the EU poses a military threat to the other. In contrast to the United States, the EU does not have any military presence in South East Asia (Interview 13).

## **Temporal pattern II: changing economic interests**

It is worth exploring the nexus between economy and security a little further. At first glance, the increasing entanglement between the EU and China on the international stage seems to have fostered cooperation beyond the economic realm. Bound in complex interdependence as two crucial actors of global governance, neither of which is able to tackle global problems unilaterally, the EU and China seek cooperation beyond the economic realm to share the burden and lower the costs involved. Also, resulting from the



changing foreign policy of the US, the focus of attention has been on the EU–China axis when it comes to dealing with issues of global governance. In that regard, it is not surprising that, especially during the four years of the Trump administration, EU–China security cooperation initiatives have picked up speed.

However, at second glance, through the prism of economic interests, it becomes obvious that this has twofold consequences. On the one hand, a nexus between economy and security has emerged, based on the linkages between the areas of economy and security that demand continuous negotiation, coordination of policies and complementary actions (Interview 19). For instance, Melania Gabriela Ciot, then President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, stressed in a parliamentary debate about EU–China relations in April 2019 that EU–China foreign policy relations have implications for the EU’s economic interests and therefore calls for ‘reciprocity in all areas [of EU–China relations] so as to underpin our [...] economic interests’ (European Parliament, 2019b).

Given the increasing levels of economic interests at stake for the EU and China, the assumption that they are bound to interact more intensely in the political and security realm to secure their economic interests has created the notion of a new strategic relationship during the honeymoon of EU–China relations and pertains until today. Thus, the liberal-institutionalist belief that economic interests also foster cooperation beyond the security realm seems to be true. Moreover, both sides seem to perceive security cooperation mainly as a means to safeguard national economic interests and to secure their close economic relations. While it is never stated explicitly in official state documents or policy papers, the interviews conducted with EU officials and Chinese policy advisers reveal this economy–security nexus very bluntly. For instance, when asked for the main reasons why China cooperates with the EU in the security realm, most Chinese interviewees named the growing acknowledgement that, in some fields of security, it could be economically beneficial for China to cooperate with the EU. Similarly, EU interviewees pointed towards economic considerations for cooperation. Thus, securing their vulnerable economic interests seems to be of high salience for the EU and China as two of the world’s largest exporters, and this has contributed significantly to the emergence of security cooperation (Interview 3; Interview 6). Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that security cooperation is framed primarily as an extension of economic politics and mainly serves two purposes: to pursue domestic economic interests, and to safeguard EU–China economic and trade relations.

As mentioned earlier, however, the amassed economic entanglement between the EU and China has not only led to cooperation beyond the economic realm, but also to deepening frictions and misperceptions that

perpetuate existing divides in EU–China security relations. This becomes very obvious in the following statement:

‘We can say that the EU and China are both facing a security dilemma, to speak in realist terms. Both fear about their survival in the global economy. It can go both ways, to more cooperation and to more competition.’ (Interview 20)

Although the EU and China, as two economic powerhouses, do not threaten each other militarily, this statement reveals that they can indeed affect each other’s economic wellbeing and security (European Parliament, 2019b). Facing different economic challenges, the EU and China strive to maintain and expand their positions in the global economy and seek to protect their respective economic interests. Consequently, with the rising entanglement of their economies, the EU and China are more vulnerable to each other, but also fear for their survival in the global economy. This complex relationship has also informed the EU’s 2019 strategy paper on China. It states explicitly that China is an economic competitor to the EU and at the same time an important negotiation and cooperation partner in economic, political and security terms (European Commission, 2019a).

Now, what does this mean for EU–China security cooperation? In general, it becomes obvious that the growing degree of interdependence indeed leads to an increasing amount of security cooperation between the EU and China based on the urgency for them to interact not only in the economic realm, but also in the political and security realms. Furthermore, there is evidence for spillover effects from the economic to the security realm, as becomes particularly evident in the interviews. One European interviewee states: ‘Despite [growing tensions] China is a necessary and in some fields even unavoidable partner for the EU’ (Interview 29). Similarly, a Chinese interviewee contends: ‘We need a partner like the EU and not only for economic aspects, but we need closer collaboration with the EU within international governance’ (Interview 19). Such statements are also underpinned by China’s 2018 policy paper (MFA, 2018a) that speaks of increasing interconnection and interdependence. It states that such interdependence increases the necessity for EU–China cooperation, especially on topics of global governance (MFA, 2018a). Accordingly, the minutes of a debate on China in the EP in December 2015 reveal that cooperating with China is not something the EU may ‘choose’, but something that becomes more and more necessary, based on growing complex interdependence (European Parliament, 2015).

It can also be concluded that where European or Chinese investment abroad is concerned, the stronger focus on the economy and the growing amount of investment have certainly fostered cooperation. This is based on the notion that in a world of complex interdependence, economic wellbeing

can only be achieved in a cooperative climate. In particular, for the Chinese side, securing its investments abroad seems to be a key driver towards seeking more cooperation with the EU:

‘Concerning spillovers of economic to security issues I have to say: as we [China] are reaching the centre of the world and expanding the sphere of our investments, we have more and more the need for a peaceful and friendly environment.’ (Interview 19)

When it comes to bilateral economic relations or economic interests that are connected to the respective other’s territory, however, those interests instead lead to competition or conflict. The 17+1 format makes this very clear. The increasing Chinese OFDIs in 17 Eastern and Southern European countries that are part of the EU have led to deepening frictions (Interview 22). Thus, growing economic interests play an ambivalent role in EU–China security cooperation.

### **The Chinese perspective: security cooperation and soft power**

Despite these two temporal patterns and even though the EU and China have become co-dependent both economically as well as in terms of global responsibility, they still have vastly different identities and adhere to opposing foreign and security policy principles. These result in different reactions to their growing interdependence and changing (economic) interests. Although the outcome is the same for both sides –seeking security cooperation – the underlying rationales for doing so differ significantly. While for China sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interest remain the most important foreign policy concepts, the EU, by its nature, strives towards more ‘normative’ or ‘civilian’ policies (see [Chapter 3](#)). In what follows, the European and Chinese rationales for security cooperation shall be explored, going beyond official statements and declarations and moving from a structural level to a more actor-centred approach.

In the context of its rise to one of the most important global powers, China has started to strategically project a certain image to the world. While this image shifts back and forth between that of a developing power that claims its right to economic growth and that of a global player willing and able to establish international rules, norms, institutions and procedures, strategic thinking is a crucial element of China’s foreign policy approach. Although ‘soft power’ (软力量 *ruan lilian*) as a policy strategy has found its way into China’s policy circles relatively late, some observers note that ‘perhaps nowhere else has the idea of soft power been as widely discussed, embraced and appropriated as in China’ (Wang, 2011b, p 1). Hence, public diplomacy has become a central pillar of

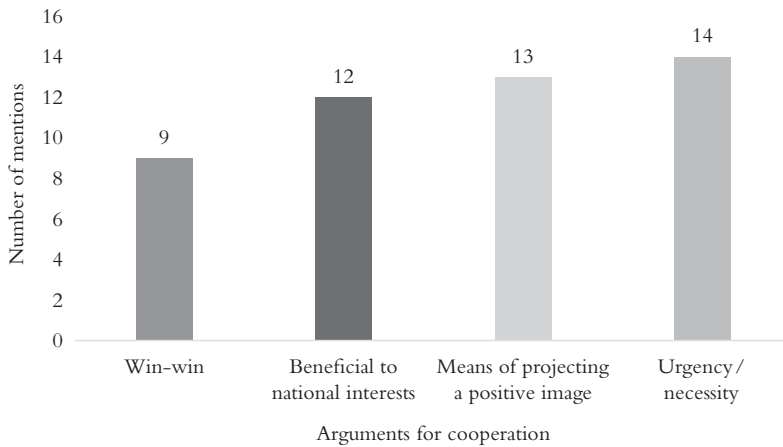
China's foreign policy (d'Hooghe, 2011) and the CCP actively navigates and shapes China's image at home and abroad. While this is not necessarily a new phenomenon – Mao Zedong had stressed China's 'people's diplomacy' (民间外交 *minjian waijiao*) and Hu Jintao later called for 'inspirational power' (感召力 *ganzhaoli*) – the CCP under Xi Jinping has made soft power one of its most important foreign policy tools, integrating it into China's security strategy (Wu, 2002; Wang, 2011a; Kalimuddin and Anderson, 2018).

This also informs China's approach to international cooperation, which is framed in terms of projecting the image of a responsible, cooperative global power. In general, multilateral cooperation can be interpreted as an attempt to wield soft power and thereby alter China's international image from being a 'threat' to being a peaceful and responsible actor in global governance. This has increased with China's growing global footprint and its rise towards being a global power, which had been closely monitored by European policymakers (Interview 25). As China started to behave more proactively on the international stage and therefore alarmed other international actors, the necessity to project such an image grew. This observation is also accentuated by speeches by Chinese politicians, which have become filled with positive rhetoric about China's behaviour and its endorsement of multilateralism. For example, in 2013, Vice Foreign Minister Song Tao's spoke of building a new type of EU–China partnership and in this context referred to the growing role that both China and the EU would play in future international relations, therein being 'indispensable cooperation partners' (MFA, 2013a, np). As regards this temporal trend, there is definitely a change towards a more outward-facing Chinese national security policy, embedded in a general overhaul of China's foreign policy, which aims to build a perception of China as a responsible great power. To reach this strategic aim, China needs to prove to the international community that it is willing to take initiative and actively shape the international security environment.

China's perspective on security cooperation with the EU is no different in that regard (see Figure 4.3). Besides the overall 'urgency or necessity' to cooperate, the aim to project a more positive image was mentioned by Chinese interviewees as the second most important reason for seeking security cooperation with the EU. As one interviewee pointed out:

'If China wants to have prosperous, peaceful and stable relations with all countries in the world, there is no other choice but to cooperate with the EU in the security realm, at least on non-traditional issues.'  
(Interview 6)

In this regard, the EU has proven to be an opportune partner for China because of its contribution to peace and stability as well as to effective multilateralism (Interview 4). The rationale driving Chinese cooperation

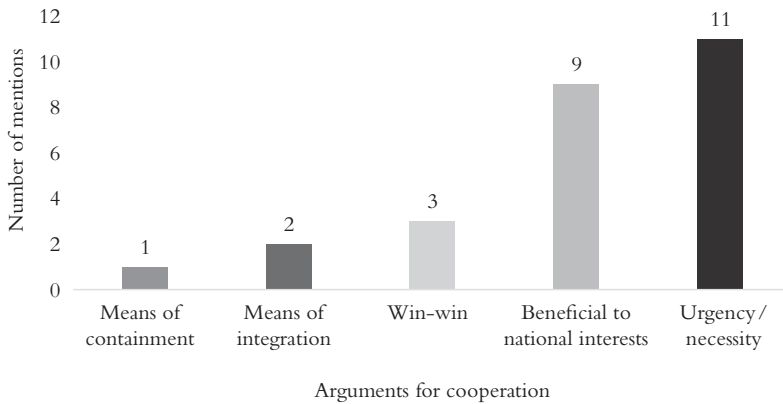
**Figure 4.2:** Arguments for cooperation: the Chinese perspective

Source: Based on interview data.

with the EU can therefore be interpreted as a mostly instrumental approach, based on the fact that China recognizes the fact that the global security environment has changed and consequently begins to adapt its policies flexibly.

### **The EU perspective: containment through cooperation**

For the EU as a primarily normative actor, cooperating with China in the security realm is mostly framed as ‘urgent’ or ‘a necessity’, albeit a pesky one. Talking to EU officials about cooperation with China leaves no doubt about this driver (see Figure 4.3). There is a strong notion of ‘having no other choice’ than to cooperate with China as ‘from an opportunity-cost calculation perspective there is no way not to cooperate’ (Interview 26). This once more highlights the complex interdependence in which the EU and China find themselves entangled ([European Parliament, 2015](#)). Thus, it is not surprising that interviewees from both sides framed their security cooperation in terms of ‘benefits to national interests’ and aimed at creating ‘win-win’ situations through joint action and shared costs. The reasons mentioned for perceiving this necessity vary between the growing economic entanglement, and the resulting fear of putting economic gains at risk, the wish to enhance economic relations through security cooperation and increasing interconnectedness as crucial actors of global governance. However, what is different for the EU side is the alleged hope of integrating China into international rules, norms and procedures through cooperation – a last sign of life of the convergence myth.

**Figure 4.3:** Arguments for cooperation: the EU perspective

Source: Based on interview data.

## Conclusion

Global entanglement has certainly brought China and the EU closer together, making them more interdependent. As two of the most crucial actors in the current global governance system, they share the responsibility to tackle issues of global concern. This fosters the need to cooperate beyond the economic realm in order to reach goals of mutual interest and reduce the costs of reaching these goals through burden-sharing. The rising interdependence of the EU and China both in the economic and the security realms is central to the development of cooperation but also reflects variations in the sensitivity of the security relations for both actors. The overall volume of trade between the EU and China increased over time, augmenting their economic entanglement and raising the potential costs of non-cooperation. The EU and China have also started communicating and interacting via a growing number of channels on the bilateral and multilateral levels, and the number of dialogue formats in which they discuss security and other matters has grown significantly.

Thus, while the EU and China are most certainly not value partners, they have become what we can call ‘partners out of necessity’. Even though huge differences prevail concerning the underlying principles and values that inform their overall styles of policymaking and guide their foreign and security policy actions, the need to collaborate on issues of global governance as well as their economic interdependence have become so strong over time that, in many cases, interests seem to trump value concerns on both sides. Of course, the prevailing differences are not resolved by focusing on common interests; they are deeply rooted in the political cultures. However, the EU and China seem to have managed to put aside at least some of their value

conflicts for the sake of cooperation. Confronted by a constantly changing international landscape, increasing complex interdependences and economic entanglements driven by the forces of globalization, their relationship has become denser, rendering increasing cooperation unavoidable. Both need the other to address global security challenges constructively and sustainably, which is reflected in their framing cooperation as something inherently 'urgent' and 'necessary', regardless of lingering ideological and value clashes. Yet there remain strategic questions on whether China's more active role in world affairs will result in augmented multilateral cooperation or in increased challenges to the existing rules and structures of the current world order. Similarly, it remains to be seen whether China is willing to shoulder the burden that comes with greater global responsibility and seek a more constructive role. And finally, both sides need to work constructively to address the value conflicts in their relationship and reflect on the potential and risks of cooperation based solely on interests.

# Framing and Perceptions in EU–China Security Relations

## Introduction

In general, the concept of security has been evolving since the end of the Cold War (Fanoulis and Kirchner, 2016). While it has been conflated with national security, focusing on military power and strength, the scope and degree of security are widening. Not only has the nature of security changed, its framing by political actors, the measures taken to tackle security issues and the resulting policy implications have changed significantly (Bourne, 2013). Security is no longer understood only in the traditional sense, focusing on challenges to nation-states and their territorial integrity or sovereignty. Instead, new, non-traditional security issues have emerged over time, which are more transnational. Examples of such issues are climate change, pandemics, global poverty, food and water scarcities, cyber-crimes (including cyber-terrorism), arms proliferation, and piracy. Traditional approaches to dealing with security have proven inadequate to combat the newer threats that are more mobile and fluid. This development has affected the EU and China equally and has led to a great deal of security cooperation, driven by the understanding of the changing nature of security threats that exceed the national scope and therefore require joint responses (Christiansen et al, 2019, p 122). This fact notwithstanding, significant normative differences prevail regarding how the EU and China seek to react to security threats – the EU wields a larger toolkit of non-military or civilian security response measures than China does. It is particularly in that non-military space that EU–China security cooperation unfolds most fruitfully.

Looking at EU–China security cooperation from a more constructivist vantage point, it is worth examining how the two define their own roles as security actors in the international system, as well as how they perceive each other. This chapter explores how the EU and China understand their positions in global security governance and whether and how these



self-conceptions influence their bilateral security relations. The chapter begins with a comparative examination of how the EU and China frame ‘security’. Subsequently, it analyses their self-conceptions and the perceptions they hold of each other as security actors. It concludes by discussing elements that foster or impede security cooperation between the EU and China.

## Understanding security through the eyes of China and the EU

The trend towards a more comprehensive and transnational understanding of what ‘security’ ultimately entails, is clearly reflected in the EU’s and China’s framings of security as set forth in their official policy papers and white papers on defence. Both have expanded their response tools to tackle the new security challenges, albeit in different ways. Moreover, differences prevail regarding the political values attached to security as well as the scope of their respective security definitions. In what follows, this chapter compares the development of the EU’s and China’s security understandings over time along the following four criteria: *scope of definition*, *extent of salience*, *target*, *institutional responsibility* (for more information about the operationalization of these categories, see [Chapter 3](#)).

### *Scope of the EU’s and China’s definition of ‘security’*

In the beginning of EU–China diplomatic relations, China’s understanding of security was mainly state-centric, focused on national defence and diplomacy, securing national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and condemning any form of external intervention. This aversion to interference finds its roots in China’s experiences in the era of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in the numerous armed conflicts the PRC has had with its neighbours over the past decades (India, South Korea and Vietnam, to name some examples). In addition, China shares borders with Afghanistan, one of the most turbulent and conflict-ridden areas in the world. These factors together have shaped China’s understanding of security and have led to a strong focus on territorial integrity and state sovereignty that persists until today. However, the excessively narrow Chinese understanding of security in military terms has changed over time. In recent years, and conflict-ridden an emerging discourse on non-traditional security issues (非传统安全威胁 *fei chuantong anquan weixie*) can be observed and the definition of security has widened to ‘comprehensive security’ (综合安全 *zonghe anquan*).

These developments become obvious when comparing China’s white papers on defence from 1995 to 2021 and how security is framed therein. For instance, China’s white paper on defence in 2000 put the construction of China’s national defence system and the building of capable armed forces at

the forefront (MND, 2000). Moreover, it mainly refers to China's immediate neighbourhoods, such as Asia-Pacific and the Taiwan Strait, when talking about external security issues or threats. In contrast, China's 2002 defence white paper stated that 'non-traditional security issues are looming large in some countries' (MND, 2002). However, at that point, China still focused heavily on its national security and held up the norm of non-interference (MFA, 2002). Despite the expanded scope of security, the 2006 white paper on defence left no doubt about the focus of China's security policy and its understanding of security. It says that the main emphasis should be:

Contributing to the country's development and security strategies, [...] maintaining national security and unity, and ensuring the realisation of the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. (MND, 2006)

This changed around 2010 and the emphasis on non-traditional security issues became stronger. As the 2010 white paper on defence warned, 'non-traditional security concerns, such as existing terrorism threats, energy, resources, finance, information and natural disasters, are on the rise' (MND, 2011a). The white paper on defence published in 2013 also highlighted the emergence and importance of non-traditional security issues. In the preface itself, it stated explicitly that 'peace and development are facing new [...] challenges' and that China was reacting to these new challenges with a 'new security concept' encompassing 'traditional and non-traditional' security concerns alike (MND, 2013). This reveals the expanded scope of China's definition of security and the recognition of the need to incorporate non-traditional security issues into the wider framework of security. The shift towards this can be explained by China's changing national self-conception as being both an essential entity to be protected against external interference and as a rising player in 'providing solutions to [numerous] non-traditional security threats' (Zhang, 2008, p 157).

During the first meeting of the newly established Central National Security Commission (NSC) in April 2015, Xi Jinping summed up the current framing of China's understanding of security as follows: while national security is at the core, comprehensive security shall constitute the substance (Tiezzi, 2014). Thus the focus of China's security concerns has grown from national or domestic security to transnational security, albeit giving priority to China's immediate neighbourhood. This also became obvious in February 2017, when Xi Jinping announced in a speech during a rare public meeting of the NSC that China would increase international cooperation on security matters and 'guide the international community in these efforts' (Xinhua, 2017b). Likewise, China's white paper on defence published in 2019 stated that China's understanding of national security

should include ‘far more subjects, a greater range and a longer time span’ (MND, 2019, np). It further mentions that the security situation of actors worldwide has become increasingly intertwined, which requires joint reactions. Accordingly, it can be concluded that China’s idea of security has moved towards ‘comprehensive security’, with the ultimate goal of ‘common security’ to be reached through cooperation (Zhao, 2011). Yet it still retains a strong focus on national security and state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference as guiding principles.

Similarly, the EU’s understanding of what security entails has widened in scope and degree over time, and a redefinition of security has taken place. Among the EU’s security priorities are now not only matters of territorial integrity and military security, but also non-traditional security issues. The first hint towards this expansion and the mounting importance that the EU attributes to non-traditional security issues can be found in the ESS of 2003. It claims that while ‘large-scale aggression against any Member State is now improbable, [...] Europe faces new threats which are more diverse, less visible, and less predictable’ (Council of the European Union, 2003). This notion becomes even more apparent in the implementation report of the 2008 ESS, which provides an encompassing list of all the issues that the EU puts at the forefront of its security strategy. It includes a number of non-traditional security matters such as energy security, climate change and cybersecurity (Council of the European Union, 2008). These non-traditional security issues seem to have now become mainstays of the EU’s foreign and security policy. In line with this development, the EU has also broadened the variety of tools to respond to security challenges, developing more measures beyond the military, falling within the scope of civilian control (Economides and Sperling, 2018). This particular focus results not only from the EU’s self-conception as a normative or civilian power, but also the fact that the EU lacks the capabilities as well as the political unity for larger military engagements abroad, beyond its contribution and deployment of personnel to past NATO missions (such as in Afghanistan).

In July 2020, the European Commission set out a new ‘EU Security Union Strategy’ that provides a set of strategies for the period from 2020 to 2025 (European Commission, 2020a) that shall react to a ‘security landscape in flux, impacted by evolving threats’. What is new about this strategy is that it explicitly names digital transformation (more specifically digital infrastructures, technologies and online systems) as a possible risk. These new tools can be manipulated or instrumentalized for terrorism and organized crime or used to further undermine democratic institutions and principles. As a consequence, cyber-security issues have been given a prominent position in the strategy and seem to be a factor of growing significance for the EU’s future internal security endeavours.

*Salience attached to ‘security’ by the EU and China*

Concerning the salience attached to the security policy field, the mapping has already indicated an interesting pattern. Over time, the EU and China have mentioned security more often in their official policy papers as well as in the joint declarations following the annual EU–China summits. This is the first indicator that security policy has grown in salience over time. Besides this general finding, the analysis suggests that the salience attached to security policy differs slightly between the EU and China. While the EU has started to attach greater salience to security since the implementation of the ESS, for China, security has been a priority all along. Yet, when it comes to the expanded scope of security, the analysis suggests that the EU attaches greater importance to non-traditional security issues than China. This stems from the continuing Chinese focus on domestic security and sovereignty, also in military terms. Thus, it is not surprising that there seems to be a sturdier belief that non-traditional aspects of security only thrive with the backing of military might. In line with the rising salience of security – particularly non-traditional issues – the EU and China have expanded their security capabilities over time. While the EU has predominantly enhanced its authority in international security through the development of the CFSP and the CSDP, China has focused on developing its military capabilities as well as the skills of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to conduct military operations other than war (MOOTW) (MND, 2013, 2017).

*Target of security threats*

Related to their understanding of what security entails as well as to their individual threat perceptions, the target of security challenges as perceived by the EU and China has changed over time. While China’s nation-centric understanding of security initially led to a strong focus on domestic targets, this has widened over time. Globalization and the expansion of Chinese activities and interests overseas have led to a transnationalization of China’s understanding of security. Threats that challenge China’s sovereignty or integrity are no longer bound to China’s national borders, as the evacuation of more than 35,000 Chinese citizens from conflict-ridden Libya in 2011 showed (Junbo and Méndez, 2015). Facing increasing domestic pressure to protect Chinese citizens abroad as well as to secure its economic interests in other world regions, the PRC has genuinely augmented its response tools to such security challenges, and enhanced its diplomatic and military capabilities to face not only domestic security threats, but also those that are transnational in scope and nature (Ghiselli, 2018, 2020). This includes improved coordination of the PLA and its preparation for missions beyond the Chinese nation-state. According to Ghiselli, this development has led to

increased Chinese military presence abroad. It can therefore be concluded that the main security challenges from a Chinese perspective have gone from being primarily domestic to being both domestic and transnational.

For the EU a somewhat reverse development can be observed. It adopted a transnational understanding of security relatively early. Among the main security threats that it identified and put at the fore of its security strategy, those transcending national boundaries and eroding national cohesion have always played a significant role. Already in the early 1990s, the EU had successfully linked its home affairs priorities with its CFSP as a reaction to an increasing overlap between internal and external security. This reflects the EU's self-conception as a civilian power, which, largely relying on civilian means and soft power tactics, seeks to promote peace globally. In the context of its integration process, security capabilities were steadily enhanced and the EU has increased collaboration with neighbouring regions. This shows that the main security threats the EU is facing are both domestic and transnational. For instance, terrorism or organized crime as well as unregulated migration influence not only the EU's internal security but also its immediate vicinity. At the same time, the 'new risks' that emanate from digital transformation, such as cyber threats, exceed the EU's national boundaries. As mentioned earlier, the EU puts a strong emphasis on these non-traditional, transnational security issues. To combat these and to pursue its ambition to become a global security actor, it sought 'strategic partnerships' with other countries (Renard, 2016).

As can be seen in the EU's most current 'Security Union Strategy' (2020–2025), the focus of EU policymaking seems to have returned to defending EU interests and safeguarding its own stability and security, revealing an inward-looking tendency that could be explained by the EU's increasing fragmentation and internal skirmishes. Thus, the main targets of security threats from a European perspective remain transnational as well as domestic.

### *Institutional responsibility*

While the scope of the security definition, the salience attached to security as a policy field and the perceived targets seem to have converged over time, considerable disparities prevail with regard to how the EU and China handle security issues and deal with security threats. This mainly refers to the institutional responsibility and links back to the main cleavages that characterize their foreign and security policies, as described in [Chapter 3](#). While, over time, the EU has sought to promote a form of 'effective multilateralism' in handling security issues, China has gradually shifted from multipolarity in its security policy towards encompassing multilateralism, but in a very different manner. First and foremost, it becomes palpable that when the EU and China established diplomatic relations, Chinese foreign

and security policy was still structured around the principle of multipolarity (*yi chao duo qiang*; 一超多强). However, this mostly meant adherence to the so-called *tao guang yang hui* (韬光养晦) doctrine, meaning to ‘coldly observe, secure our positions, cope calmly, conceal our capabilities and bide our time, keep a low profile, never take the lead and make a contribution’ (Xiong Guangkai, quoted in Ferdinand 2016, p 941). Only around the early 2000s did China begin to take a more active stance towards actual multilateralism, stepping up its troop contributions to the UN and taking the lead in setting up the SCO in 2001. In this context, China has developed into the most important and mighty player in the BRICS group of emerging powers (Ferdinand, 2016). This tendency to open up, which had its origins in Hu Jintao’s leadership, has continued under his successor Xi Jinping (2013–) and goes along with rising ambitions to reshape the regional and international order. Thus, Chinese foreign and security policy has shifted towards a more active contribution to international governance and multilateralism, also called *fenfa you wei* (奋发有为), which can be translated as proactive behaviour (Shi, 2015; Sørensen, 2015). In October 2017, in a speech at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping announced that the country was progressing towards becoming ‘a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence [...] and a proud and active member of the community of nations’ (Xi, 2017). Although China had clung to the principle of non-interference – partly to conceal its lack of experience and capabilities as a security provider – it now seems to be more willing and able to take strategic initiative and participate actively in international security structures (Interview 19), although it does so for own purposes.

Hence, a turn towards multilateralism has indeed taken place since the late 1990s, with China participating in multilateral regional (security) arrangements within Asia and beyond. Yet, despite this more proactive multilateral engagement, China still favours unilateral or bilateralism over multilateralism if it serves its national preferences, as explained in detail in Chapter 3. As a result some scholars have started to ascribe China’s approach the title of ‘selective multilateralism’ (Interview 3; Interview 21).

By contrast, the EU is one of the main advocates of multilateralism when it comes to handling transnational security issues. Furthermore, the EU stressed the primary responsibility of the UNSC to safeguard international peace and security in the ESS.

Table 5.1 sums up the evolution of the EU’s and China’s framing of security over time, as regards the scope of their security definition, the degree of salience they attach to security as such, as well as the focus of their security concerns.

Now, what does this mean for the emergence and increase of security cooperation between the EU and China over time? Overall, despite certain

**Table 5.1:** Development of the EU’s and China’s framing of security since 1995

	<b>The EU’s understanding of security</b>		<b>China’s understanding of security</b>	
Scope of definition	Narrow – traditional security issues	→ Wider – traditional and non-traditional security issues	Narrow – traditional security issues	→ Wider – traditional and non-traditional security issues
Extent of salience	Medium	→ High	High	→ High
Target	Domestic and transnational	→ Domestic and transnational	Domestic	→ Domestic and transnational with a focus on direct neighbourhood
Institutional responsibility	Multilateralism	→ Multilateralism	Multipolarity	→ ‘Selective’ multilateralism

prevailing differences, the security understanding of the EU and China has genuinely converged. As a result, they sought to build their security policies on common ground. Responding to a changing security environment, China and the EU have started adapting their security concepts in similar ways. Terms for this change range from ‘new security concept’ (Quille, 2004; Gill, 2010) to ‘extended security concept’. They accentuate the changing nature of current security threats, stressing the pre-eminence of international terrorism, the influence of non-governmental actors and the asymmetrical nature of new confrontations (Stumbaum, 2011).

In particular, the expansion of the scope of the EU’s and China’s security definitions to include non-traditional concerns has fostered a considerable increase in cooperation. Several interviewees stated that the wider focus of security has led to a greater willingness to cooperate (Interview 1) due to diminishing differences and decreasing mistrust on issues of non-traditional security (Interview 4). In other words:

‘On traditional security issues the level of mutual trust is low, so that signals that are sent that could lead to more cooperation might be mutually misunderstood, interpreted wrong or taken as a trick. Another problem is also the ongoing arms embargo of the EU on China. On non-traditional issues there is more common interests and less space for conflict.’ (Interview 4)

The transnational and global nature of many non-traditional security concerns support the emergence of EU–China security cooperation (MFA, 2018a; European Commission, 2019a). With the rise of non-traditional

security concerns such as climate and energy security, terrorism, or international migration, the need to cooperate has increased. In line with these developments, the converging understanding of the problem has opened a window of opportunity to initiate cooperation. As one interviewee stated, transnational non-traditional security concerns require a ‘common response [...] and over time the architecture for that was developed, so now there is the need *and* the architecture for cooperation’ (Interview 10). Consequently, non-traditional aspects of security have become more prominent in EU–China security relations over time (Kirchner et al, 2016).

Moreover, there is evidence that the widening of the definition of security on both sides has offered a window of opportunity for the EU and China to redefine their security policies. For the EU, this entails both a stronger defence of liberal democratic values and ‘European’ positions, and an increased possibility for cooperation in the security realm, based on augmented capacities and more profound capabilities (European Commission, 2019a). In some areas of security, this has increased tensions between the EU and China, while in others it has led to more cooperation (Interview 27). In other words, the EU has become more of a pragmatic security actor, putting aside ideological and normative differences, where it seems unavoidable.

The analysis suggests that the widening scope of China’s security policy has fostered security cooperation with the EU, driven by the Chinese regime’s desire to stabilize its domestic position and project a more positive image to other international actors. China developing into a global security actor seems to increase the necessity for it to be part of bilateral and multilateral cooperative frameworks in the security realm (Interview 12; Interview 18). Keeping China on the pathway to further development is only possible with stable relations with its immediate neighbours as well as with the larger global community (Interview 12; Interview 18).

The analysis shows that the widening scope of the Chinese definition of security has further contributed to a more active role in the security realm. For instance, China contributes more troops to UN peacekeeping missions than any other permanent member of the UNSC (USIP, 2016). According to the Ministry of National Defence (MND), as of June 2017, China participated in 24 UN peacekeeping missions, sending around 13,000 personnel abroad (*China Daily*, 2017b). This increasing globalization and transnationalization of China’s national security policy reflects China’s overall policy of ‘going global’. This policy in turn increases the exposure to risks from its expanded economic presence overseas. The attempts to protect China’s overseas investments, such as the BRI investment projects (NDRC, 2015) in unstable environments in the Middle East, through more security provision have increased, as reflected in China’s white



paper on defence published in 2015, which lists safeguarding the security of China's overseas interests as a priority for the PLA (State Council, 2015). This reveals that China's security policy has developed a strong economic component, serving primarily to secure its development and accumulation of wealth, synthesizing the country's military and economic strategy (Interview 22).

Additionally, there seems to be a rising awareness in the Chinese government that a peaceful rise can be better achieved within a peaceful environment. This notion is at the centre of 'China's White Paper on Peaceful Development' (State Council, 2011a) and the white paper on 'China and the World in the New Era' (State Council, 2011b). Increased cooperation with other great powers shall demonstrate China's willingness to join international action to address peace and security-related matters. The following statement reflects this Chinese self-perception as well as the external expectations:

'To play an important role in world politics, we need to be accepted as one of the influential powers [...]. If you are rising, you have to take responsibility for creating a good international environment. This is expected from China from others, especially from other big powers. [...] Rising power means more interests, means more responsibility, that's logical and that was also the request from outside.' (Interview 19)

However, China's selective multilateralism approach and the conflicting understanding of adequate response mechanisms constitute an obstacle to cooperation. For instance, the EU repeatedly criticizes China's selective multilateralism. This becomes apparent not only in the interviews, but also in official documents (Interview 21). For instance, the EU's strategic outlook published in 2019 explicitly states that 'China's engagement in favour of multilateralism is sometimes selective and based on a different understanding of the rules-based international order' (European Commission, 2019a) and underscores that this does not contribute to creating more supportive relations but instead weakens the multilateral international order. Moreover, although all EU member states support the common EU foreign and security policy, in practice, due to different interests and priorities in their China policies, reaching a consensus among the 27 member states (and the different EU institutions) has proved to be a hard or even impossible task. Therefore, the EU has trouble agreeing on priorities for how to engage with China in the security realm (Interview 27). This further impedes the deeper alignment of the security policies of the EU and China.

The EU-China relationship has also been heavily influenced by their membership in and commitment to international organizations. In the

security realm, China's membership in the UN was crucial to promoting cooperation with the EU under the banner of multilateralism. As mentioned before, working together in multilateral frameworks or multinational agendas was frequently mentioned as a driver of security cooperation, with a special focus on the UN as a facilitating platform. This might be interpreted as a sign of successful institutional socialization and norm diffusion within the institutional arrangement of the UN. To a certain extent, this might be true. However, it has to be mentioned once more that the Chinese understanding of multilateralism differs significantly from the European understanding of the same term. Although China's involvement in activities in the nominal multilateral category has been significant (Wang, 2010), a certain degree of instrumentalism prevails. Chinese scholars and policy experts were straightforward in the interviews, explaining the practical reasons for China's endorsement of multilateralism in only limited respects or within a limited scope (Interview 1; Interview 21). As a chief negotiator on the matter of China's WTO membership said in a speech in July 1999, 'When our country joins an international organisation, our top priority remains our sovereignty and our national interests. [...] We will not do anything contradicting our interests' (quoted in Wang, 2000, p 485). Thus, China's increasingly positive policy towards multilateralism does not automatically indicate full socialization into the norm of multilateralism (Interview 1; Interview 21).

To sum it up, over time the EU and China have developed an increasingly convergent framing of security, which has facilitated cooperation to some extent. Yet prevailing differences on adequate response mechanisms to security concerns hinder a deeper alignment of the EU and China in the security realm.

## **Mutual perceptions and role conceptions**

Most studies on EU–China security relations focus on the policy outputs. However, many of these studies fail to analyse these outputs in terms of 'foreign policy outcomes as social structuration' (Harnisch, 2016b, p 5).

The following section examines the mutual perceptions of the EU and China in the security realm. It takes into account internal conceptions and self-ascribed roles in international security governance, as well as their perceptions of each other. It does so in a temporal manner, seeking to extract variations in their mutual perceptions over time. Following the criteria established in Chapter 3, it is the task of the chapter to assess whether the EU and China perceive each other as 'friends', 'partners', 'necessary counterparts', 'rivals' or 'enemies' in the security realm, and whether and how this perception fosters or impedes security cooperation.

*China's role in international security governance*

China's role in international security governance cannot be explained by focusing on external expectations or the effects of integration and socialization alone (Harnisch, 2016b). Instead, self-identification plays a crucial role in understanding China's conception and behaviour as a security actor. As mentioned before, a lot of what China does on the international stage has its roots in its history (Chong, 2014; Dessein, 2016; Harnisch, 2016a), past experiences and the desire to project a certain image to the world.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there is a strong nexus between China's domestic considerations – for example, the legitimation needs of the CCP or internal security concerns – and Chinese foreign policymaking – for example, the aim to position China as a responsible international power. Controversial readings of Chinese history or 'competing histories' in China's foreign policy discourse have translated into what could be called China's 'two faces' (see Chapter 3). The 'weak power face' implies a strong norm-taking or rule-taking attitude of China on the international stage and points towards the PRC's role as a power that is still developing. This reading goes hand-in-hand with references to China's colonial past and translates into seeking indulgence on the international stage. The 'strong power face', meanwhile, reflects China's ambitions to be an influential global power and goes with strong power claims. In that regard, China's foreign policy behaviour is often interpreted in terms of being a norm- or rule-maker. These are all elements that matter in analysing China's behaviour as a security actor and its relationship to the EU in that regard. In what follows, the analysis seeks to extract China's self-identification or self-conception as a player in international security governance.

China's perception of its security situation includes both traditional and non-traditional security concerns. It considers itself a domestic rather than an international security guarantor, driven to a vast extent by domestic considerations (see analysis of the understanding of security of the EU and China earlier in this chapter). According to the interviews, China's rationale for seeking more security cooperation with the EU is motivated by the regime's desire to stabilize its domestic position and project a more positive image of China internationally. This is closely linked to the regime's survival. Although China has made enormous progress since the beginning of its reform process more than 30 years ago and has become one of the leading world powers, it is facing strong challenges.

Therefore, Chinese foreign policymaking reflects domestic developments and the current leadership's will to maintain its position is linked to resolving many domestic problems that China faces. China can remain on the path to further development only if it builds stable relations with its immediate neighbours and the larger global community. The urge to cooperate with

the EU also stems from the very positive image that Chinese nationals hold of the EU as a normative and civilian power, so cooperation with it can also please the Chinese population. Stability in China is primarily based on stable economic growth and good trade relations, for which both a peaceful environment for investment and good relations with other economic powers are needed. Furthermore, the analysis emphasizes that one important rationale underlying Beijing's increased proactive engagement in bilateral and multilateral cooperative frameworks in general, and with the EU in particular, is to foster the creation of a more positive image internationally.

China clearly considers itself a rising but responsible power. Furthermore, it recognizes that it needs to be acknowledged as such by external actors in order to fulfil this role. This is one of the dominant rationales that can be found in the analytical material and there is evidence that this role as a responsible power is sought both by China itself, meaning that it is its self-conception, and by other actors, meaning that it is a role expectation that the EU, for instance, has of China. The latter is clearly revealed in parliamentary debates about EU–China relations, where explicit role expectations for a rising China are formulated.

Besides the internal and external expectation to behave as a responsible great power and to be acknowledged as such, another relevant driver of cooperation with the EU seems to be the strategic rationale to make China's rise seem less threatening to other great powers (Interview 7), which it believes can be achieved through cooperation with a normative power such as the EU. This once more suggests that China has learned that cooperation is not an end in itself but that the type of actor with whom cooperation takes place is also relevant.

### *China's perceptions of the EU as a security actor*

In general, 'China's contemporary images of the EU are embedded in ideas that have developed over the past decades and that also reflect historical experiences' (Wu, 2010, p 173). Despite temporal setbacks such as the Eurozone financial crisis (De Ville and Vermeiren, 2016; Zhang, 2016b), the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 (Gabriel and Schmelcher, 2017) and the Brexit referendum in 2016 (Yu, 2017), the general picture emerging from the Chinese policy literature on the EU is favourable and primarily optimistic (Lan, 2005; CASS, 2008; Dong, 2014; Long and Dai, 2018). In some documents, the EU is even mentioned as 'one of the key directions of China's diplomacy' (Cui, 2018, np) and according to Chen Zhimin, 'Europe has been Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's key foreign policy priority during his two terms [...] in office' (Chen, 2012, p 2). Although there are ongoing disputes between different EU member states and China on the

bilateral level concerning, for example, human rights, the Tibet issue and the continuing European arms embargo on China, the EU is still perceived as an important partner in economic, political and security terms under the Strategic Dialogue framework. Accordingly, many Chinese scholars advocate that the PRC should strengthen its public diplomacy mechanisms with regard to Europe to avoid the spread of misunderstandings and negative sentiments (Song, 2011; Chen, 2012, 2016b). Yet perceptions of the EU's role in world politics, especially in the security realm, are overshadowed by the EU's perceived lack of actorness, which is closely observed by Chinese policy experts who frequently criticize the lack of internal cohesion within the EU and the growing dissent among some of the member states (Chang and Pieke, 2018; Feng, 2018). For instance, Zeng (2017) argues that the EU plays only a marginalized role in China's new type of great power relations although it had once been considered the second most important pole in China's vision of a multipolar world. Other scholars even argue that the EU's international influence will decline and it will resort to market protectionism and seclusion (Zhang, 2016a; Zuokui, 2017). In that regard, the EU would have been perceived as secondary to China in the security realm, if not for the deteriorating Sino-US relations, in particular under the Trump administration (Dai, 2010; Ye, 2011; Zeng, 2017).

Turning towards China's perceptions of the EU as a security actor, there has been a quite significant change over time. Two different contradicting trends can be detected. Some Chinese policy experts claim that there has been no major change in China's role expectation of and role performance towards the EU. Those scholars state that Beijing has considered the EU an important partner in addressing 'shared [...] security interests', as evidenced in China's EU policy paper published in 2003, which lists 'fighting against international terrorism, promoting sustainable development, eliminating poverty, and protecting the environment' as common grounds for security cooperation (MFA, 2003). Moreover, they say that regardless of deepening tensions, security relations between the EU and China have improved over time due to the establishment of the ESS and the EU Global Strategy, the augmentation of security dialogue formats, the overall easing of relations since the CSP in 2003 and finally, the extension of the security policy capabilities of the EU following the Lisbon Treaty. Those analysts still consider the EU a possible partner to align with on security matters and acknowledge the increasing necessity to treat each other as counterparts on equal terms in the security realm, especially against the backdrop of the US' withdrawal from international security arrangements (Interview 12).

Others hold that the Chinese perception of the EU as a security player was at its peak in 2003 and has decreased steadily since due to crises within the EU and Europe's criticism of China's domestic policies (Interview 4; Interview 6). This reading is also widely supported by the Chinese media.

Moreover, China considered the EU's refusal to give it the Market Economy Status and lift the arms embargo political obstacles to closer cooperation (MFA, 2014; 2018). According to a Chinese policy expert:

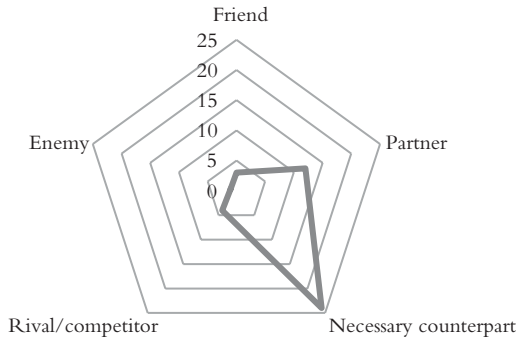
'The arms embargo is still an issue. [It] was not lifted for a long time and China's market economy status is also a problem. So, over time perception stagnated and [...] gradually, from 2008 onwards, perceptions didn't develop much more positive.' (Interview 13)

Similarly, critics argue that the European financial crisis has been a game-changer in EU–China security relations, but not in a positive sense. While China continued its rise towards becoming a global power, the EU was weakened by domestic turmoil in the aftermath of the financial crisis (Interview 12; Interview 13; Interview 20).

The existence of these two interpretations again reveals the two faces of China's role in its relation to the EU. In some security issues, we see more integration of China into international institutions and rules because it has certain interests in liberalization and cooperation, and intends to project power outwards. In other security issues, however, China sticks to protectionism and nationalism, reacting to local necessities and the urgency to project power inwards (Interview 24). The overall aim is legitimization, yet the way to achieve it is twofold, either through cooperation or through unilateralism and protectionism. This reflects an overall trend in China's international role performance that derives from the aim to become a global power that creates its own rules in the international system, and the need to be acknowledged as such by other major international players such as the EU. The strategic pick-and-choose of cooperation and challenge that drives EU–China security relations reflects this and, once more, shows the sectoral approach China takes towards the EU (Interview 24), which is also reflected in China's 2018 policy paper (MFA, 2018a).

Figure 5.1 displays the current perceptions that Chinese policy experts hold of the EU in the security realm, based on the interviews. It becomes obvious that China currently considers the EU mostly a 'necessary counterpart' and sometimes a 'partner' for security cooperation, but certainly not as a 'friend'. Moreover, the EU is mentioned as a 'rival or competitor' several times and once even as an 'enemy'. This links back to the finding of security cooperation as something driven by urgency or necessity to cooperate rather than something that is preferred or cherished (see Chapter 4).

This notion of the EU as a 'partner' and 'necessary counterpart' is also widely reflected in the way China talks about the EU in the sections about peace and security in its policy papers (MFA, 2014, 2018). A closer look at these papers reveals an interesting temporal pattern that further supports the interview statements. In its first official policy paper on the EU, published

**Figure 5.1:** China’s perception of the EU in the security realm

Note: This figure is based on the number of mentions of the different categories of mutual perceptions indicated in Chapter 2. The data base is the interviews conducted with Chinese officials and experts.

Source: Author.

in 2003, the PRC terms the EU a ‘major force in the world’ and states that there is no fundamental conflict of interests between the two actors, despite certain prevailing disagreements (MFA, 2003). China’s second EU policy paper in 2014 goes further, speaking of ‘tremendous changes’ in EU–China relations, highlighting ‘important strategic consensus’ over disagreements, and stating that ‘China and the EU have far more agreement than differences’ (MFA, 2014). In the policy paper of December 2018, China mentions the EU as an important counterpart when it comes to contributing to world peace and security (MFA, 2018a). Similarly, a Chinese policy expert mentioned that there ‘is more and more recognition that the EU can be a partner for security cooperation, not only in the economic [...] field[s]’ (Interview 6).

### *The EU’s role in international security governance*

Although the EU’s self-conception as an actor in international security governance might not stem from its history, or at least does so to a lesser degree than in the case of China, it is worth exploring how the EU positions itself as a security actor. This is particularly interesting against the backdrop of the EU’s struggle for increased actorness and autonomy in the security realm and its quest for a more unified security policy.

It is noteworthy that there is no one self-conception of the EU and that the struggle to find a unified position in general, and in its China policy in particular, is keeping EU policymakers busy. In principle, all EU member states support the common EU foreign policy and security policy, but in

practice, due to different interests and priorities in their China policies, it has proven hard or even impossible to reach a consensus among the 27 member states ever since the establishment of EU–China diplomatic relations in 1975 (Interview 27).

Two patterns can be distinguished regarding the EU's self-conception in the security realm. Both have a temporal component in that the EU's role in global politics has changed over time. The first pattern concerns the EU's self-conception as a normative power that has prevailed despite the EU aspiring to play a more proactive and leading role in global politics (Bengtsson and Elgström, 2012; Chaban and Elgström, 2014) and the expansion of its toolkit of response measures to security challenges in the context of the ESS and the new Strategy for a Security Union. The second pattern concerns the EU's struggle for a unified position in its security policy.

First, the development towards claiming a more active role in international security governance notwithstanding, the EU has maintained its self-identification as a normative power that strives for rule-based action and institution-building rather than ad hoc decision-making and interest-based politics. In that regard, Ian Manners' famous statement that the EU has the ability to define what is 'normal' in world politics (Manners, 2002, p 242) neatly aligns with how the EU conceptualizes its own role on the world's political stage. Comparing this to the rule-making role of China, it becomes obvious that the EU too views itself as a rule-maker that stresses norms over interests. Although this self-conception has become increasingly contested lately based on the EU's internal skirmishes, such as the backlash of nationalism and the erosion of democracy in some of its member states as well as its lack of autonomy in handling global security conflicts, the EU's security role can still be understood primarily in terms of its normative prioritization (Gurol and Grimm, forthcoming). According to Robert Kagan, the EU 'is turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation' (Kagan, 2002). By now, it has thus become standard practice to label the EU as a 'normative' and 'civilian' power (Manners, 2002; Bengtsson and Elgström, 2012). Thus, being a normative great power seems to be important for the EU's self-identification as a security actor. This is also reflected in the primarily civilian response tools the EU has at its disposal to react to security challenges.

Second, EU decision-making on matters of security and defence is largely conducted according to intergovernmental procedures, which leave little room for supranational actors to manoeuvre (Finamore, 2017a). Yet there is a change over time towards increased autonomy. This changing context of European security policymaking and drive towards greater strategic autonomy offers a window of opportunity to redefine the EU's China policy towards the more realistic stance mentioned in the EU's strategic



outlook on China, as of March 2019. While this entails a stronger defence of liberal democratic values and ‘European’ positions, it also means that there is increased potential for cooperation in the security realm, based on augmented capacities and more profound capabilities (European Commission, 2019a).

This goes along with an expanded influence of the EU in international security, not least through the development of the ESS, the CFSP and the CSDP. Responding to the changing security environment, the EU has adapted its concept of security over time (see the section on security through the eyes of the EU and China in this chapter). This expansion heightens the changing nature of current security threats, emphasizing the pre-eminence of international terrorism, the influence of non-governmental actors and the asymmetrical nature of new confrontations.

It is this self-identification that often leads to divergences with China over how to react to global security problems. As the analysis of how the EU and China frame ‘security’ earlier in this chapter has outlined, the prevailing differences in the institutional handling of security issues constitute the main divergence between the EU and China, and make it more complicated to agree upon adequate security response measures.

### *The EU’s perception of China as a security actor*

On the European side, the amplified engagement in reaching out to China as a possible security partner dates back to the beginning of what is called the European ‘pivot to Asia’ (Parello–Plesner, 2012; Casarini, 2013).<sup>2</sup> While the EU saw its relationship with China as one of ‘constructive engagement’ (European Commission, 1995) in 1995, it rose to a ‘comprehensive’ partnership (European Commission, 1998, 2001). Finally, in 2005–6, the EU established five key principles of foreign policy towards China, which remain influential until today. Those principles are to ‘engage China further’, to ‘support China’s transition towards an open society’, ‘encourage the integration [...] into the world economy’ and to ‘work together in support of peace and stability’ (European Commission, 2006).

A closer look at the EU’s policy papers reveals that over time, the EU has started to think of China as a possible partner in the security realm, moving beyond the initial focus on the economy that had long branded EU–China relations. In line with this development, the EU has strengthened its discussions with China in the high-level dialogue on security issues (European Parliament, 2002). In the beginning, this behaviour was driven by the anticipation to transform China into a responsible power by engaging with it and integrating it into the multilateral world order (Interview 21). For instance, after the CSP was signed, the EU had expected China to integrate more proactively into the international system and to take the initiative to

cooperate with the EU. Often, this expectation was disappointed and the perception of China as a possible partner weakened. One example of such diametral developments is the issue of anti-terrorism. As an interviewee from the EU reported, it was China's idea to establish a specific counter-terrorism dialogue with the EU. Although the EU agreed to set up such a dialogue, China repeatedly postponed further meetings. Finally, the establishment of a counter-terrorism dialogue was taken off the agenda (Interview 21). This resembles the initial optimism when the EU and China agreed to coordinate their anti-terrorism agendas in 2016 and even concluded a cooperation agreement (MFA, 2014; *China Daily*, 2016), but then nothing followed.

Moreover, the EU does not keep its expectations of China secret but has always voiced them explicitly. For instance, during a debate in the EP on 6 September 2006, a member of Parliament underlined that China 'need[ed] to shoulder a growing international responsibility [...] [and] it must also accept increased international responsibility and be a responsible partner' (European Parliament, 2006). Likewise, the former HR/VP, Federica Mogherini, stressed during an EP debate in 2015 that China 'is becoming a more integrated member of the global community and this means it has to accept the obligations and not simply the benefits of it' (European Parliament, 2015).

Over time, the confidence that China would meet the EU's expectations to integrate into existing cooperative structures were disappointed and the EU's perception of China as a possible security partner weakened. Early hints of disenchantment in the EU became obvious around 2005, and increasing 'divergences [...] when it comes to values and ideology' (Interview 20) came to the fore. At the same time, 'economic connections [were] becoming stronger and therefore also the needs [to cooperate]', which once more reveals the dilemma the EU found itself stuck in (Interview 20). In line with this disenchantment, anxiety rose that China's behaviour in international security governance would hinder more than support the creation of a rules-based global multilateral security order (European Parliament, 2006).

Consequently, instead of discussing China as a possible security partner in general terms, discussion within the EU turned towards finding more nuanced policies to handle its 'extraordinary range of complex relationships' with China (European Parliament, 2009) and to seek cooperation on security issues on which common ground exists while defending the EU's own interests more robustly in areas where normative or ideological differences prevail or interests diverge. The difficulty of finding the right balance in this dilemma was voiced by Federica Mogherini during an EP debate in 2018. She mentioned the 'fundamental disagreements' between the EU and China in the security realm and pointed towards a growing level of mutual mistrust. At the same time, she stressed the importance of China as a rising global

security provider for the EU (European Parliament, 2018a). This perception was far from new. Already in 2002, China was discussed as being a

... rising superpower with whom we certainly share interests and common ground, but – and let us be realistic here – with whom we also disagree as regards some very fundamental values and beliefs. (European Parliament, 2002)

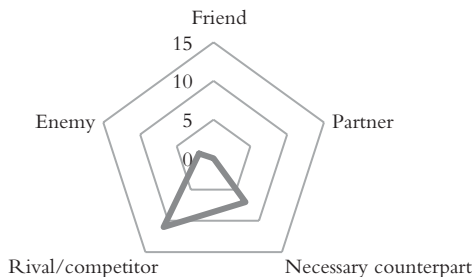
Yet concrete policy implications reacting to this realistic stance on China as a new security actor followed much later.

Figure 5.2 displays EU officials’ current perceptions of China in the security realm, based on the interviews. It becomes obvious that the EU considers China mostly a ‘rival or competitor’ in systemic terms, but also a ‘necessary counterpart’. This once more points towards the role of complex interdependence as rendering security cooperation necessary (see Chapter 4). Based on the increasing degree of security cooperation between the EU and China that can be observed empirically, interests and rational cost-benefit calculations seem to trump value concerns when it comes to security cooperation.

The complex perception of China both as a rival or competitor, and as a necessary counterpart creates a delicate balance in which the EU has to act: ‘China’s rise provides opportunities and challenges – it is in precisely this balance that we have to act’ (European Parliament, 2005c). This includes trying to detect points of engagement within an overall shrinking space of trust, mostly following on a ‘sector-by-sector approach’ (Interview 30).

These positions reveal that the EU is forced to balance two competing agendas in its foreign and security policy towards China – pursuing its

**Figure 5.2:** The EU’s perception of China in the security realm



Note: This figure is based on the number of mentions of the different categories of mutual perceptions indicated in Chapter 2. The data base is the interviews conducted with EU officials and experts.

Source: Author.

interests on the one hand, and defending and promoting its values on the other. In most cases, the main strategic and security interests of the EU and China do not overlap, and in some cases, their preferences and priorities even diverge. However, a growing number of analysts acknowledges that China is a necessary security counterpart for the EU, notwithstanding the deepening level of mistrust and divergence between the two (Interview 24). The following statement sums up this complexity and highlights the EU's perception of China:

'The EU has certain limitations in terms of power and power projection, so we need this cooperation with China, but we also need to show our teeth when we can and say, hey, do not expect us to cooperate on everything.' (Interview 27)

## Conclusion

Over time, the EU and China have developed a perception of shared responsibility for many issues of global governance and have enhanced and broadened their understanding of 'security'. This has, to some extent, facilitated the emergence of security cooperation, albeit mostly on non-traditional security issues. Acknowledging that they are bound in complex interdependence and not capable of tackling global security concerns unilaterally, the EU and China have put more effort into translating this convergent understanding of security into concrete joint actions over time, whenever it seemed favourable to both sides. Based on the changing nature of most security issues and the emergence of new, non-traditional security challenges, a similar threat perception has emerged for both sides. However, huge differences prevail regarding their respective approaches to global security governance. In contrast to the principled and rules-based approach of the EU, China pursues a strategy of 'selective multilateralism', attempting to shape existing multilateral security institutions from within, only adhering to binding international rules when these are in line with its interests and circumventing unwanted multilateral frameworks by establishing its own institutions. In line with this approach, Beijing prioritizes domestic security over international security, and its state-centred and fundamentally authoritarian approach is not in line with the EU's policies.

As a consequence, mutual perceptions between the EU and China have deteriorated over time. While policy officials on both sides highlight an ostensible like-mindedness of the EU and China and rhetorically endorse security cooperation, this official discourse should not lead us astray. In fact, establishing cooperative initiatives or implementing those in practice remains difficult and often fails due to mistrust. In particular, 'since 2005, perceptions worsened, from honeymoon towards a more pragmatic relationship'

(Interview 12) in which a mutual trust deficit seems to handicap cooperation (Interview 16). Against the backdrop of China's expanding geopolitical clout and its proactive promotion of its state-focused and authoritarian goals, the EU as a traditionally liberal advocate of a principled and rules-based multilateralism is facing deepening systemic challenges. This rivalry notwithstanding, the EU seems to acknowledge that in some areas of global security, it needs to engage with China as a necessary counterpart and, in some cases, interests and rational cost-benefit calculations seem to trump value concerns when it comes to security cooperation.

# EU–China Relations on Anti-Terrorism

## Introduction

With the globalization of security and the increase of transnational, non-traditional security concerns, terrorist and non-state armed groups have replaced conventional military threats as the main security hazards to many states (Kaldor, 2012). Especially since the end of the Cold War, the diversification of terrorist groups has become recognized as a substantial transnational security menace (Albanese, 2012) that poses severe challenges to economic and social stability (Bossong and Holmes, 2016).

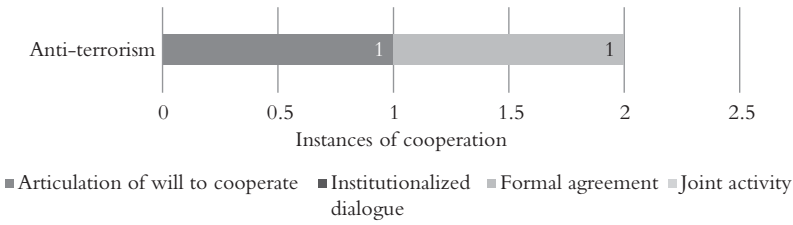
Consultations between the EU and China with regard to counter-terrorism measures take place on both the bilateral and multilateral levels. On the bilateral level, the EU–China Dialogue on Security and Defence, the Informal Dialogue on the Middle East and North Africa and, to some extent, the EU–China Dialogue on Human Rights (concerning terrorist activities in mainland China) address these issues. Additionally, the EU and China have organized several meetings under the ASEM Framework, in which they have addressed transnational terrorism. In 2003, the first ASEM counter-terrorism meeting was held in Beijing and then took place annually until 2012. In the context of the 10th general ASEM summit in 2014, the EU and China decided to launch an institutionalized forum to discuss the political situation in the Middle East (extending to Afghanistan and Central Asia), Northern Africa and the Sahel zone. This forum was expected to foster joint Chinese-European activities to combat the rise of extremism and terrorism in these regions – a plan that was never put into practice. Yet efforts to establish joint counter-terrorism measures continued. In 2016, the EU’s law enforcement agency EUROPOL and the Chinese Ministry of Public Security (MPS) joined the Agreement on Strategic Cooperation (EUROPOL, 2016) that includes the exchange of information and intelligence.

On the multilateral level, the UN provides the main framework for anti-terrorism, in particular the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. Both China and the EU stress the UN's crucial role in counter-terrorism and adhere to its principles. Beyond this, both are part of international UN-led counter-terrorism talks. The first state commissioner for counter-terrorism and security matters represents China in these meetings.

Although the EU–China anti-terrorism cooperation architecture seems well advanced at first glance – due to ongoing consultations on the bilateral and multilateral levels, the EUROPOL–MPS Agreement and the expressed will to find cooperative measures to combat the upsurge in terrorism – the two have failed to turn this into concrete action. Collaboration in terms of joint activities has hitherto remained scarce. This is baffling, as in recent years international terrorism has emerged as a growing menace. As a result, it might have been expected that due to a shared interest in the fight against terrorism, the perception of similar menaces to their respective national security, the geographical proximity of both actors to the Middle East and Central Asia (where most Islamist terrorist groups originate), and the overarching UN framework, EU–China anti-terrorism cooperation should be well advanced. Instead, China is arguably the most limited of the EU's strategic partners on that issue in Asia (Bossong and Holmes, 2016; Duchâtel, 2016). In a similar vein, China's counter-terrorism collaboration with actors other than the EU, such as Russia, Tajikistan and, on a regional level, the SCO, is much more advanced.

This chapter scrutinizes EU–China anti-terrorism relations – unquestionably one of the most controversial security issues in EU–China relations. A first glance at the Chinese and European policy papers and their joint declarations suggests that anti-terrorism is not mentioned frequently, at least not in combination with the expression of a will to cooperate, descriptions of institutionalized discussions about joint measures, indications of formal agreements or even references to joint activities. Figure 6.1 shows how often cooperation (in its rhetorical, institutional, formal or active form) is brought up in this text corpus. Only once have the EU and China articulated a concrete will to cooperate in this realm. Similarly, on the formal level, the EUROPOL–MPS agreement is the only instance of cooperation to which reference is made.

The chapter contains four main sections. The first section seeks to understand terrorism through the eyes of the EU and China, exploring how they define and frame terrorism. The second section engages with rationalist explanations for the low level of cooperation between the EU and China on anti-terrorism and analyses the constraints that have stalled deeper alignment on combatting terrorism from the lens of interdependence and interests. The third section studies the mutual perceptions that the EU and China hold of each other in the realm of anti-terrorism. Finally, the chapter evaluates the main findings.

**Figure 6.1:** Instances of cooperation on anti-terrorism. Based on the text corpus

Note: This figure is based on the number of mentions of the respective dimension of cooperation in official Chinese and European policy papers and joint declarations.

Source: Author.

## Understanding terrorism through the eyes of China and the EU

In what follows, the framing of terrorism by the EU and China is compared, along the following parameters (for a detailed description of these categories, see [Chapter 2](#)):

- type of security issue
- scope of definition
- target
- institutional responsibility
- salience
- political values

Terrorism constitutes a growing threat for the EU and China, based on the increasing number of terrorist attacks ([Zhang, 2003](#); [Clarke, 2008](#); [Smith, 2009](#); [Zhou, 2014](#); [Bossong and Holmes, 2016](#)). For China, these threats endanger Chinese nationals living overseas as well as China's sovereignty and territorial integrity at home ([Bossong and Holmes, 2016](#); [Clarke and Kan, 2017](#)). Examples of terrorist attacks on Chinese citizens and/or the Chinese state include several knife and bombing attacks in the Western city of Urumqi in 2014 and the so-called Tiananmen Square attack in 2013. Likewise, the EU has become a target of international terrorism in the past years (Council of the European Union, [2005b](#), [2015a](#); [EUROPOL, 2019, 2020](#)). The examples thereof are manifold: The Brussels bombing in 2016, the Nice truck attack in France in 2016, the Berlin Christmas market attack in 2016 and the Paris attacks in 2015. The nature of these attacks is changing from 'individuals acting alone – often with limited preparation and easily available weapons' ([European Commission, 2020b](#), p 1) – to more concerted attacks. For 2019 alone, EU member states reported a total of 199 completed, failed and foiled terrorist attacks, with ten deaths and



17 injuries. This neatly aligns with the threats perceived by EU citizens. According to the 2020 fundamental rights survey, every fifth EU citizen was worried about terrorist attacks in 2019 (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020, p 3). Consequently, high salience is attached to the issue of counter-terrorism by both the EU and China.

At first glance, the definition or framing of terrorism does not seem to diverge significantly between the EU and China. For both, the issue has become increasingly transnationalized in recent years, especially since 9/11. Besides, the increasing sectarian violence originating in the Middle East (in particular Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria) constitutes a mounting risk to their sovereignty, territorial integrity and national stability.

A closer look, however, reveals huge differences in ways China and the EU frame terrorism, as well as in their approaches regarding adequate response tools. An examination of their official definitions alone yields thought-provoking inconsistencies. The EU has developed a mainly operational understanding of terrorism. According to the Council Common Position of December 2001, it defines terrorism as:

acts, which [...] may seriously damage a country or an international organisation, as defined as an offence under national law, where committed with the aim of: (i) seriously intimidating a population, or (ii) unduly compelling a Government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or (iii) seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization. (European Council, 2001, p 1)

By contrast, Article 3 of China's 2015 counter-terrorism legislation defines terrorism as:

propositions and actions that create social panic, endanger public safety, violate person and property, or coerce national organs or international organisations, through methods such as violence, destruction, intimidation, so as to achieve their political, ideological, or other objectives. (National People's Congress, 2015)

This shows that the Chinese definition of terrorism is much broader and more ambiguous than the concrete and specific definition of the EU. The EU, for instance, explicitly refers to 'acts' as terroristic behaviour while China even considers 'propositions' terroristic actions, which broadens the scope of possible counter-measures that can be taken at a much earlier stage. Moreover, the European definition specifies 'serious damages' as an indicator of a terroristic act, while the Chinese version refers to the creation of 'social

panic'. In addition to these conceptual differences, it seems to be important for the EU that terrorism is something that is done consciously with a concrete 'aim of [...] intimidating, [...] compelling or [...] destabilising or destroying'. Moreover, the EU distinguishes between 'international, religiously motivated terrorism and territorial, secessionist-oriented terrorism with several hotspots also within the European Union' (European Parliament, 2011, p 55). Concerning terrorist threats originating from outside European territory, the terrorism situation and trend reports of 2019 and 2020 mention Islamist terrorism as the biggest concern. They identify the main threats emanating from within the EU as nationalist, separatist, left- and right-wing or single-issue extremist terrorist groups (EUROPOL, 2019, 2020). This neatly aligns with the Security Union Strategy, which states that despite an overall downward trend in terrorist attacks in the EU in 2019, the threat to EU citizens stemming from jihadist attacks by or inspired by Da'esh,<sup>1</sup> al-Qaeda or their affiliates remains high (European Commission, 2020a, p 4). Yet it also highlights the growing menace of violent right-wing extremism, often inspired by racism.

Beyond these divergences concerning the understanding of the nature of terrorism as defined in official documents, the interviews reveal even deeper differences between the EU and China. Primarily, as stated explicitly both by Chinese and European interviewees, 'their terrorism is not our terrorism' (Interview 9; Interview 20). This underlines the impasse the two sides have reached in establishing common ground on anti-terrorism. This culminated at the EU–China summit in 2019, when China took the initiative to place anti-terrorism on the meeting agenda. Although open and free discussions were held, including on the sensitive issue of Uyghur minorities and human rights (Interview 25), the stalemate could not be resolved. Another example of this is that according to the interviewees, the European External Action Service (EEAS) repeatedly tried to establish a regular anti-terrorism dialogue with China after the situation in Xinjiang started to escalate. However, all attempts were fruitless, according to interviewees from the EU (Interview 21; Interview 29).

One major point of difference regarding the target of terrorist attacks or threats is that for China terrorism seems to have a strong domestic component. China's 2015 white paper on defence (State Council, 2015) names terrorism as the first concrete threat to national security, after 'international and regional turmoil'. It further refers to regional terrorism (地区恐怖主义 *diqu kongbu zhuyi*), separatism (分裂主义 *fenlie zhuyi*) and extremism (极端主义 *jiduan zhuyi*) as three rampant evils (National People's Congress, 2015; National People's Congress, nd).

For a long time, China's main concern regarding terrorism was linked to the so-called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in the northwest of the country, but its current stance on terrorism also reflects

the contemporary international focus on Islamist-inspired radicalism and extremism in general. Still, the strong focus on the XUAR remains and the alleged insurgency of the Muslim minority living there is considered to be one of the main threats to Chinese territorial integrity (Wang, 2014). More specifically, State Councilor Guo Shengkun stressed during a visit to the XUAR in 2014 that ‘terrorism must be taken down without mercy’ (Wang, 2014, np). Tensions between the Chinese Han majority and the Muslim Uyghur minority have a long history. While the Chinese government in Beijing considers Xinjiang an inalienable part of China, a vocal and at times militant Uyghur independence movement seeks autonomy from Beijing (Clarke, 2008; Finley, 2019). As a consequence, Beijing has started imposing strict restrictions on the Uyghur minority. It drew international attention in particular when the Chinese government under Xi Jinping proclaimed the so-called strike hard against violent terrorism campaign in 2014 (State Council, 2014). The topic gained further international attention when the Chinese government set up the so-called Vocational Education and Training Centres, ‘political re-education’ or ‘training’ centres in Xinjiang that have been frequently criticized and accused of human rights violations, not only by human rights organizations (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018; OHCHR, 2018; Freedom House, 2020) but also by the EU itself (European Parliament, 2021).

In a similar vein, comparing the lists of terrorist threats put out by the EU and China reveals quite clearly that China’s definition of terrorism has a strong domestic component, while the EU applies a primarily transnational framing. The Chinese Ministry of Public Security (MPS) issued a list of terrorist threats that includes the East Turkestan Islamist Movement (ETIM), the East Turkestan Liberation Organization (ETLO), the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and the East Turkestan Information Center (ETIC), revealing quite clearly the strong domestic focus of China’s understanding of terrorism (Mission of the PRC to the EU, 2003). The EU’s terrorist list, set out in common position 2001/931/CFSP and regularly updated, includes organizations such as Hamas (from Palestine), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (from Sri Lanka) and Sendero Luminoso (from Peru) (European Council, 2001), just to name a few examples that illustrate the EU’s transnational understanding of terrorism.

However, discarding Chinese anti-terrorism as merely focused on the XUAR would be too simplistic and would not do justice to the manifold Chinese initiatives to combat transnational terrorist groups and participate in bilateral or regional SCO-led endeavours to fight Da’esh and al-Qaeda and strive towards mediation with the Taliban in the Afghan conflict. Still, it is noticeable that in the official Chinese discourse, such transnational threats are often linked back to China’s national security and territorial integrity, with manifold references to the XUAR. For instance, the rise of Da’esh

is often framed in terms of having possible implications for Islamist non-state groups operating on Chinese ground (Interview 17). One could thus argue that China's commitment to combatting Da'esh is driven by fear of a possible spillover of terror and insurgency onto Chinese soil. In this context, the hazard originating from returning Uyghur fighters who had joined the battle in Syria is often mentioned (Interview 17).

A similar pattern that reveals China's domestic focus when it comes to terrorism can be found with regard to the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. For China, the political stability of Afghanistan seems to be a major point of concern, as it bears the potential to either stabilize or destabilize the whole region. Additionally, Afghanistan shares ethnic and religious ties with northwestern China. Against the backdrop of the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan in 2014 and the withdrawal of US troops from the country, Beijing fears that Afghanistan might become a new hotbed for Uyghur militants.

China's proactive stance towards the country is also fuelled by the concern about the potential effects of Afghan instability on the PRC, including terrorism, insurgency and a possible influx of militants or cross-border organized crime. With tensions mounting between Beijing and the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang, the PRC wants to avoid possible collaboration between its own Muslim minorities and the Taliban, al-Qaeda or other Islamist groups in Afghanistan (Interview 17). As for the time being, China's main concern is linked to the so-called Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), formerly called ETIM (MFA, 2018b). It was funded by Uyghur fighters in Western China and is believed to be training Uyghur fighters to spread insurgency in Xinjiang as it seeks independence for the province. In September 2002, China managed to get ETIM listed as a terror group based on its association with al-Qaeda. In November 2020, however, the US removed ETIM from its terror list, citing a lack of 'credible evidence that ETIM continues to exist' (*The Guardian*, 2020).

One (cause for) concern for the CCP is still the relatively high number of Da'esh fighters that are believed to be residing in Afghanistan as part of a Da'esh offshoot, the Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K). When Da'esh announced its expansion to Afghanistan through the IS-K in 2015, Beijing reacted by reviewing its policy of non-interaction with the Afghan Taliban and opened a dialogue with the group (Azami, 2016). Besides, it established an anti-terrorism alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan (*Reuters*, 2016). In 2016, a first joint Chinese-Tajik anti-terrorism exercise was carried out on the Afghan-Tajik border to tackle Islamist terrorism in Central Asia (Putz, 2016). Moreover, the PRC started to support the Afghan National Unity Government in the ongoing peace and reconciliation process (MFA, 2016) and, together with Kabul, developed control measures at the Chinese-Afghan border. In July 2021, the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi further pressed

the leaders of Afghanistan’s insurgent Taliban group to cut their ties to all terrorist groups, such as the anti-Chinese ETIM, during a visit to several Central Asian countries (*Global Times*, 2021).

China’s approach to combatting transnational terrorism seems to be closely linked to the fear that a deeper engagement in many world regions, including those long beset by terrorist violence and yet central to China’s BRI agenda, such as Central Asia or the Middle East, increases its own exposure to terrorism. Therefore, the growing Chinese global footprint has been accompanied by the augmentation of the capacities of the People’s Armed Police Forces (PAP) and an adaptation of China’s criminal laws. According to China’s white paper on defence published in 2009, the PLA is allowed and able to ‘crack down on [...] terrorism efficiently, appropriately, and legally. [...] [and] it has taken part in operations [...] to hunt down the “East Turkestan” terrorists’, which refers to the TIP and ETIM. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between transnational security issues, which have objective content, and transnational security threats, which are subjectively constructed, as in the Chinese definition of terrorism.

With the expansion of the Chinese definition of terrorism, the Chinese security discourse is believed to have adapted to the ‘Western’ discourse of a global war on terror, linking Uyghur extremism to global jihad and al-Qaeda, and later to the Islamic State (Interview 17). For instance, a document of the State Council of the People’s Republic emphasizes that ‘China has made important contributions to the global fight against terrorism with its deradicalisation efforts in Xinjiang’ (State Council, 2020). China’s dilemmas are thus increasingly transnational (Interview 9). In general, China’s dilemma with what the official discourse considers as Uyghur separatism and terrorism appears to fit broad conceptualizations of transnational threats. However, this broad conceptualization of terrorism is often understood by critics as a form of instrumentalization that allows China to go against its Uyghur citizens that supposedly have the intention to create ‘social panic’ and insurgence. This instrumentalization is a central plank of the EU’s criticism and one of the main barriers to EU–China cooperation under the framework of the global war on terror.

Linked to the different definitions of terrorism of the EU and China, is the question of institutional responsibility, or who is in charge of the decision-making process on counter-terrorism measures. The fact that the fight against terrorism is handled in different institutional bodies in the EU and China shows that ‘a common willingness is not always enough, but also we need a common understanding of adequate response mechanisms’ (Interview 27). One of the interviewees stated that different political bodies in China are characterized by different degrees of protectionism and nationalism (Interview 30) and discourses of legitimization play a crucial role in China’s foreign policymaking.

These discourses are fed by economic performance and nationalism, of which the latter becomes particularly apparent when it comes to terrorism. According to the same interviewee, in policy fields such as anti-terrorism, which are characterized by strong nationalism and thus require a higher degree of legitimization within China, cooperation with external actors is less likely (Interview 24; Interview 30). Moreover, it is noteworthy that China handles its fight against terrorism primarily via its homeland security institutions. Over time, the PLA has intensified its strategic- and operational-level command post training and troop training to gain more MOOTW capabilities for counter-terrorism (MND, 2009). Under the umbrella of homeland security, China has further established a number of new institutions to deal with terrorism. Shortly after 9/11, it created the National Anti-Terrorism Coordination Group (NATCG) and the MPS set up an anti-terrorism bureau in 2013 (CPC News, 2014).

The EU, by contrast, handles the fight against terrorism at the intersection of its foreign, security and internal security policies, and mentions counter-terrorism as a priority within both its external and internal security strategies. The fight against terrorism has been a vital driver of the development of an EU external security profile. In 2005, the EU adopted its first counter-terrorism strategy to fight terrorism globally. The strategy, which was updated step-by-step, has four main pillars: to prevent, to protect against, to pursue and to respond to the international terrorist threat (Council of the European Union, 2005b; European Commission, 2020b).

Like the EU's and China's understanding of terrorism, their response toolkits also differ tremendously. They also link very different political values to the fight against terrorism. While for China, it is mainly state sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security at stake, the EU links terror with threats to democracy and human rights: 'beating terrorism requires, firstly, a belief in the supremacy of democracy [...] [as] terrorism is incompatible with democracy' (European Parliament, 2005a). As stated in Directive 2017/541:

Terrorism constitute[s] one of the most serious violations of the universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity, and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on which the Union is founded. (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2017)

Similarly, the most recent counter-terrorism agenda of the EU stresses that terrorism is a threat to its freedom, security and justice, and emphasizes the need to safeguard the EU's 'pluralistic society, [...] common values and [the] European way of life' (European Commission, 2020b, p 1). As a former European policymaker made clear, the repetitive attempt of European stakeholders to convince China to adopt 'European values' in order to foster

**Table 6.1:** Comparison of the EU’s and China’s definitions of terrorism

	<b>The EU’s definition of terrorism</b>	<b>China’s definition of terrorism</b>
Type of security issue	Non-traditional	Non-traditional
Extent of salience	High	High
Scope of definition	Narrow, specific	Broad
Target	Domestic and transnational	Domestic
Political values	Democracy and human rights, freedom, equality and solidarity	National sovereignty or territorial integrity
Institutional responsibility	Embedded in foreign and security policy	Embedded in homeland security policy

cooperation on this issue proved counterproductive, as the Chinese held on to their ‘Chinese values’ (Interview 23).

Table 6.1 sums up and compares the EU’s and China’s definitions of terrorism along with the criteria discussed. Although for both, terrorism is a non-traditional security issue that is of high salience, their understanding of the scope of terrorism, relevant targets as well as the institutional responsibility to combat terrorism differ enormously. The same applies to the political values they attach to the issue.

The analysis paints a clear picture of the discrepancies between the EU and China. The fact that ‘their terrorism is not our terrorism’ seems to be the key cause for non-cooperation and why, despite efforts on both sides to maintain an ongoing dialogue, EU–China anti-terrorism relations are neither progressing nor failing. According to some of the experts interviewed (Interview 3; Interview 25) for the EU, China’s repression of the Uyghur Muslim minority in XUAR under the narrative of a ‘global war on terror’ seems to be a clear deal-breaker. This neatly aligns with the clash of values attached to the EU and China to anti-terrorism. For the EU, the risk of giving away its essential focus on human rights and the rule of law are too high in comparison to the potential benefits to be gained when making compromises in order to cooperate with China on anti-terrorism. Likewise, for China, based on this clash of values, it seems to be easier to combat terrorism unilaterally or to reach out to other like-minded – often autocratic – cooperation partners. The following section on interdependence and interests will further elaborate on how siding with actors other than the EU allows China to combat terrorism together with partners and yet keep its own definition of it.

Moreover, the EU harshly criticizes the broad scope and vague nature of the Chinese definition of terrorism for leaving too much room for interpretation. It condemns China's actions, taken under the guise of anti-terrorism (Interview 27), that open up possibilities for extensive societal surveillance and the repression of minorities such as the Uyghurs as well as dissidents more broadly. For example, this critique is reflected in EP resolution 2019/2690(RSP) on China, notably the 'situation of religious and ethnic minorities' (European Parliament, 2019a). The resolution denounces that under the umbrella of fighting terrorism, China has:

set up a sprawling state architecture of digital surveillance, ranging from predictive policing to the arbitrary, nationwide collection of biometric data in an environment devoid of privacy rights mass detention of ethnic Uighurs. (European Parliament, 2019a)

Similarly, the 'Joint Statement on Human Rights Violations and Abuses in Xinjiang', issued by 22 countries (including 18 European countries) strongly disapproved of China's handling of Xinjiang (UK, 2019).

All in all, zooming in on (anti-)terrorism through the lenses of the EU and China demonstrates that a common willingness to combat terrorism is not enough to promote security cooperation. Instead, the analysis indicates the significance of a common understanding of the problem. As one interviewee put it: 'With the issue of terrorism, we see that a common willingness is not always enough, but also we need a common understanding of adequate response mechanisms' (Interview 27).

## Interests and interdependence

The divergences discussed earlier are mostly at the level of clashing values and norms between the EU and China. The chapter will now turn towards the role of interests and interdependence. In particular, it will scrutinize whether and how the overall interdependence and global entanglements of the EU and China influence their respective stances in the realm of anti-terrorism.

Two major assumptions need to be examined. First, there does not seem to be a strong economy-security nexus when it comes to anti-terrorism. And second, despite their adherence to the UN framework on counter-terrorism, the interdependence of the EU and China as two actors in global governance does not seem to translate into joint counter-terrorism measures. Instead, rationalist calculations and cost-benefit estimates drive the EU and China to reach out to other, more like-minded cooperation partners. In the case of China, these are the SCO, Russia and Tajikistan, while the EU mostly reaches out to other Western partners like the US. The analysis further suggests that despite the shared interest of fighting



terrorism and the high salience attached to this security concern, pursuing strategic objectives in a purely rationalist manner hinders the emergence of cooperation between the EU and China. From an individual standpoint, it seems to be the most rational choice for both not to cooperate (Interview 9; Interview 17; Interview 27). It is the task of the subsequent sections to disentangle the concrete modes and mechanisms through which rational considerations lead to non-cooperation. The EU's and China's calculations will be discussed separately as very different underlying motives play a role.

Concerning China's non-cooperation with the EU, two different strategic objectives can be distinguished. These are (1) a fear of retaliation and (2) the temptation to cooperate with more like-minded partners. On the one hand, the specific approach taken to address terrorism reflects China's dynamic social and economic transformation, and is further influenced by its changing global security role. There is evidence that China is afraid of retaliation from terrorist groups in the Middle East and Central Asia (Kelemen and Fergani, 2020), which would pose a threat to its territorial integrity and state survival, and would further endanger its citizens overseas (Ghiselli, 2020) as well as its investments abroad. Altogether, this leads to its choice of defection over cooperation (Interview 1). Closer cooperation with the EU would be likely to draw China closer into the global war on terrorism, increasing the risk of exposure.

Moreover, for China, cooperating with the EU on combatting terrorism would require at least a partial acceptance or adaptation of the European approach to human rights and the rule of law and would also require departing from the close connection between terrorism and the XUAR. Therefore, it seems easier to reach out to other, often similarly autocratic, partners like Russia or Tajikistan. As recent research shows, autocratic actors have a strong interest in preserving a compatible environment and therefore oftentimes seek cooperation with like-minded partners (Kneuer and Demmelhuber, 2020), which explains the Chinese aversion to adopting a Western definition of terrorism.

Siding with other autocrats lets China jointly combat terrorism while keeping its own definition of terrorism and how to respond to it. Hence, the SCO, which established the Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) in 2003, seems to be the preferred forum for China to address counterterrorism (Interview 17) in addition to bilateral partnerships. In a speech at the 15th meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the SCO, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stressed the need to 'beef up the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure [and] hold regular joint anti-terrorism drills' (State Council, 2016). In a similar manner, China reaches out to other – mostly also autocratic (Potter and Wang, 2021) – cooperation partners in the Middle East, such as Egypt or the Arab Gulf countries with whom China claims to share a 'solid political foundation' (State Council, 2019b).

In this context, one bilateral partnership stands out – China’s collaboration with Egypt (MFA, 2020). According to a Chinese interviewee ‘giving and taking’ (Interview 17) characterizes this relationship, in particular in the security realm. There is evidence of close cooperation in combatting Islamist extremism in the Middle East and, strikingly, also regarding the Uyghur Muslim minority. While it is surprising just that a Muslim country like Egypt does not condemn China’s treatment of its Muslim minority, in 2017, Egyptian authorities went so far as to detain dozens of Uyghur students and deport them to China (Barrington, 2017). In return, China allegedly provides economic support, helping Egypt with infrastructure and technology investments (Interview 17). For instance, the China State Construction Engineering Corporation built many of Egypt’s landmark buildings and more than 1,500 Chinese firms are currently registered in Egypt. Moreover, China has become the largest investor in the Suez Canal Corridor, a huge industrial zone (Calabrese, 2020).

To sum it up, the gains for China from cooperating with partners other than the EU are certainly higher than those that cooperation with the EU promises. At the same time, the costs of cooperating within other fora like the SCO or through bilateral partnerships like the one with Egypt are lower than those of cooperating with the EU.

For the EU, similar calculations are at play. Following a simple cost-benefit analysis, putting enormous effort into initiating anti-terrorism cooperation mechanisms with the divergent China simply does not pay off. Above and beyond this rationale, counter-terrorism cooperation would require an exchange of information and personal data, and thus would entail intelligence collaboration (Interview 16). Yet the EU remains highly sceptical about the continued uncertainties involved in the exchange of personal data, and a prevailing lack of trust hinders the establishment of cooperation with China in this case (Interview 31). Accordingly, an increasing securitization of digital policies (Interview 27) hinders deeper alignment on the issue of counter-terrorism.

## **Mutual perceptions**

The previous section mentioned the EU’s scepticism and mistrust when it comes to intelligence cooperation with China. The chapter now examines such mutual perceptions more in-depth and scrutinizes whether the EU and China view each other as ‘friends’, ‘partners’, ‘necessary counterparts’, rivals or competitors’ or ‘enemies’ in the realm of anti-terrorism. It begins by studying the EU’s perceptions of China and subsequently examines the Chinese perceptions of the EU.

In the matter of counter-terrorism, the EU and China are rivals or competitors rather than partners or friends. Although at first glance,

their overall objective to combat terrorism aligns, a closer look reveals that they pursue highly contradicting aims and are motivated by very different rationales, as explored in previous sections. This is reflected in the overall tone in which European and Chinese interviewees talk about each other's roles in anti-terrorism. The narratives and attributes they use to describe each other reveal that they see each other as competitors or even rivals. This goes along with the EU's sharp criticism of China in its 2019 EP resolution on the situation of the Uyghurs in China (European Parliament, 2019a).

Besides this overt mistrust and disapproval over the handling of the fight against terrorism, the analysis reveals another interesting finding. The EU and China see each other as incapable of combatting terrorism efficiently. This perceived lack of competency seems to be a major hindrance to the emergence of cooperation. The Chinese side seems to be well aware that the Chinese military is not yet capable of combatting terrorism outside China (Interview 9). This is one of many justifications, voiced by Chinese official sources, for why the country focuses so strongly on domestic terrorism. That China is not a major global security provider becomes obvious in manifold cases.

However, one should not be misled by the alleged lack of abilities that are mentioned by official Chinese sources as the main reason for China not becoming a more active global security provider. While this deficiency of competencies is certainly at play, other, more strategic calculations neatly align with this deficiency. A look at China's overall security approach to the Middle East shows how deficiency and strategy go hand-in-hand. Despite its increasing economic engagement there, China has so far remained hesitant to become a security provider and take on greater responsibilities in the security realm. In fact, Beijing has been reluctant to signal the possibility of it becoming an alternative to or even flanking Washington's security role in the region (Gurol, 2020b). For the European side, the lack of Chinese capacities and will to build them provide a major obstacle to seeking cooperation. Helping China to overcome such shortcomings in terms of experience, equipment and training would mean giving the country military and police abilities that could end up being used elsewhere. As one European interviewee pointedly put it: 'The question is, how far can we go without giving them too many capabilities?' (Interview 21).

However, dismissing China as the only side of the EU–China axis that lacks competencies in the realm of counter-terrorism would hide the fact that the EU too has a deficiency in that regard. This deficiency was frequently mentioned in interviews with EU officials and experts, who acknowledged shortcomings in the EU's CSDP (Interview 27). Indeed, the EU has not yet played a significant role in supporting international actions to combat terrorism (Laakso, 2004).

Hence, we can conclude that mistrust and a well-acknowledged conception of not being adequately equipped to combat terrorism further hinder EU–China cooperation on counter-terrorism. The persistent mistrust that characterizes their relations when it comes to this particular security issue has put on hold all initiatives that would lead to developing joint response tools, as initially foreseen in the EUROPOL–MPS agreement.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored the surprising phenomenon of EU–China non-cooperation on anti-terrorism. Despite the obvious alignment of their overall objectives, which is to combat terrorism efficiently, both their interests and underlying values are diametral and incompatible. As a consequence, the EU and China do not manage to convert their aim to collaborate on anti-terrorism, oftentimes proclaimed in national documents, into joint activities. Even though China has stepped up its engagements in its wider neighbourhood, such as Central Asia and the Middle East, it has so far remained reluctant to expand this engagement to the security realm, fearing retaliation from local terrorist groups. While in other policy fields, the CCP is eager to protect its economic interests overseas, no particular economy–security nexus seems to exist in anti-terrorism. Accordingly, the increased Chinese investment in the Middle East in the context of the BRI, do not result in a more proactive fight against transnational terrorism. For the EU, too, the analysis did not reveal any evidence that economic interests are connected to the issue of anti-terrorism.

Moreover, the EU and China have a collective action problem (Olson, 1965; Hardin, 1982) in the sense that despite having similar interests, they lack the ability to create collective action and overcome their self-interests (Olson, 1965; Wendt, 1994). It seems to be the most logical choice for both to not cooperate, so as to keep the costs as low as possible. Playing by the rules of individual rationality leads to a focus on the pursuit of economic and security self-interests, and the costs that cooperation would create are higher than the actual benefits. China in particular seems focused on national interests, declining many cooperation requests from the EU and trying to reach favourable results without the EU's cooperation. The fact that China has behaved this way partly adds to the strategic considerations of the EU in not initiating cooperation in the first place, as they know that China will not accept the cooperation offer. One could argue that not cooperating is the most rational form of behaviour for the EU and China, based on strategic economic and security considerations.

In addition, the EU and China do not perceive each other as friends or partners in the realm of anti-terrorism. Rather, there seems to be a significant lack of trust and even growing mistrust in EU–China terrorism relations

that hinder cooperation. The analysis revealed that, for the EU in particular, this lack of trust is closely connected to abilities, as cooperation with China would mean giving the country more military and police abilities, which could be used elsewhere. Similarly, anti-terrorism cooperation would require the exchange of data and intelligence collaboration, which requires a certain degree of trust.

But the most prevalent hindrance to EU–China cooperation on anti-terrorism is their completely different understanding of the scope, degree, relevant actors and purposes of terrorism. While both consider terrorism a non-traditional security threat and attach high salience to the issue, the scope of their definitions of terrorism differs significantly. The EU's definition is much more concrete, while the Chinese definition is rather vague and includes propositions as acts of terrorism. This enables the PRC to apply the label of terrorists to the Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang, as China considers terrorism mainly a domestic issue with a strong nationalist component. Accordingly, it locates the fight against terrorism in its homeland security policy, while the EU primarily treats it as a foreign and security policy concern. Likewise, the EU and China name very different political values that they believe are endangered by terrorism. For the EU these are democracy and human rights, while for China they are mainly national sovereignty and territorial integrity. This divergent framing of terrorism and the difficulty in finding common ground constitute the main obstacles for cooperation on anti-terrorism. These have instead led to deepening frictions and rivalry.

# EU–China Relations on Maritime Security and Anti-Piracy

## Introduction

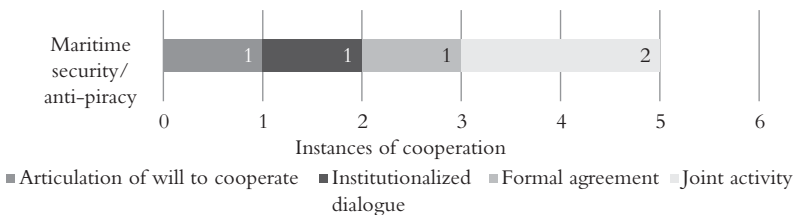
When the EU and China talk about maritime security in the context of anti-piracy, it is mostly in reference to the Gulf of Aden (GoA), between the coastlines of Yemen, Somalia and Djibouti. The GoA is part of the broader Arabian Sea and a maritime region of utmost geopolitical importance. Few international sea lines of communication (SLOCs) are under as much scrutiny as those that cross the Arabian Sea ([Gurol and Shahmohammadi, 2019](#)). The most crucial strategic hubs in the Arabian Sea for both the EU and China are the GoA, the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and the Bab al-Mandab Strait. All three SLOCs provide vital links to the trade routes between the Mediterranean and Asia. Increased globalization has rendered access to maritime trade routes more important than ever, because the seas are communication and transportation facilities on a global scale ([Hamza and Priotti, 2020](#)). The key East–West SLOC that runs through the Suez Canal and connects Africa and Asia to the European market passes through the GoA. In addition, the majority of vessels that cross the Suez Canal need to pass through this maritime strait. In the past 20 years alone, the overall volume of goods transported by sea has increased from 2.6 billion tonnes in 1996 to more than 10 billion tonnes in 2015, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) ([UNCTAD, 2016](#)). An estimated 4.8 million barrels per day of crude and petroleum products were moved through the Bab al-Mandab Strait in 2016, with about 2.8 million barrels going north towards Europe, and another 2 million moving towards Asia ([Cordesman, 2015](#); [Lee, 2018](#)). More than 20,000 merchant ships pass through the GoA every year, with a freight volume that accounts for about one-fifth of the world's total sea cargo ([EIA, 2019](#)). In this context, it has

become crucial to secure these strategic SLOCs to guarantee the safe and uninterrupted flow of trade.

Because of its strategic trade location and significance for global trade and shipping, the GoA has become the world's most common target of pirate attacks on merchant ships in the past two decades. Between 2005 and 2010, the number of attacks increased significantly, peaking in 2011, when 736 people and 32 ships were taken hostage (Winsor, 2015). According to Hamza and Priotti, the number of acts of piracy increased from 241 in 2005 to 544 in 2010 (Hamza and Priotti, 2020, p 144). These events drew a strong international response, with more than a dozen nations sending their ships on anti-piracy missions to the GoA. Some of them are participating in the Combined Task Forces (CTF) 150 and 151 under the multinational Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) framework (CMF, 2014) with a UN mandate. The EU launched its own mission in 2008, the EU Naval Forces Operation Atalanta (Council of the European Union, 2013) that operates in conjunction with the CTF 150 and 151 (Muratore, 2010). Although these concerted international actions managed to reduce the number of piracy attacks significantly, pirate activity in Somalia has resumed recently.

This chapter explores the concerted drive by the EU and China to combat piracy in the GoA, while putting them in a broader geopolitical context that also includes tensions in the Persian Gulf, another route where pirates have taken a significant toll. The chapter explores the drivers of EU-China anti-piracy cooperation and in doing so discusses self-interest and interdependence as well as their mutual perceptions and framings of piracy. In general, in maritime security and anti-piracy, we see all four forms of cooperation between the EU and China (rhetorical, institutional, formal and activity), as shown in Figure 7.1. Not only have the EU and China articulated the will to cooperate, they have also created institutionalized dialogue formats, reached formal agreements and pursued joint actions to battle piracy. Since 2008, the EU and China are cooperating within the framework of the international

**Figure 7.1:** Instances of cooperation on maritime security and anti-piracy



Note: The figure is based on all EU and Chinese policy papers and their joint declarations following the annual EU-China summits.

Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and carrying out joint training sessions, escort missions and strategic planning until today.

The first section of this chapter seeks to understand piracy and maritime security through the prisms of the EU and China, exploring how they define and frame this particular security issue. The second section engages with rationalist explanations for anti-piracy cooperation between the EU and China and scrutinizes the economy–security nexus as well as the need for burden-sharing. The third section focuses on the perceptions that the EU and China have of each other with regard to maritime security. Finally, the chapter ends with an evaluation of the main findings.

## **Understanding anti-piracy through the eyes of China and the EU**

As in the case of anti-terrorism, we compare the framing of piracy by the EU and China along the following parameters (for a detailed description see [Chapter 2](#)):

- type of security issue
- scope of definition
- target
- institutional responsibility
- salience
- political values.

To begin with, both the EU and China formally adhere to the UN's definition of piracy. According to Article 101 of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), acts of piracy include:

any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft [...] on the sea, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft [...] in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State. ([UN, 1982](#))

For both, piracy constitutes a non-traditional security threat that is relatively new and transnational in nature, and that has increased in salience since the early 2000s. As early as 2004, Hu Jintao mentioned the need for increased MOOTW to tackle rising non-traditional security threats. He considered anti-piracy missions overseas an important component of Chinese foreign and security policy ([Hu, 2004](#)). Likewise, China's 2013 defence white paper stressed that it is a key aim of China's foreign and security policy to 'protect national maritime rights and interests and national security interests in outer



space and cyber space’ and that it is indispensable to sustain and secure China’s overseas interests (MND, 2013). The 2015 white paper, ‘China’s Military Strategy’, went even further, endorsing far-seas operations to secure China’s maritime interests. It states that:

With the growth of China’s national interests, its national security is more vulnerable to [...] piracy, and the security of overseas interests (and) strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), has become an imminent issue. (State Council, 2015)

This strong domestic component of the Chinese definition of piracy again becomes apparent in the white paper ‘The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces’ (State Council, 2013), which lists the evacuation of Chinese nationals and the provision of security support for China’s interests overseas as the most important tasks of the PLA abroad.

Maritime security is a key foreign and security policy priority for the EU as the world’s largest trading bloc and as an important global security provider (EEAS, 2019b). In 2014, the EU adopted the European Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) that states the EU’s maritime interests. The main goal is advancing concrete actions to ensure the EU’s internal and external maritime security (EEAS, 2017b). For the EU, anti-piracy constitutes a cross-sectional security threat that is discussed both in traditional terms under the framework of the EU’s defence policy, as well as non-traditionally on environmental and humanitarian grounds (Pichon and Pietsch, 2019). Moreover, the EUMSS frames anti-piracy as a transnational issue (European Parliament, 2013). Similarly, in several EP debates, piracy has been outlined as a type of ‘organised crime that is happening at sea and on land’ (European Parliament, 2012a). According to a Chinese expert, this European framing of piracy as a non-traditional and transnational security threat facilitates cooperation with China: ‘It makes it easier that neither traditional, national security is involved nor [are] weapons, missiles or nuclear power’ (Interview 4).

Thus, the EU’s and China’s definitions of maritime security and anti-piracy seem to converge. For instance, another interviewee states that ‘in this area [the GoA], the enemy is so clear: it is the pirates’. In the opinion of this interviewee, the clear-cut understanding of the security challenge endangering the waterways of the GoA as well as the convergent threat perception felt by the EU and China make it easier for them to agree upon adequate response mechanisms to combat piracy (Interview 10; Interview 25). It also seems crucial that the defined security threat has no links to any form of (political) dogma and is not attached to particular political values. Moreover, it does not touch upon religious or ideological issues (Interview 22). Unlike acts of terrorism, which are oftentimes subject to wider political or ideological agendas, pirates are mainly driven by economic factors. Consequently,

counter-piracy measures do not necessarily touch upon ideological or political issues and do not require convergence on ideational interests.

As discussed in-depth in [Chapter 3](#), European and Chinese principles of foreign and security policymaking diverge mainly on a value level, while their material interests oftentimes converge. Accordingly, anti-piracy seems to be a policy field in which it is relatively easy to overcome normative clashes and focus on overlapping interests, as no particular values or ideological elements are attached.

Another element indicated by the interviewees is that cooperation in third countries, within a clearly defined area that has no direct links to either European or Chinese territory, is considerably easier to establish, as it neither conflicts with the principle of non-interference nor jeopardizes Chinese territorial integrity (Interview 10; Interview 16). Anti-piracy missions in the GoA take place in international waters and beyond national European or Chinese boundaries. This is of importance especially for the Chinese side because of its strong adherence to the principle of non-interference and its unwillingness to accept foreign-led activities in Chinese territory or interests. This argument also explains why EU-China cooperation is possible on anti-piracy and maritime security in the GoA, but not in the SCS (Interview 31).

When it comes to the salience attached to anti-piracy measures by the EU and China, the analysis paints a clear picture. The huge economic importance of the GoA as one of the most vital international SLOCs makes the EU and China vulnerable to piracy, and thus they see the fight against piracy as an issue of relatively high salience.<sup>1</sup> Yet there are crucial differences as regards the degree of perceived vulnerability and salience. As voiced by Chinese interviewees and supported by import and export data,

**Table 7.1:** Comparison of the EU's and China's definitions of piracy

	<b>The EU's definition of piracy</b>	<b>China's definition of piracy</b>
Type of security issue	Non-traditional	Non-traditional
Extent of salience	Medium (indirect vulnerability)	High (direct vulnerability)
Scope of definition	Specific	Specific
Target	Economic interests	Economic interests
Political values	None	None
Institutional responsibility	Foreign policy concern located within the EUMSS framework	Domestic security concern located within national PLA(N) missions

the SLOCs that cross the GoA are vital for China to secure a continuous supply of economic, energy and military goods, and to protect access to imported natural resources. Any disruption of these flows of trade and energy could have devastating consequences for the country. This renders China highly vulnerable and thus increases the salience of anti-piracy measures for it. Similarly, many EU member states rely on seaborne transportation and the fisheries sector. According to the EUMSS, European energy security is also highly dependent on the security of maritime infrastructure ([European Commission, 2014b](#)). Table 7.1 sums up and compares the EU's and China's definitions of maritime security/anti-piracy.

## Interests and interdependence

As already indicated, the issue of maritime security and anti-piracy showcases the impact of complex interdependence and reveals a strong economy–security nexus. The chapter will now turn to the role of interests and interdependence. In particular, it will examine whether and how the overall interdependence and global entanglements of the EU and China influence their anti-piracy cooperation.

Based on the globalization of international trade as well as the international energy market, the vulnerability of the EU and China to even small disruptions in global supply chains has increased over the past decades. Moreover, the links between the capture of oil tankers as a common act of piracy in the GoA and the reaction of the international oil market are obvious. Accordingly, the GoA is critical for international trade, especially for Western energy markets and China, where demand is high for oil and gas. An unimpeded flow of goods in the GoA is crucial, as the volume of seaborne trade via this SLOC has oscillated in the past two decades. The majority of goods that flow between the EU and China are shipped through the GoA. Therefore, there is not only a strong economy–security nexus when it comes to anti-piracy, but also a strong mutual dependence that translates into the need to jointly combat Somali pirates.

A glance at how interwoven the EU and China are institutionally in the realm of maritime security and anti-piracy illustrates this dependence. In line with the increase in pirate attacks in the GoA since roughly 2005, multiple channels of communication and interaction have been established between the EU and the PRC. Their joint presence in the Gulf of Aden dates back to 2008, when China's PLAN conducted the first naval operation in the GoA. Since then, the Chinese Navy has held bilateral joint maritime training exercises with the navies of 14 countries, including Russia, the UK, France, the US, Pakistan, India and South Africa. China has also conducted different forms of multilateral joint maritime training exercises with various countries, focusing on tasks ranging from escorting vessels to patrolling. At present, the

EU and China are primarily cooperating within the context of the EU's Operation Atalanta (also called EU NAVFOR Task Force 465), which was established in December 2008 by the EU Council Joint Action 2008/749/CFSP (European Council, 2008). Moreover, EU troops and Chinese PLA forces are conjoining under the overarching CGPCS framework to defuse political tensions in the GoA, the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Strait of Hormuz, thereby mainly focusing on escorting of trade vessels (Gippner, 2016). The CGPCS is coordinated by the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) programme that seeks to organize the activities of all actors present in the GoA, the NATO OCEAN SHIELD Operation, the US-led CMF, EU NAVFOR as well as independent deployers and the maritime industry (Gippner, 2016). Between 2008 and 2017 alone, the PLA dispatched 106 vessels and sent more than 28,000 officers and soldiers to the GoA to escort over 6,700 Chinese and foreign merchant ships (Xinhua, 2019a, 2019b). More than 20 meetings and communications between EU and Chinese fleet commanders have taken place in the same period (Xinhua, 2019b) and they have frequently engaged in joint training exercises. In January 2021, the 37th PLAN escort mission fleet set sail for the GoA and the waters off the Somali coast (Wei, 2021). Even though the joint EU-China drills might seem negligible or tenuous in terms of cooperation, we must keep in mind that the Chinese and the EU navies had never worked jointly before. Moreover, it is striking that China has not been idle in response to piracy in the GoA and has become more involved in actual military operations, despite not being a traditional naval power (Hamza and Priotti, 2020). Consequently, the EU and China have put enormous efforts into the multiform response architecture that has been built up since 2007 under UNSC leadership to eradicate maritime piracy in the GoA.

Institutionally, the EU-China cooperation on anti-piracy can be located at the intersection of bilateral and multilateral frameworks. Besides the overarching UN-led actions, powerful bilateral mechanisms have been developed since 2008. Within the overall cooperation architecture in EU-China relations, anti-piracy has been discussed at the highest level: at a meeting in 2014, Xi Jinping and Herman Van Rompuy talked about the benefits of military cooperation in the GoA (European Commission, 2014c). Joint actions in this realm are mainly promoted via the EU-China Dialogue on Security and Defence and the EU-China Dialogue on the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, in 2019, the EU and China held the first Experts' Seminar on Maritime Security, which was organized by the Delegation of the European Union to China in partnership with China's National Institute for South China Sea Studies (NISCSS). Besides, during their Blue Partnership Forum for the Oceans in 2019, the two sides agreed to try harder to improve international ocean governance and maritime

security (EEAS, 2019a). Discussions also take place at the ministerial level, during the regular High-Level Dialogue on Ocean Affairs.

Both Chinese and European sources suggest that EU–China anti-piracy cooperation in the GoA emerged mainly because of the clarity on how a joint mission could benefit them both. For the EU, the main strategic objectives behind its cooperation with China within the framework of NAVFOR is to share the burden and to reduce the cost of combatting piracy alone. Moreover, maritime security issues reach beyond the scope of the law enforcement activities of the EU's CSDP operations and thus require multilateral action. This is also a key component in the EU's factsheet on 'Enhancing security cooperation in and with Asia' (Council of the European Union, 2018a). It is stressed likewise in China's defence white papers. Accordingly, cooperation on the ground is believed to create a win-win situation by sharing the burden of combatting piracy (Interview 31). The following statement by an EU interviewee underlines this rationale:

'We asked the Chinese to escort a WTO vessel, so we were happy to share responsibility, also because our external actions when military costs are involved, are held by limited number of member states. [...] So, often burden-sharing is in the interest of the French and therefore, we started interacting with China on security and defence.' (Interview 29)

This notion is further stressed in official EU NAVFOR press releases (EU NAVFOR, 2018) and is also reflected in EP debates around safety in the Horn of Africa. For instance, in 2007, it was stated that to make 'real progress in the creation of peace and security in this region', the EU needs to coordinate 'its support and actions [...] with other countries, such as, for example, China' (European Parliament, 2007a). Similarly, piracy is understood as a 'strategic-type threat; it is a shared challenge that requires collective action' (European Parliament, 2012a). During the same debate in the EP, one representative stressed that through Atalanta, it is easier to establish such cooperative frameworks, as 'the partners working in cooperation with the EU – that is Russia, China and India – find it easier to work with the EU than they do with NATO' (European Parliament, 2012a), as this would involve the sharing of intelligence codes, which is a sensitive military and political issue. The EU's eagerness to cooperate with others is reflected in official visits and cooperation agreements with European military officials and their counterparts in partner countries. For instance, in 2017, Chinese officials hosted the EU NAVFOR commander on their frigate *Huang Gang* to exchange views on ongoing anti-piracy missions (EEAS, 2017a). Similar visits have taken place before (China Military Online, 2012).

For China, the organization of patrols and escorts was far more efficient and less cost-intensive in cooperation with the EU than unilaterally (Interview 21). China's navy is extremely vulnerable when it enters the Indian Ocean Region. Thus, international cooperation is necessary to address piracy. There is also evidence that the Chinese leadership is faced with internal and external pressure to cooperate on combatting piracy. As the legitimacy of the Chinese government rests on perceptions of how it handles security threats to Chinese economic, environmental and human security, the decision to cooperate with the EU in the GoA was further driven by domestic pressure (Erickson and Strange, 2013). This is evidenced by the fact that China deployed the PLA to the region and decided to cooperate with Atalanta after increasing pressure on the Chinese government to show its ability to protect Chinese vessels and citizens abroad, and to integrate into multilateral cooperation frameworks (Interview 9). One example of this is the Chinese initiative to host an international conference to coordinate anti-piracy actions in the GoA in November 2009.

Besides that, China's cooperation with the EU also expresses its budding role in countering piracy as evidence of the growing expeditionary character of the Chinese navy and the PLAN's transition from a traditionally coastal defence navy to a global blue water navy (Gurol and Shahmohammadi, 2019). By joining the multilateral anti-piracy actions in the GoA, China did more than just show its willingness to cooperate internationally to obtain higher benefits. One Chinese interviewee pointed out that the Chinese decision to work with Atalanta was inter alia due to the needs of the poorly equipped and inexperienced Chinese navy (Interview 9) (China Military Online, 2004). This interviewee interpreted the Chinese behaviour as an act of 'integration because of a lack of own capabilities'. This statement refers to the significant gap between Chinese interests and needs on the one hand and its influence in international maritime security on the other hand.

'In the beginning [of joint action], the main reason [for cooperation] was necessity: China wanted to learn how to operate in piracy, how to tackle that problem, how to operate in deep seas.' (Interview 14)

This notion is further underlined by a report by Hu Jintao, issued at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, that emphasizes the Chinese need to 'enhance the capability to accomplish a wide range of military tasks' (China Daily, 2012).

The Chinese approach to cooperation on maritime security with the EU neatly aligns with the overall approach of the PRC to adapt its foreign policy to that of a global power that has to deal with the challenge of securing international waterways of strategic importance (MFA, 2013b). Therefore, there is evidence that China's participation in the EU's Atalanta mission is among other things driven by longer-term strategic considerations, such as

training its naval resources more broadly and projecting a certain image of itself (Interview 9). Collective action on a low-risk issue such as anti-piracy could be an instrument for China to build confidence in great power relations (MFA, 2014; MND, 2017; CGTN, 2018). This rationale was mentioned by one interviewee, who pointed to the timing of engagement of the PLAN, which he considered well thought out. This interviewee stressed that China needed a good international reputation in 2008 because of the upcoming Beijing Olympics. As the only country in the UNSC that had so far not taken part in anti-piracy missions, the PRC might have felt compelled to prove China's role as a responsible great power, thereby reacting to international expectations (Interview 9). Therefore, China was happy to engage in a multilateral cooperation framework (Interview 14) like the CGPCS and to join the monthly SHADE meetings in Bahrain. Being integrated into multilateral structures provided a window of opportunity for the PLAN to gain experience and to learn from more experienced and more customary naval operators. It also helps to improve its international image (Interview 9).

By being involved in multilateral and bilateral response mechanisms, Beijing also increased its ability to lead new developments in maritime security in a direction that suits Chinese needs, thereby increasing its naval influence as well as the tactical and operational knowledge of the PLA(N). However, until today, the gap in experience prevails and influences the activities of the EU and China within their cooperation framework. While the EU seeks to combat piracy proactively, Chinese ships act on demand, responding when a ship in danger calls for help (Interview 9). Although the rules of engagement of the PLA(N) remain unknown, they are probably very conservative (Interview 9) in terms of focusing on securing national interests, Chinese territorial integrity and national sovereignty, while departing from the policy of non-interference as little as possible.

In addition to the aim of burden-sharing, there is a strong economy-security nexus in the realm of maritime security and anti-piracy. The SLOCs passing through the GoA are of high economic salience to both the EU and China. They provide vital links to the trade routes between the Mediterranean and Asia, and are strategic choke points for the import of crude oil and petroleum. Every day several million barrels of these resources pass through the GoA. An estimated 2.8 million barrels make their way to Europe, while around 2 million barrels travel eastbound to Asia. Additionally, more than 20,000 merchant vessels pass through the GoA annually (EIA, 2019). Speaking in terms of economic interests, it is thus of no doubt that the GoA is a strategic hub.

Scrutinizing the EU's and China's abovementioned vulnerability to disruptions in the global supply chains that pass through the GoA further indicates the economic damage that ongoing piracy in the Gulf of Aden causes. Because of its strategic trade location and significance for global

trade and shipping, the majority of worldwide piracy attacks since 2000 has taken place in the GoA. The number of attacks rose sharply in 2005 and escalated further in 2011 (Winsor, 2015). In 2011, when piracy in the GoA was at its peak, 739 seafarers and 32 ships were taken hostage. The global economic costs of these incidents are estimated at up to \$24.5 billion per year. According to a report by the European Parliamentary Research Service, these evaluations include a broad variety of first-order costs, such as ransom payments, insurance costs and military operations, as well as second-order costs, such as the effects on fisheries, food security and tourism. In recent decades, shipping companies have started to circumnavigate piracy hot spots, making shipping routes longer and significantly increasing transport costs (Pichon and Pietsch, 2019).

As of 2015, about 48 per cent of the EU's exports to third countries and around 53 per cent of its imports were transported by sea, according to Eurostat (Eurostat, 2016). As of 2018, sea transport accounted for more than half of all goods traded by the EU, according to Eurostat (Eurostat, 2019c). More precisely, sea transport accounted for 47 per cent of goods exported and 55 per cent of goods imported. Comparing 2018 with 2002, shipping was the fastest growing mode of transport for EU trade in goods. Accordingly, a level playing field is a key factor to securing the EU's economic interests, and maritime security has become an increasing priority for the EU's global strategy, as a report by the European Parliamentary Research Service points out (Pichon and Pietsch, 2019). The report further elaborates on piracy as a threat to the EU's economic interests, stating that 'one decisive element to maintaining this level playing field is the openness of sea lanes for international trade. [...] Pirate gangs pose a significant source of insecurity for EU trade routes' (Pichon and Pietsch, 2019, p 16). In 2014, the European Commission had stated in the very first sentence of its communication 'For an Open and Secure Global Maritime Domain: Elements for an EU Maritime Security Strategy' that 'Europe's maritime interests are fundamentally linked to the well-being, prosperity and security of its citizens and communities' (European Commission, 2014b). Also, the 2014 EUMSS and its 2018 revised version make this economy–security nexus very explicit (Council of the European Union, 2018b). Thus, for the European side, piracy in the GoA clearly endangers economic interests and prosperity.

For the Chinese side, a comparable picture can be painted. Most of China's economic needs are met through seaborne traffic. Thus, China is extremely vulnerable to disruptions of trade by pirate attacks. About 20 per cent of Chinese ships sailing through the GoA since 2008 faced pirate attacks of some kind (Dossi, 2015). In 2008 alone, five Chinese ships were attacked: *Tianyu 8*, a fishing boat, the tanker *Zhenhua 4*, the cargo ship *Dajian* and two other ships that were registered in Hong Kong (Erickson and Strange, 2015). By disrupting trade and resource flows and destabilizing the crucial waterways in



the GoA, piracy affects China's maritime commerce. According to Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Jinchao, 'Piracy has become a serious threat to shipping, trade and safety on the seas. [...] That's why we decided to send naval ships to crack down' on Somali pirates (*The Guardian*, 2008). With the increasing importance of the Middle East since the implementation of the BRI in 2013, this trend has increased (Interview 16). To ensure an uninterrupted supply of economic, energy and military goods from the Middle East, China needs to secure the GoA as one of its most strategic maritime–terrestrial supply chains (Interview 19), as its increased investment in Africa and the Middle East has augmented the costs the PRC would incur in case of an interruption of trade flows (Interview 14).

Accordingly, even minor incidents in the GoA carry the risk of badly harming China's shipping in the straits and possibly disrupting its strategic oil cargo routes, which can have devastating economic consequences. This becomes apparent in China's defence White Paper of 2019, in which it emphasized the need to protect its 'maritime rights and interests' (*haiyang quanyi* 海洋权益) and to safeguard its 'overseas interests' (*kaigai riedi* 海外利益) (MND, 2019). As a reaction, China has felt compelled to attach increasing importance to maritime security in order to protect its economic interests. This becomes very obvious in an article published by the Ministry of National Defense stating that:

Traditionally, the Chinese navy's primary responsibility is coastal defence. But with rampant pirate hijacking activities along the Gulf of Aden, which threatened the economic interests of Chinese merchant vessels, the navy was called upon to safeguard maritime security. (Zhuo, 2019)

Similarly, China's maritime strategy explicitly mentions a nexus between security and economy when it comes to maritime interests and puts protecting maritime rights and interests (*weihu haiyang quanyi* 维护海洋权益) at the forefront of the PLA(N)'s overseas missions.

To sum up, both the EU and China have strong interests in combatting piracy in the GoA. However, China seems to be more dependent on the EU, based on the lack of training and experience of the PLA(N) and the resulting inability to combat piracy alone. Moreover, cooperation with the EU can be attributed to the necessity to cooperate in multilateral frameworks to project a more positive image of China. The EU, meanwhile, is not necessarily dependent on China in this particular security issue. Instead, its cooperation with China is born of the overall necessity to create a multilateral framework to eradicate piracy. By cooperating with other international actors, the EU can share the burden of combatting piracy and thereby increase its benefits while lowering the costs. Moreover, many European

and Chinese economic interests are at stake in the GoA and pirate attacks can have devastating consequences for their economic wellbeing. What does that mean for EU–China cooperation on maritime security and anti-piracy? Did the economic interests and the obvious threats that piracy posed to them actually foster cooperation?

In the first place, both Chinese and European sources said that the primary reason for cooperation is the clarity that a joint anti-piracy mission would economically benefit the EU and China, and this facilitated the actual cooperation on the ground and in combatting piracy ([China Military Online, 2014b](#); [EEAS, 2019b](#)). Similarly, most interviewees also said that cooperation on combatting piracy in the GoA mainly emerged because of the one-dimensional, uncomplicated, economic nature of the issue at stake. The costs – in terms of effort and finances – are considerably lower when the EU and China cooperate. One interviewee called this a ‘win-win situation’ that is ‘purely interest-based’ (Interview 31). Likewise, many Chinese interviewees suggested the primary motivation to participate in international anti-piracy actions was to secure China’s main trade routes in the GoA in the first place. These interests result in the expansion of Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean, including the supply of military equipment to Chinese allies, and building military bases and commercial ports. Moreover, they lead to increased bilateral cooperation. One interviewee mentioned that the increasing Chinese exposure to threats like piracy fostered China’s willingness to cooperate and explicitly stated that security cooperation is easier when it touches upon economic interests (Interview 3). Another sign of this is that with the increasing Chinese investment along the Maritime Silk Road, cooperation has further increased in order to secure economic investments (Interview 10).

Especially for the Chinese side, the need to secure economic interests was the strongest driver of cooperation with the EU, as the PLA(N) quickly realized that it was not able to protect Chinese vessels in the GoA unilaterally. So far, the PLAN has had little experience in operating in blue waters, but has shown an increased interest in participating in manoeuvres beyond China’s direct coastlines ([China Military Online, 2014b](#)). During joint training missions with Atalanta ships, the PLAN intended to increase its rapid reaction ability, far-seas deployment ability, replenishment and weapons supply, as well as combat capabilities and joint war fighting skills, among others ([China Military Online, 2014a, 2014b, 2019](#)). Through cooperation, China could assess European technologies and capabilities and learn how to modernize its maritime equipment (Interview 9). For the EU, too, economic interests led to increased cooperation. In 2012, the EP stressed in a resolution that only by ‘increased coordination and cooperation among all international actors’ would securing the economically important SLOC in the GoA be possible ([European Parliament, 2012b](#)).

## Mutual perceptions

Economic interests and mutual dependence have proven to be strong drivers of EU–China cooperation on maritime security and anti-piracy. Similarly, scrutinizing their respective framings of piracy as a growing security threat has indicated that their definitions of piracy are mostly convergent, with the exception of institutional handling. Finally, a closer look at how the EU and China perceive each other in the realm of maritime security will complete the analysis. The following section investigates their perceptions of each other to explore whether the EU and China view each other as ‘friends’, ‘partners’, ‘necessary counterparts’, ‘rivals or competitors’ or ‘enemies’ when it comes to fighting piracy.

China’s perception of the EU as a civilian power and mostly normative actor plays a crucial role when projecting a certain image of itself to the world. It believes that cooperation with an actor such as the EU will present China in a better light, making the EU a preferred collaboration partner in the realm of maritime security and anti-piracy. The EU’s normative foreign policy approach plays into China’s attempt to position itself as a responsible international power and to diversify its global security cooperation (Interview 19). This is widely reflected in other researchers’ works on the Chinese participation in anti-piracy missions in the GoA (Erickson and Strange, 2013). Moreover, as one interviewee mentioned, China shares ‘extended trust’ with the EU and therefore prefers to cooperate within the Atalanta framework instead of joining the NATO OCEAN SHIELD Operation or the US-led CMF (Interview 19). The EU itself seems to be well aware of this perception and of the underlying reason for Chinese cooperation. According to a European interviewee ‘cooperating with the EU as a responsible global power promises returns and China needs it as a rising global power that wants to establish legitimacy on global stage’ (Interview 26). Hence, the EU is a ‘partner’ for China regarding the eradication of piracy in the GoA.

The EU perceives China as just one of many cooperation partners with whom to address the problem of piracy in the GoA. Neither does it consider China a partner of particular importance or a preferred counterpart to work with (Interview 29). Instead, the EU is interested in contributing to a multiform response to piracy and so seeks collaboration with many actors. This is further emphasized by the fact that the EU originally initiated its NAVFOR mission without China and was therefore less dependent on cooperation than China, which joined the mission after failing to tackle the piracy problem unilaterally.

## Conclusion

In general, collaboration between the PLAN and EU Atalanta forces can be interpreted as a showcase of successful security cooperation in EU–China

relations. The two actors have cooperated in the GoA continuously since 2008. Their main aim has been to defuse political tensions by providing seaborne escorts for trade vessels through this crucial SLOC and by conducting frequent patrol missions. The EU and China are mutually dependent on unimpeded trade flows in the GoA. The analysis reveals strong evidence that this dependence constitutes one of the main reasons for EU–China cooperation to combat piracy in the GoA. Above and beyond, the analysis suggests a strong economy–security nexus, as cooperation is framed as a ‘win-win situation’ that is ‘purely interest-based’. Moreover, it is very apparent that cooperation on fighting piracy was relatively easy to establish between the EU and China, as they have a common definition of the problem and could thus easily agree on adequate response mechanisms. Mutual perceptions, however, did not seem to be of high explanatory value.

The GoA is a region of strategic economic importance to both the EU and China. With more than 20,000 merchant ships frequenting this waterway annually, any interruption of trade flows or danger posed to the cargo vessels can create considerable economic damage for both actors. In the interviews, the notion that cooperation was easy to establish because of the one-dimensional and non-complicated economical nature of this security issue became especially apparent. In short, one of the primary reasons for cooperation is the economic benefit of unimpeded trade flows through the GoA, or, put differently, the damage to economic gains that can be avoided by combatting piracy. Besides, tensions in the GoA always bear the risk of spilling over to other waterways in the region, such as the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz or Bab al-Mandab Strait. These are often subject to frictions between the US and Iran, so any form of regional turmoil can escalate quickly.<sup>2</sup> Based on these security-economic interlinkages, the EU and China are both dependent on unimpeded trade flows in the GoA as the majority of trade that circles between them passes this strategic waterway. Consequently, cooperation on securing this SLOC is possible because of mutual benefits.

Accordingly, the EU and China are bound in complex interdependence regarding piracy in the GoA. The analysis reveals strong evidence that this dependence has contributed to EU–China cooperation on this particular security issue. One of the main arguments for cooperation that can be extracted from written and oral sources is the benefit of burden-sharing. The EU and China realized that they can act together and profit from cooperation, as it reduces the cost of engagement and increases benefits for both. Although the PLAN tried to tackle the issue unilaterally in 2008–9, it realized that it cannot combat piracy without the support of others. Therefore, it joined the EU’s *Atalanta* mission. For the EU, meanwhile, sharing the burden with more cooperation partners means reducing the costs further. Strategic economic considerations are a crucial factor facilitating

cooperation, as for both China and the EU the economic consequences of piracy would be devastating.

Yet the EU and China react differently to this interdependence and their rules of engagement in combatting piracy differ. While the EU is focused on proactively combatting piracy to secure unimpeded trade flows, China acts on demand. Interestingly, China seems to be more vulnerable to the adverse effects of piracy. Moreover, it is less capable of combatting piracy alone due to the PLAN's lack of experience and poor equipment. Hence, China is more dependent upon the EU than vice versa and benefits more from cooperation. The analysis reveals evidence that the strategic aim to train the PLAN by exposing it to other navy systems so it can learn from them in joint training and patrol missions was a crucial driver for cooperation on the Chinese side.

The analysis further shows that cooperation was relatively easy to establish between the EU and China, as they quickly found a common definition of the problem and could easily agree on adequate response mechanisms. As one interviewee put it, 'the enemy is so clear'. Their definitions of what constitutes piracy and threatens maritime security converge on almost all compared parameters. First of all, the scope of their definitions is very specific. In general, both formally adhere to and underline the importance of the UNCLOS definition of piracy that frames it as 'any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft [...] on the sea, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft [...] in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State' (UN, 1982). This leaves little doubt and sketches a very concrete scope of action for anti-piracy measures. Moreover, both the EU and China see piracy as a non-traditional security threat that can harm their economic interests. The analysis has further shown that the fight against piracy is vastly free of political values and does not touch upon religious or ideological issues. In addition, both European and Chinese interviewees said that it is easier to cooperate in third countries and within a clearly defined area, which does not touch upon European or Chinese territory and does not require action on either European or Chinese soil. This point has further facilitated cooperation.

The only two parameters on which the comparison differs is the salience of anti-piracy to the EU and China and the institutional responsibility for fighting it. Concerning the former, the analysis shows that the threats emanating from acts of piracy can harm China more, mainly because it lacks the ability to combat such threats alone and its navy is poorly equipped. Thus, the extent of salience is higher for China based on direct vulnerability. As regards the institutional responsibility, it becomes apparent that the EU locates the fight against piracy within the scope of its EUMSS framework. China, however, sees maritime security and anti-piracy as a security concern

with a strong domestic component, and so it is handled by the national PLA(N) missions.

Mutual perceptions were not found to have any significant importance in driving cooperation. No doubt, the EU and China do perceive each other as partners when it comes to combatting piracy. However, this did not have a crucial impact on the emergence of cooperation and has proven to be of little meaning. The analysis suggests that the EU sees China as just one of many cooperation partners with whom to address the problem of piracy in the GoA, and not a partner of particular importance.

# EU–China Relations on Climate and Energy Security

## Introduction

While climate security implies that climate-related alterations create risks in society that endanger the security of human beings, ecosystems, the economy and infrastructure, energy security is the association between the availability of energy resources of all kinds and national security. It entails topics like diversification of oil and gas supplies, offshore oil and gas safety, and critical infrastructure (European Commission, 2019b). While there has been a considerable amount of scholarly work on the politics of climate change and energy security as separate issues (Toke and Vezirgiannidou, 2013), sometimes measures to ensure climate security can contradict initiatives to ensure energy security (Chalvatzis and Hooper, 2009). Other scholars argue that both can be achieved through similar policies (Brown and Huntington, 2008). Climate security and energy security are both global concerns and energy accounts for around 60 per cent of emissions globally. Thus, the two issues are closely related. Another reason, why climate and energy security are examined together in this book is that in China, the two are inseparably linked (Wu et al, 2012; IEA, 2019). Moreover, both issues feature prominently on the agenda of EU–China relations (Holzer and Zhang, 2008). Due to their strong dependence on fossil fuel supplies, the EU and China are vulnerable to energy security problems, and the large carbon footprint of their energy sectors is a climate concern (Espa, 2018).

Furthermore, China is the largest and the EU is the third-largest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), together accounting for around one-third of all energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions worldwide (IEA, 2015; European Commission, 2016b). China has been the world's largest energy consumer since 2011 and is projected to account for 22 per cent of global energy

consumption by 2040, according to the BP Energy Outlook (BP Energy Economics, 2019). In addition, China became the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHG) in 2006, surpassing the US (Schreurs, 2016). By 2014, it accounted for about 29.7 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Torney and Gippner, 2018). According to the country's latest carbon 'inventory' submitted to the UN in 2019, China's GHG emissions hit 12.3 billion tonnes in 2014, rising by around 53.5 per cent in just a decade (CNBC, 2019). With its current policies, China's greenhouse gas emissions are projected to rise until at least 2030 (Climate Action Tracker, 2020a). Despite China's ambition to diversify its energy mix, its overall energy consumption is heavily dominated by coal, with renewable energy resources representing only a minor share of its total consumption (US EIA, 2015). Coal combustion is therefore one of the main sources of pollution in China. The country is also heavily dependent upon oil. To satisfy its hunger for energy, especially the high demand for oil, China has turned to the Middle East in the past decades, as its largest domestic oil fields, in Daqing, Shengli and Liaohe, are drying up (Zhang, 1999). China has also increased its oil imports from Iraq. In January 2018, Iraq revealed that it was constructing an oil refinery at the port of Fao on the Persian Gulf in partnership with two Chinese companies, and in June 2018, the Iraqi Ministry of Oil signed new contracts with two Chinese firms to develop oil and gas blocks in Iraq (Xinhua, 2018).

Besides this strong dependence on oil and the overall resource scarcity, it is striking that China has recognized the economic potential of green technologies and is already dominating this field, especially in comparison to the US (Lema and Lema, 2012). As of early 2017, China owned five of the world's six largest solar-module manufacturing companies and the world's largest wind turbine manufacturer (Slezak, 2017). In 2019, China was the number one country investing in clean energy (a total of \$83.4 billion, in comparison to \$55.5 billion by the US and \$4.4 billion by Germany) (Statista, 2019).

Like China, the EU meets more than two-thirds of its total energy needs through fossil fuels (oil, natural gas and coal). In general, in the EU, energy consumption has been constantly rising, according to Eurostat Statistics (Eurostat, 2019a). Furthermore, it has failed to provide financial support for the deployment of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) demonstration plants as planned in 2007. Many experts argue that such technologies would be needed to supply coal-dependent developing nations like India or China with clean energy (Bo et al, 2016).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the EU reduced its GHG emissions by 22 per cent by 2017, compared with 1990 levels (Eurostat, 2019b). Yet the Climate Action Tracker considers this target as 'insufficient' and expects the EU to put forward a revised and more ambitious 2030 NDC target (Climate Action Tracker, 2020b).

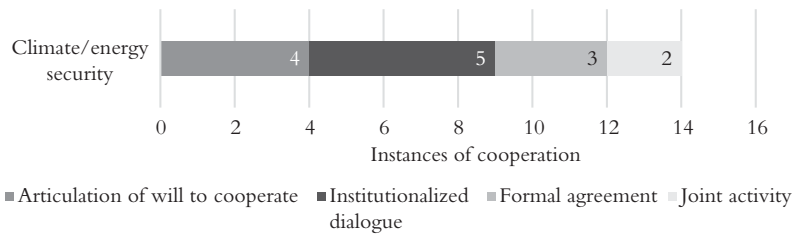


In general, within the overall EU–China cooperation framework, the issue of climate and energy security is discussed at a node between bilateralism and multilateralism (Liu and Lo, 2020). On the one hand, there are several bilateral agreements between the EU and China. On the other, both are pivotal members of the multilateral climate system of the UNFCCC, especially since the announced withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement (PA) in 2017. Moreover, climate and energy security are concerns that have been discussed in the UNSC and the G20 group. However, the EU and China have often been on opposing sides in UN-led international negotiations on climate and energy. For instance, in the run-up to the Kyoto Protocol, EU–China cooperation seemed likely to become a stepping stone to overcome the tensions between the Global North and the Global South. Yet China’s reluctance to commit to the reduction of GHG emissions interrupted the budding North–South rapprochement (Dai and Diao, 2011).

Similarly, the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Copenhagen in 2009 challenged emerging cooperation between the EU and China, as the parties failed to conclude a successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol. In Copenhagen, the EU and China found themselves on opposing sides of the negotiation table, as China sided with the BASIC countries, a coalition of four large emerging economies – Brazil, South Africa, India and China (Groen, et al, 2012). This changed at the 2015 COP in Paris, which marked a milestone in international climate governance and resulted in the PA. This success partly resulted from closer ties between China and the US as well as the EU and China (Schreurs, 2016). Although this did not end the EU–China disagreement, it did put forward more cooperation on climate and energy. When the US administration under Donald Trump announced plans to withdraw from the PA in 2017, this tendency intensified. An immediate reaction to this declaration was that China, the EU and Canada attempted to build a new coalition to salvage the agreement (European Commission, 2018).

This chapter assesses EU–China climate and energy security relations. This security issue can be framed as a flagship of EU–China cooperation (EIA, 2019). Cooperation takes place on the bilateral level, between different EU member states and China, on the region-to-state level between the EU and China, as well as in multilateral settings under the UNFCCC, the UN Security Council and the G20 group (see Figure 8.1).

The first section of this chapter seeks to understand climate and energy security through the eyes of the EU and China, exploring how they define and frame climate and energy. It further explains the linkages between climate and energy. The second section engages with rationalist explanations for climate and energy security cooperation, while the third section explores the constructivist explanation and focuses on the perceptions that the EU and China hold of each other with regard to climate and energy security. The chapter then resolves with an evaluation of the main findings.

**Figure 8.1:** Instances of cooperation on climate and energy security

Note: the figure is based on the number of mentions of the respective dimension of cooperation in official Chinese and European policy papers and joint declarations.

Source: Author.

## Understanding climate and energy security through the eyes of China and the EU

The following section explores how the EU and China understand climate and energy security in order to highlight convergences and divergences in how they approach this security issue. In particular, it compares their framing of climate and energy security along the following parameters (for a detailed description, see [Chapter 2](#)):

- type of security issue
- scope of definition
- target
- institutional responsibility
- salience
- political values

First of all, the analysis clearly reveals that both the EU and China consider climate and energy security as non-traditional security issues that are transnational and cannot be tackled unilaterally, but require joint action (Interview 10; Interview 25; Interview 26). Moreover, both connect climate and energy security to global governance and stress the importance of multilateralism in coping with climate change and energy scarcity (European Parliament, 2005b; Europe-China Clean Energy Centre, 2015; EEAS, 2018b).

For the EU, climate and energy security are relatively new, non-traditional security threats that have risen in salience and urgency over the past decades (Council of the European Union, 2003). The EU's perception of climate and energy as security concerns has evolved since about 2003. While the ESS (2003) included both aspects, it did not classify them as key threats. The 'Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy'

(2008) gave them greater importance and listed them as fundamental security challenges. Accordingly, climate and energy security concerns are often cited as the main rationales for enhancing the EU's climate diplomacy (Council of the European Union, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Likewise, the EU's global strategy lists 'climate change' and 'energy insecurity' under the heading of 'the security of our Union' and emphasizes that these issues are security threats that 'endanger our people and territory' (European Commission, 2016c, p 9). In 2009, the EU's Foreign Affairs Council said that 'climate change and its international security implications are part of the EU's wider agenda for climate, energy and the CFSP, and therefore central to the endeavours of the EU' (Council of the European Union, 2009, p 1).

Moreover, both issues were among the top priorities of former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker for his 2015–19 term (Bo et al, 2016) and are even more pressing under current President Ursula von der Leyen. When she took office in December 2019, one of her first official actions was to present a 'European Green Deal'. This action plan would make the EU's economy sustainable in the long term. The Green Deal provides a concrete step-by-step action plan to boost the efficient use of resources and to restore biodiversity and cut pollution (European Commission, 2019c, 2019b). This indicates the high priority of climate and energy security for the EU. Furthermore, climate and energy security play into the EU's overall interests of prosperity, sustainable development and worldwide stability, an interviewee said (Interview 30). The salience of climate and energy security issues for the EU is high, as it imports more than 60 per cent of its overall energy consumption (Eurostat, 2021a, 2021b). The EU is highly dependent on fossil energy supplies and meets more than two-thirds of its total energy consumption through fossil fuels. As its energy consumption is constantly rising (Eurostat, 2019a), the EU is increasingly vulnerable to energy security problems, and the large carbon footprint of its energy sectors. Thus, diversifying sources, suppliers and import routes, and further developing cooperation and dialogues on energy security ranks high on the EU's agenda (Council of the European Union, 2015b).

As regards institutional responsibility, climate and energy security are embedded in the EU's foreign and security policy, as they form a central part of the ESS. Energy security is also a key pillar of the European Green Deal and constitutes a crucial component of the Green Deal's roadmap to resource efficiency, biodiversity restoration and decrease of pollution. Accordingly, the EEAS has been tasked with developing diplomatic strategies within the realm of climate and energy security, and with integrating climate and energy security into the EU's foreign policy strategies. Moreover, climate and energy security issues are discussed within the Commission's Directorate-General for Environment. And the EU report 'Implementing the EU Global Strategy: Year 2' describes climate and energy security as

‘cross-cutting’ challenges that interlink the internal and external security policies of the EU (EEAS, 2018a).

China’s awareness that climate and energy issues can become serious security concerns has evolved since around 2007, before which climate change was primarily perceived as a development issue.<sup>2</sup> The first time that China linked climate and energy concerns to security was in its defence white paper of 2008, which mentions climate and energy security along with other new non-traditional security issues as ‘rising threats’ (MND, 2009). This framing of climate and energy security concerns as threats to China’s national wellbeing went along with the country’s rising vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change, which have had a substantial impact on its economic and social development. Interestingly, China frames climate and energy security as closely related to national security concerns. In particular, it affirms that climate and energy security touch upon national concerns such as food security, water security, ecological security, human security and public health. Likewise, the 2010 white paper on defence states that ‘non-traditional security concerns, such as [...] energy, [and] resources, [...] are on the rise’ (MND, 2011a). In 2014, Premier Li Keqiang even announced a national ‘war on pollution’ (Reuters, 2014), following the sharp decrease of China’s environmental standards and the rising number of environmental problems. Thus, although China recognizes the international dimension of climate change and is part of the UNFCCC framework, climate and energy security is located in its homeland security and has a strong domestic dimension (Bo et al, 2016). More specifically, China handles climate and energy security within the institutional responsibility of the National Energy Administration (NEA) and one of its implementation bodies, the Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (COSTIND). The highly centralized approach of the PRC to environmental, climate and energy policies is often described as an example of ‘environmental authoritarianism’ (Beeson, 2010). The authority of developing climate and energy policies is centralized in the hands of a few executive organs that can act autonomously and at the expense of civil liberties or multi-actor deliberations (Gilley, 2012; Engels, 2018).

Despite its centralized domestic approach, China engages vigorously in multilateral fora on climate and energy security. Especially since the announcement of the US withdrawal from the PA, it has taken more responsibility for the mitigation of the adverse effects of climate change, siding with the EU on reaching the PA goals. Moreover, climate and energy security issues are closely connected to the CCP’s legitimization, which reveals a strong domestic dimension of climate and environmental issues (Interview 28). Disregarding China’s increased engagement on climate and energy security would thus neglect the impact of the CCP’s need for legitimization. As air pollution and the devastating environmental,

economic and social consequences of global warming and the implications of the Chinese dependency on coal become more visible to the public, the CCP feels a stronger urge to react. Energy concerns increase the internal pressure on the Chinese government and pollution is now a very serious issue (Interview 10). Accordingly, climate and energy security are framed under the narrative of alleviation of poverty in China and are used to stabilize the power of the CPP and to grant it internal legitimacy. Locating climate and energy within the context of national power politics makes China more open to cooperation on climate issues, both bilaterally and in the multilateral arena (Interview 24; Interview 25). As regards energy security, China considers itself a mighty global player, leading the way for the EU in terms of cooperation (Interview 11). Its energy security concerns are fed by worries about resource scarcity and the need to diversify its energy mix and decrease its dependency on fossil fuels.

As mentioned before, the EU and China both adhere to the UNFCCC framework, within which they are pivotal actors. For instance, in the document announcing the launch of the EU–China Partnership on Climate Change, one of the stated aims is to support the UN-led process and ‘strengthen [...] dialogue on climate change policies and exchange views on key issues in the climate change negotiations’ (Council of the European Union, 2005a). Likewise, the EU and China acknowledge that they have a ‘common responsibility for advancing global development’ (EEAS, 2013), emphasizing the necessity for joint action. The EU strategic outlook on China, published in 2019, also underlined the necessity of EU–China cooperation on climate change, stressing the need ‘to continue developing a strong relationship’ and underlining that the ‘partnership is essential for the success of global climate action’ (European Commission, 2019a). However, at the same time, the EU criticized China for continuing to invest in coal energy, which goes against many joint activities and undermines mitigation. Consequently, it wants China to start reducing its emissions before 2030 (Interview 14; Interview 16). This alludes to the possibility that a common framing of the security issue under scrutiny does not necessarily translate into a common framing of adequate response mechanisms.

Additionally, different principles shape the EU’s and China’s positions in international climate governance. The EU primarily emphasizes multilateralism and the importance of rules- and institution-based international cooperation and frequently mentions the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the PA as bases for cooperation. Other international institutions and fora, including the G20, are also used as platforms for climate cooperation. Thus, it becomes evident that the EU believes that climate and energy matters must mainly be addressed multilaterally (Gurol and Starkmann, 2021). A sign of this is that EU policy papers and declarations repeatedly refer to the term ‘multilateralism’. For instance: ‘The PA is prof

that with shared political will and mutual trust, multilateralism can succeed in building fair and effective solutions to the most critical global problems of our time' (European Commission, 2018).

On the surface, this does not differ significantly from the Chinese approach. Chinese official policy sources also frequently refer to the importance of multilateralism and international climate governance. This shows that China has accepted the EU's understanding of international cooperation in the course of their interaction. Yet huge differences prevail. As regards the distribution of responsibility to mitigate climate change, China often opts for unilateral or domestic response mechanisms instead of relying on the bilateral or multilateral cooperation architecture. For example, China often refers to the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), a concept from the 1992 UNFCCC Framework Convention. CBDR implies that all states are responsible for addressing global environmental destruction, but are not equally responsible, and must take measures based on their 'respective capabilities and their social and economic conditions' (UN, 1992, p 2). Especially when it comes to contributing financially to international climate policies, China often evokes this principle. This indicates that China perceives its responsibilities as a country on the threshold of going from an emerging economy to a global power as different from the EU's responsibilities (Interview 9). This reveals China's hesitation to accept the economic burden of mitigating climate change. Picking and choosing its self-depiction strategically, China refers to itself as a developing country whenever beneficial, while claiming its role as a global leader at other times.

As regards the EU's and China's framing of climate and energy security, the analysis paints a clear picture. It can be concluded that their overall understandings of the security issues converge, with small differences regarding the institutional handling as they locate climate and energy security in different parts of their policymaking apparatus. China frames climate and energy security as a global problem, yet it embeds adequate response mechanisms to it in its homeland security policy, treating climate and energy security as issues of global importance, but also overtly domestic concern. In contrast, the EU embeds climate and energy security in its overall foreign and security apparatus, emphasizing the transnational scope of the issue and highlighting the importance of multilateralism and international climate governance. Accordingly, the EU is more likely to discuss climate and energy topics in multilateral fora and bilateral cooperation dialogues, while China's climate and energy security policies are tailored to meet domestic needs first, before transferring them to the multilateral level.

With regard to the consequences of this overall convergent framing of climate and energy security for the amount of cooperation between the EU and China, the analysis shows two different trajectories. On the one hand, the common understanding of the problem and the repeated emphasis on

**Table 8.1:** Comparison of the EU’s and China’s definitions of climate and energy security

	<b>The EU’s definition of climate and energy security</b>	<b>China’s definition of climate and energy security</b>
Type of security issue	Non-traditional issue of global concern	Non-traditional issue of global concern
Extent of salience	High (direct vulnerability due to dependence)	High (direct vulnerability due to dependence)
Scope of definition	Specific	Specific
Target	Economic interests	Economic interests
Political values	None	None
Institutional responsibility	Embedded in foreign and security policy; cutting across internal and external policies	Embedded in homeland security policy

shared responsibility has contributed to cooperation (EEAS, 2013). This is emphasized in the interviews as well as in the key documents issued by both sides. For instance, the EU’s 2019 Strategic Outlook highlights that climate and energy security is one of the issues on which the EU and China share a similar understanding and can develop a strong partnership. This collaboration is further stated to be ‘essential for the success of global climate action’ (European Commission, 2019a).

However, the EU and China diverge over the response mechanisms needed to combat climate and energy security threats. These disagreements persist especially when it comes to the economic and financial costs connected with the mitigation of climate and energy concerns. The analysis finds that China plays a somewhat ambivalent role, trying to balance climate and energy security with economic development. In particular, the fact that China has pursued a strategy of pick-and-choose, presenting itself either as a responsible global power or as a developing nation underlines this.

## Interests and interdependence

The EU and China are relative newcomers to global governance. However, they have developed into two of the most important global players, particularly since the disorderly retreat of the US from global governance under the presidency of Donald Trump. This is especially visible when it comes to climate and energy security. Ever since the US announced its withdrawal from the PA in 2017, this trend has accelerated. The return to the agreement under Joe Biden in January 2021 notwithstanding (White House, 2021a), the roles of the EU and China in international climate governance

have altered considerably during the previous three years, as the withdrawal of the US has drastically changed the constellation of the remaining relevant signatories (Schreurs, 2020), and increased the vulnerability of the EU and China to the effects of climate change. Besides, it has increased their responsibility to combat the problem as two of the largest emitters (*Climate Change News*, 2018).

The chapter now explores whether and how these global developments have altered the EU's and China's interests as international climate actors, as well as their mutual dependence as regards climate and energy security. It pays particular attention to their strategic calculations and takes into consideration both their vulnerabilities to the adverse effects of climate change and energy scarcity, as well as their common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR).

When examining the interests and entanglements of and between the EU and China, it becomes very apparent that for both sides, the gains to be achieved through cooperation on climate and energy security are higher than the costs. However, as mentioned before, the levels of perceived 'sensitivity' and 'vulnerability' to the consequences of climate change and energy scarcity vary between the two, leading to different approaches to climate and energy security cooperation. Let's start by noting that the EU and China are increasingly interdependent, fuelled further by the US turning into a withdrawing hegemon under the Trump administration. Against this backdrop, a strong sense of 'having no other choice' than to cooperate has emerged. Almost all interviewees framed EU–China climate and energy security cooperation as being driven by the 'urgency or necessity' to cooperate (for example, Interview 10; Interview 11), which is also the key argument of the 2018 joint statement by the leaders of the EU and China on climate change and clean energy (European Commission, 2018). While this development predates the US withdrawal from the PA, it has certainly picked up speed since 2017, when the EU and China were faced with increasing international pressure as the two most significant remaining signatories to the agreement. Indeed, to reach the goals of the PA and to keep the rise of the global average temperature to below 2°C or even 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, quick and determined action is necessary. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report published in October 2018, international actions are ever more urgent to reach these goals and mitigate the adversative effects of climate change (IPCC, 2018). Thus, climate and energy security as a matter of global concern seems to be a strong driver of cooperation (Interview 29).

Besides, it is relatively easy for the EU to engage with China on climate and energy security as it touches upon the 'narrowly defined' Chinese national interests (Interview 29). Whenever cooperation promises to serve these interests, China seems to be willing to engage with the EU to



increase benefits and decrease costs through burden-sharing. In the case of climate and energy security, this is facilitated not only by the increased Chinese vulnerability to climate issues due to its growing economy and increasing dependence on energy resources, but also by the notion that climate deterioration and energy scarcity are global challenges, which have an impact inside China, but have to be dealt with globally (Interview 30). Above all, the increasing interdependence between the EU and China facilitates cooperation on climate and energy (Interview 10). In this regard, the 2018 leaders' statement can be understood to be a response to the announcement of the US withdrawal from the PA, since it is an appendix to the declaration of the 2018 EU–China summit and had already been drafted in 2017, when a joint declaration fell through due to trade issues. The 2018 version was published with only minor changes. Passages such as 'they call on all Parties to uphold the PA' and the expressed support for 'global free trade' and a 'multilateral rule-based system' can be read as a response to the messy withdrawal of the US (European Commission, 2018). The retreat of the US created a window of opportunity for the EU and China to fill the resulting vacuum and readjust their behaviour in international climate governance.

According to a Chinese expert, China's cooperation in the realm of climate and energy had mainly been directed towards the US. With the US withdrawal from the PA, the EU took over the role of the US as a leader in climate and energy politics, albeit in a different way, seeking to share the burden of leadership with China (Interview 10). The EU's strategic outlook on China can be read as proof for this statement. It underlines the necessity of EU–China cooperation on climate change, stressing the need 'to continue developing a strong relationship' and indicating that an EU–China 'partnership is essential for the success of global climate action' (European Commission, 2019a). At the same time, however, the EU criticizes China for investing in coal energy production in many countries and explicitly puts forth the expectation that China should start reducing its emissions before 2030, departing from earlier policy papers on China in terms of clear language and strong requests. The COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020 brought a decline in emissions, but energy consumption has risen again since then (Heggelund, 2021).

The entanglements between the EU and China in international climate governance have led to the emergence of a robust cooperation architecture. Bilateral discussions between the EU and China on climate and energy security take place at all levels, encompassing institutionalized dialogue formats at the governmental and ministerial levels as well as in high-level working groups (Torney, 2015; Torney and Gippner, 2018). At the governmental level, climate and energy security are mostly discussed within the dialogue format between the Commission's Directorate-General for Environment

and the Chinese State Environmental Protection Administration (Bo et al, 2016). Under the Economic and Sectoral Dialogue, the main cooperation on climate change takes place within the framework of the EU–China Climate Change Partnership. This Partnership contains a Bilateral Consultation Mechanism (BCM) on climate change to ensure regular follow-up meetings (Bo and Torney, 2016) as well as a climate change rolling plan, which is regularly updated (MFA, 2006). The BCM was upgraded to the ministerial level in 2010. Other important arenas to discuss climate and energy security issues are the Energy Working Group, the Environment Policy Dialogue, the Water Platform Dialogue, the Urbanisation Dialogue and the Dialogue on Development. Moreover, additional dialogue formats exist to discuss more specific topics under a broader environmental policy framework. Examples are the River Basin Management Programme (RBMP) (2006–12), the EU–China Biodiversity Programme (2005–10), the EU–China Bilateral Cooperation Mechanism on Forests (launched in 2009) and the Sustainable Urbanisation Partnership (launched in 2012).

In addition to ongoing dialogues on the ministerial level, the EU and China have established a number of governmental cooperation projects, with the overall aim of building capacity at the national and local levels with respect to climate and energy security policymaking (Torney and Gippner, 2018). Flagship projects among these are cooperation on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which is supposed to support China's transition to a sustainable economy (Europe Aid, 2010), a project on near-zero emission coal (launched in 2005) and the EU–China Environmental Sustainability Programme (launched in 2012). Furthermore, several negotiated cooperation agreements have come out of bilateral discussions, such as the EU–China Joint Declaration on Energy Security (2005a), the Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Clean Energy (2018) and the Memorandum of Understanding to Enhance Cooperation on Emissions Trading (2018). Recent policy papers and joint declarations also frequently mention climate and energy security, and environmental policy in general has become a crucial pillar of their overall relationship. In sum, the EU–China bilateral partnership changed from one between a development aid donor (the EU) and its recipient (China) to a cooperative partnership between equals (Europe–China Clean Energy Centre, 2015).

There is also a significant economy–security nexus when it comes to climate and energy security. In general, it shows that there is a strong nexus between economy and climate and energy, based on the fact that climate deterioration and energy scarcity can have devastating impacts on economic development. Articles 2.3 and 3.14 of the Kyoto Protocol and Article 4.8 of the UNFFP emphasize the importance of taking economic drivers into consideration. This is especially necessary for China, whose rapid economic development has come at a devastating cost for climate

and energy security. For decades, China's economy has been dependent on fossil fuels. Its rapid economic development came with the rapid growth of energy use and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Besides, the effects of climate change – including extreme weather, climate variability and the heavy air pollution resulting from a coal-dependent industry – cut across many sectors of China's economy. Climate deterioration and energy scarcity have the potential to harm China's national wellbeing in the long term and already have a substantial impact on the PRC's economic and social development. According to the country's latest carbon inventory submitted to the UN in 2019, China's GHG emissions hit 12.3 billion tonnes in 2014, a rise of around 53.5 per cent in just a decade (*CNBC, 2019*). This comes at a cost. In its 13th Five Year Plan on Renewable Energy (*NDRC, 2019*), the Chinese government acknowledges that China's economic wellbeing is directly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change and the growing scarcity of energy resources. The 14th Five Year Plan even sets a target to reduce China's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per unit of GDP by 18 per cent from 2020 to 2025 (*NDRC, 2020*).

Despite China's drive to diversify its energy mix, coal still heavily dominates its overall energy consumption. Coal combustion is one of the main sources of air pollution in China and constitutes a growing threat to its economy. Thus, one crucial Chinese rationale to seek cooperation with the EU on issues of climate and energy security is domestic – to ensure Chinese wellbeing and prosperity. Clearly, the Chinese leadership has accepted that the resource intensity of its current economy is simply not sustainable. It has started encouraging growth driven by efficiency gains, technological innovation and renewable energy, responding to weaknesses in the 'old' economic growth model.

Furthermore, there is evidence for an increasing 'economization' of climate and energy security by China, which leads to increased cooperation to push forward the development of new technological devices to combat climate change. Making its economic growth model more sustainable has become a major concern of the Chinese government. Further, the concept of a low-carbon economy contains important elements of a model that is more promising to the party elite, as it also offers international symbolic recognition. As an EU interviewee points out, China has recognized the economic potential of green technologies and is already dominating this branch, especially in comparison to the US (Interview 26). As of early 2017, China owned five of the world's six largest solar-module manufacturing companies and the world's largest wind turbine manufacturer (*Slezak, 2017*), and by 2019, China had become the world's top investor in clean energy. It had invested a total of \$83.4 billion, in comparison to \$55.5 billion in the US and \$4.4 billion in Germany (*Statista, 2019*). Thus, China has become a key participant in negotiations on trade liberalization for environmental

technologies and services. So, there is evidence of political-economic reasons driving China's cooperation with the EU.

A similar development can be observed for the EU, albeit on a smaller scale. Due to its strong dependence on fossil fuels, the EU is highly vulnerable to energy security problems and to the large carbon footprint of its energy sector. More than two-thirds of the EU's energy needs are met through fossil fuels. As the EU's energy consumption is constantly rising, according to Eurostat Statistics (Eurostat, 2019a), putting the EU further away from its 20 per cent energy savings, economic risks are constantly growing. Thus, diversifying sources, suppliers and import routes, and further developing cooperation and dialogue on energy security ranks high on the EU's agenda (Council of the European Union, 2015b).

To sum it up, from a rationalist point of view, EU–China climate and energy security relations can be characterized as a 'positive-sum game' (Powell, 1991a; Keohane and Martin, 1995; Moravcsik, 1997a) increasing the prosperity and gains on both sides. Thus, not cooperating would harm both sides. However, this does not imply that conflict or competition does not exist. Rather, it is remarkable how both sides acknowledge that their cooperative relationship on climate and energy security can turn into competition over trade (Interview 31). Increasing imbalances in energy supply and demand, as well as geopolitical tensions around energy, could lead to increased energy competition between the EU and China or could turn them into rivals competing for access to key energy resources around the world. In other words, the same dependence and urgency that facilitates EU–China cooperation on climate and energy security could affect trade relations between them in the field of energy. However, the EU and China are focused more on the benefits of burden-sharing and jointly tackling a problem of global concern (Interview 10; Interview 24).

## **Mutual perceptions**

Besides a similar understanding of climate and energy security as a matter of global governance and global responsibility, mutual perceptions contribute vastly to EU–China climate and energy security cooperation. The following section is dedicated to exploring the mutual perceptions and role conceptions of the EU and China in the realm of climate and energy security.

As two relatively new actors in global governance, the EU and China share the experience of needing a partner to deal with concerns of global relevance. In the realm of climate and energy security, they consider each other 'partners' (for example, Interview 29). In particular, since the withdrawal of the US from the PA, they have shared the role of 'joint leaders' in combatting climate change and energy scarcity – a role they did not seek (Interview 11). Three thought-provoking aspects can be identified regarding

their mutual perceptions. First and foremost, the EU's perception of itself as a bridge-builder in international climate governance and its more pragmatic approach towards climate and energy cooperation partnerships stands out. Second, China's role as a more responsible and proactive great power that seeks to be acknowledged as such by other major powers and cares about the image it projects internationally plays a crucial role. Finally, the EU and China acknowledge that they are necessary counterparts in climate and energy security. These three findings will now be discussed in detail.

The EU has all along been a key player within the UNFCCC (1992) framework and the negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol (1997) in the early years of international climate politics (Oberthür and Groen, 2017). It had made a substantial effort to save the Kyoto Protocol and supported its entry into force in 2005, eight years after the international community had signed it. However, the 2009 COP negotiations in Copenhagen were a major challenge to the EU's leadership in climate diplomacy. Until then, the EU's leadership style had been exceedingly normative or ideational and its strategy had been based on a combination of 'leading by example', that is unilateral reduction pledges and climate policies, and the promotion of norms through third parties. Yet, during the failed negotiations for a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, the EU had been sidestepped by the US and the BASIC coalition of the four emerging powers Brazil, South Africa, India, and China. Falling behind its ambitious expectations, the EU came out considerably weakened from the Copenhagen negotiations, which had a strong impact on its self-perception, which was challenged by the emerging gap between its leadership ambitions and negotiation reality.

Cooperation with China emerged when the EU shifted its self-perception after this incident. In the literature, this is commonly described as a shift from being a leader to being a 'leadicator', a combination of leadership and mediation that offered the EU a more pragmatic approach towards climate and energy, and towards teaming up with others to combat climate change (Groen et al, 2012; Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013). There is a strong belief in the EU that climate and energy security is an issue that it cannot deal with alone, so normative differences and ideological tensions need to be put aside to reach the common goal. This becomes obvious in the EP climate and energy security discussions at a time of 'fresh momentum in the wider international process in which the EU plays such a crucial role. China and India [...] are particularly important partners for the EU in tackling climate change' (European Parliament, 2005b). Despite its relative success in negotiating the PA, the EU is still struggling to be a leading actor in international climate politics and feels the urge to cooperate with others. This became clear during the 2017 COP in Bonn, where the EU failed to step up its own climate action and did not manage to resolve conflicts over equity concerns. This changed when, in the run-up to the Katowice

COP in 2018, the EU sided with China to adopt a rulebook on climate cooperation, clearly showing the need to work together.

China's increased measures to mitigate climate change derive mainly from its position as a more responsible great power in international politics. For a long time, China has shown a 'weak power' face, considering itself a developing country that claims a right to development and economic growth, reinforcing the dominant narratives of developing countries in the UNFCCC system. From this perspective, the US, Europe, Japan, Australia and other highly developed countries have the historical responsibility for climate change and should provide financial support for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. Thus, China refers to the CBDR principles. China was one of the major players establishing this principle and reiterating it in UNFCCC negotiations. While the EU initially accepted it as a means to release pressure on developing countries, it nevertheless expected that developing countries would eventually have to cut emissions in the future. Therefore, China denied having an active role in climate change and resisted any demands for emission reductions for a long time, even though both China's economy and GHG emissions were growing increased rapidly. This led to tensions between China's internal position on its global obligations and the external expectations of the international community, as observed by an EU interviewee (Interview 8). This position is also reflected in discussions in the EP, in which China was accused of failing to 'stand shoulder to shoulder' with the EU ([European Parliament, 2008](#)).

This has changed and China is now pursuing a more proactive stance. Although in general, China displays more leadership, China pursues a political strategy of pick-and-choose when it comes to presenting itself as a developing nation or a great power. One interviewee stated that we see 'political tactics at play' in China's choice of climate policies due to the multiplicity of political realities which China faces (Interview 5). However, during the negotiations leading to the PA, China sided with the US and the EU for the first time, showing leadership in international climate governance. Why did it do so? According to the interviews, foreign pressure on China increased, mainly due to the dissonance between China's fast-growing economy and its low level of accountability on mitigation (Interview 8). Further, internal pressure to participate more actively in climate change mitigation and to transform the country into a resource-efficient economic power independent of financial aid increased, as observed by a Chinese academic (Interview 4). This goal is also recorded in China's 13th five-year plan on energy development, issued by the NEA in January 2016 ([NDRC, 2016b](#)) as well as by the renewable energy five-year plan ([NDRC, 2016a](#)). At the 19th National Congress of the CPC, Xi Jinping emphasized the aim to 'build an energy sector that is clean, low-carbon, safe and efficient for China and the vision of ecological civilisation' ([National Congress of the CCP, 2017](#)). In response to internal

and external pressure, and to pursue national interests, China began taking a more proactive stance on climate change.

One may argue that China's aim to be perceived as a regional hegemon has paved the way for more cooperation (Interview 3), as China is reaching out to conclude new bilateral partnerships to demonstrate that it is taking more responsibility (NDRC, 2016a, 2017; MEE, 2017). Furthermore, China proved that it is willing to take responsibility in proportion to its economic power when the US announced its withdrawal from the PA. China used this as a window of opportunity to demonstrate its readiness to become a major power in global climate governance (European Commission, 2018). However, the strategic pick-and-choose of policies continued and was on display during the 2017 and 2018 COPs. At the 2017 COP, China fell back to its old tactic of adapting the dominant narrative of other developing countries like the group of Like-Minded Developing Countries on Climate Change (LMDC) and the G77 group, demanding more financial support to implement the PA. In this case, China failed to continue the proactive behaviour it exhibited in 2015, when it announced it would spend around \$3 billion on climate change mitigation in the context of the South-South Climate Cooperation Fund. During the 2018 COP in Katowice, by contrast, China signalled that it was open to following uniform climate change rules that deviated from supporting a clear division of responsibilities between rich and poor countries (*Climate Change News*, 2018). China partly went back on this during the 2019 COP in Madrid, when it sided with Brazil, India and South Africa, and attacked 'imbalances in the negotiations', claiming that wealthier nations should provide more funding than developing countries to deal with the environmental crisis (*South China Morning Post*, 2019).

These changing perceptions of the EU and China contributed to the emergence of a cooperative partnership on climate and energy security. The EU considers itself an ambitious leader, trying to get other countries on board using a strategy of 'leading by example' (European Parliament, 2007b): 'so in this way we shall show that we practice what we preach and we shall persuade them to follow in a global agreement'. In contrast, a Chinese policy expert described China as an emerging economy claiming a 'right to develop' and consequently a right to continue emissions (Interview 6). Nevertheless, both actors started a bilateral partnership on climate cooperation in 2005, issuing a joint declaration on climate change. Several statements, declarations, and cooperation programmes followed. In 2005, the EU and China launched their Partnership on Climate Change, formulating concrete cooperation objectives. One of the aims is to support the UN-led process and 'strengthen [...] dialogue on climate change policies and exchange views on key issues in the climate change negotiations' (Council of the European Union, 2005a), but the main objective is technical cooperation and knowledge exchange on issues like energy efficiency, and low-carbon and renewable energy

technologies. This shows the connection between climate change, energy policies and energy security in EU–China relations.

Furthermore, this focus implies that energy security, that is the secure supply of cheap and ‘clean’ energy to serve economic demands and create economic benefits from technology innovation, might be equal to or even supersede the motivations to curb climate change. The joint declaration on energy security issued in 2012 reiterates the importance of this topic for EU–China cooperation and mentions climate change as concomitant with energy security (EEAS, 2012a). Newer documents take a broader view with regard to climate change. The 2015 joint statement published before the Paris COP, and the 2018 statement reflect more general issues discussed in the international climate system, such as mitigation and emission reduction options, adaptation measures and climate finance for developing countries (European Council, 2015; European Commission, 2018). However, some issues lingering since the beginning of cooperation are still visible in recent publications, for instance, the economic arguments for EU–China climate cooperation, market mechanisms (especially emissions trading) and energy security.

Over time, normative considerations, increased importance attached to climate change and a higher awareness of the critical position of China and the EU become apparent. In 2013, the EU–China Strategic Agenda highlighted ‘a common responsibility for advancing global development’, and in 2014, during a discussion in the EP, a representative stated that ‘with the recent climate change commitments of the US and China, we are no longer alone. Now is the time to find a truly global solution to a truly global problem’ (European Parliament, 2014). The 2015 declaration that followed the EU–China summit recognizes the EU’s and China’s ‘critical roles in combating global climate change, one of the greatest threats facing humanity’ (European Council, 2015). It marks a clear point of departure from earlier statements, and the language of the 2018 EU–China statement on climate change and clean energy further emphasizes this development (European Commission, 2018). This statement expresses the severity and urgency of climate change, frames the responsibility to solve the issue as a common one, and underlines the significance of the PA, which it calls ‘an historic achievement’. Furthermore, the document emphasizes the commitment of the two parties, stating that ‘the EU and China are committed to showing firm determination’ and the parties ‘underline their highest political commitment to the effective implementation of the PA in all its aspects’ (European Commission, 2018).

## Conclusion

EU–China cooperation on climate and energy security has developed from rather one-sided development aid for energy and technology to a



partnership of equals aimed at shaping global climate politics. This reflects the understanding of the EU and China that they are in a critical position in the international system and shows their leadership ambitions (and willingness) (Interview 9). Moreover, EU–China cooperation on climate and energy security has been shown to be the most profound of all three security issues examined here. The analysis has revealed that a similar understanding of climate and energy security, positive perceptions of each other as a ‘partner’ in climate and energy security, and complex interdependence between the EU and China have contributed to cooperation. Moreover, to some, if lesser, extent economic considerations have facilitated cooperation.

With climate and energy security being issues of global concern and global governance, the EU and China are bound in complex interdependencies when tackling security concerns emanating from them. The analysis revealed a strong awareness of the fact that these security issues cannot be addressed unilaterally. As two of the largest global energy players, the EU and China face similar strategic and practical challenges that render cooperation fruitful. Moreover, they are both increasingly dependent on fossil fuel imports. This, in turn, makes them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and energy scarcity. Furthermore, sharing the burden to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and diversify energy sources in order to avoid energy scarcity seems to be a strong rationale for cooperation. Both sides perceive a rising degree of interdependence and the interviews reveal a strong sense of ‘having no other choice’ than to cooperate.

As the analysis has shown, cooperation on climate and energy security is driven significantly by the ‘urgency’ or ‘necessity’ to cooperate. This argument is supported by the interviews (for example, Interview 10; Interview 11), and the ‘EU–China Leaders’ Statement on Climate Change and Clean Energy’.

Another crucial aspect that has contributed vastly to the interdependence between the EU and China in the realm of climate and energy security is the announced US withdrawal from the PA. There is considerable evidence that this has increased the vulnerability of both the EU and China to the effects of climate change as well as their responsibility to combat it as two of the largest emitters. This has contributed to the emergence and fortification of cooperation on climate and energy security concerns. The costs of non-cooperation would be unbearably high as both see climate and energy security as issues that no state can deal with on its own. Thus, we do not see a problem of divergent understanding or a cost-benefit calculation that would lead either side not to cooperate, as we saw in the case of anti-terrorism. Rather, there is a cost-benefit calculation that renders cooperation the most rational choice for both sides.

In the case of climate and energy security, a strong economy–security nexus is at play. This implies that economic considerations drive the EU’s

and China's actions in this sphere and contribute to the emergence of cooperation. The leaders proclaim that EU–China collaboration on climate and energy security shall be part of the economic pillar of their relationship, thereby emphasizing the economy–security nexus, and both actors are well aware of the consequences of a deteriorating climate and increasing energy scarcity for their respective economic and social development. Moreover, the analysis reveals evidence of the ‘economization’ of climate and energy security concerns, in that China in particular capitalizes on the development of new techniques to combat climate and energy security issues. In seeking cooperation with the EU, the Chinese leadership promotes these new developments. It has recognized the economic potential of green technologies and is already dominating this industry, especially in comparison to the US.

The analysis further revealed that the EU and China have a common understanding of the issue under scrutiny and face similar threats born of the deteriorating climate and the depletion of fossil fuel sources, both of which are highly dependent. The definition of climate and energy security converges on all issues but on one: the EU and China locate the issue in different parts of their policymaking apparatus. China frames climate and energy security as a global problem, yet it embeds response mechanisms to it in its homeland security policy, treating it as an issue of domestic concern. By contrast, the EU embeds climate and energy security in its overall foreign and security apparatus, emphasizing the transnational scope of the issue. Accordingly, the EU is more likely to discuss climate and energy topics in multilateral fora, while the majority of China's climate and energy security policies are made at the domestic level, before taking them to the multilateral level. Beyond this aspect, their definitions of climate and energy security converge, which has made cooperation on this particular issue much easier.

Furthermore, changing perceptions have played a supporting role in the emergence of EU–China climate and energy security cooperation. The interviews and official statements have shown that changing perceptions of the EU and China in international climate governance contributed to the emergence of a cooperative partnership on climate and energy security. For a long time, the EU and China were competitors in the international climate system but now perceive each other as ‘partners’. Especially, since the announced US withdrawal from the PA, the sense of being ‘necessary counterparts’ has grown.

Interestingly, although the issue of climate and energy security is the most important in terms of the amount of cooperation between the EU and China, it also seems to be the most ambivalent. Although the EU and China are fully aware of the threats posed by a deteriorating climate and growing energy scarcity, their climate and energy security relations are not only characterized by deepening cooperation. Instead, they also

show signs of persisting divergences on the bilateral and multilateral levels. Accordingly, beyond these drivers that have contributed to cooperation, the analysis suggests an interesting factor that leads to competition in the overall EU–China climate and energy security relationship. When the focus is on financing mitigation measures, there is a distributional conflict between the EU and China, as China seems to be very hesitant to shoulder the financial burden of combatting climate change and takes refuge in the narrative of being a developing country that has a right to develop. They agree upon the necessity to combat climate change, and to secure and diversify their energy supplies. Yet they sometimes differ on the adequate response mechanisms and the question of who should bear the costs of mitigating climate change. While the EU believes the costs should be distributed equally, China continues to claim CBDR and sees climate and energy security in terms of domestic factors. Thus, there may not be a conflict of interest, but there is a conflict of distribution, albeit on small scale.

# The US: An Elephant in the Room for EU–China Security Relations

## Introduction

While there is no essential reason for a global pandemic to forge geopolitical tensions, COVID-19 has accelerated a development that predates the outbreak of the pandemic (Zhao, 2020). Ever since the beginning of the Trump administration but also in light of the ravaging pandemic, the relationship between the EU and China has become increasingly overshadowed by US–China tensions, questioning the strategic EU–China–US triangle that once dominated political analyses. In the early post-Cold War years, the relationship between the three largest world powers seemed to be mutually beneficial. Over time, the EU has found itself increasingly stuck in the middle, between the US and China. This has intensified because of the US–China trade war, putting the EU in a tough spot strategically (Chun, 2020). Both the US and China are competing for its favour, and the EU as such is struggling to choose between Washington and Beijing. Maintaining neutrality is not feasible for Europe, as both sides are actively seeking its support. While traditionally, the EU, as well as its individual member states, would have been inclined to side with the US, the somewhat protectionist foreign policy of the Trump administration has forced the EU to seek cooperation with China more often. The Trump administration's hostile behaviour towards the EU has made it increasingly difficult for EU policymakers to maintain a balance between the US as a withdrawing hegemon and China as an emerging leader (Montesano, 2020). This was accelerated by the US' disorderly retreat from global governance (Meunier, 2020), which required a reconfiguration of the positions of the EU and China as the two most important remaining actors in global governance. At the same time, as mentioned before, tensions have increased with China over questions of a normative nature (Goulard, 2020).

In the context of COVID-19, relations between China and the US have further worsened, and the risk of the EU being caught in the middle of these two great powers has increased. By now, the disputes between Beijing and Washington are far greater than mere trade skirmishes and touch upon questions of global order, the future of multilateralism, and international rules, norms and procedures (Men et al, 2020). The isolationist stance of the Trump administration facilitated China's attempts to make its own rules on the international stage and to exercise considerable influence in the global system (Hosli et al, 2020). This constituted a further challenge for the EU, which is one of the most vigorous promoters of multilateralism, but at the same time has priorities that conflict with China's values. These developments show that it is crucial to take into consideration the role of the US as the 'elephant in the room' in EU–China relations.

To understand why the initial EU–China–US strategic triangle has started to fall apart and how the three are struggling to reconfigure their foreign and security relations (Henrikson, 2020), it is necessary to look at the bigger picture. In general, the global security structure has been undergoing a transformation from unipolar to multipolar over the course of the 21st century. There are four major international security actors in the world security system today: the US, China, Russia and the EU. Of these the EU, China and the US carry the most weight (Art, 2010). Yet, the balance of power of these major international security actors – Russia aside – has been changing considerably. In some global security fields, China and the EU started to share responsibilities with the US (Chu and Chen, 2011; Can and Soto, 2020). This created the notion of a strategic EU–US–China triangle. What are the characteristics of this triangle? First and foremost, the US has extensive military entanglements with both the EU and China, albeit in completely different ways. While the US is allied with the EU states through NATO, it is a military rival for China because of its attempts to contain the expansion of China's military presence in East Asia, its military assistance to Taiwan and the SCS arbitration (Art, 2010). Therefore, despite being inherently intertwined and interdependent, the US–China leg of the strategic triangle has always been the weakest. Recent developments make clear that although the US and China have managed to stabilize their relations over time through dialogue formats and summit-level agreements to enhance military-to-military ties and seek cooperation in other security and economic fields, their bond remains prone to recurring tensions. In addition, the EU and the US have not always been on equal terms as regards their relationship with China and their reactions to China's rise have differed significantly. This gap widened during the four years of the Trump presidency. While the US aimed to decouple its economy from China's, the EU has sought to manage tensions in its relations with China constructively, being aware

of the importance of economic relations with China. After Joe Biden's election success in the US in 2020, hopes were high for a reassessment of the EU's and US' positions towards China and reinforcement of the transatlantic axis (Montesano, 2020).

With shrinking US hegemony in global governance and its disorderly retreat from multilateral agreements and structures under Trump, it is necessary to reassess the US–China–EU triangle and ask whether it is still a strategic triangle or rather a trilateral love-hate relationship. While it is not the aim of this chapter to disentangle the inherently complex nature of EU–China, China–US and US–EU relations as the three legs of the allegedly strategic triangle – whole books have been written about this, for example, Men et al (2020) – it aims at exploring the impact of the US on EU–China security relations. The period of observation is mostly the Trump era, during which the international role of the US has changed significantly. The question is whether this change has also led to a reassessment of the international roles of the EU and China as relative newcomers to global governance, and whether and how this has contributed to either enhanced security cooperation or deepening tensions.

## **EU–China–US trilateral relations**

When discussing the role of the US in EU–China relations, Donald Trump's election as US president in 2016 was a critical moment. With Trump taking office in 2017 as the leader of what can be called the world's most powerful country, a disorderly retreat of the US from global governance and multilateral agreements began and the US started to become a 'withdrawing hegemon' (Montesano, 2020). In what follows, the analysis focuses on the impact of US foreign policy on EU–China security relations in the era of Trump. In particular, it sheds light on two dynamics that emerged during the Trump administration and discusses whether EU–China–US trilateral relations can still be considered 'strategic' after the Trump years, or whether they now form a 'crooked' triangle.

One clear trend can be seen regarding the effect of Trump's foreign policy on EU–China security relations. The first is that his administration's allegedly unilateral foreign policy has effectively pushed the EU and China closer, and had increased the need for closer collaboration on issues of global governance. With the US administration leaving the PA, withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and retreating from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, the international expectation that the EU and China would take over leadership in global affairs increased significantly (see Chapter 9) (Interview 23). A metaphor often used in this context is that of a 'vacuum' left by the US, ready to be filled by either the EU or China, or both:

The EU and China in some fields now see their common interests more [...], as in many world regions the US is no longer a security provider. This provides a vacuum for the EU and China that they can fill. (Interview 19)

Other, similar readings from the European side emphasize this idea, saying that ‘in the age of Trump, Beijing pivots to Europe’ (*Politico EU*, 2017) and that the ‘Trump chaos breeds better EU–China relations’ (*EU Observer*, 2018). They predict an emerging ‘common position from the EU and China’ that would be a blow to many US officials, who ‘hoped that the [US–China] trade war would morph into a united front against Beijing’ (*Politico EU*, 2019). This broadly matches the media coverage in China. For instance, an article from *Xinhua News* said that ‘EU–China cooperation [is] vital as U.S. multilateralism writ large’ (*Xinhua*, 2017a) and an article from *China Daily* stated that the result of the ‘changed international environment is a closer alignment between the EU and China on many issues’ (*China Daily*, 2017a).

What does this mean for the positions of the EU and China in international security governance? For China, the transition to the Trump administration was astonishingly smooth. In the beginning, the US and China even initiated additional dialogue formats, such as the Comprehensive Dialogue, including the Diplomatic and Security Dialogue and the Law Enforcement and Cybersecurity Dialogue (Can and Soto, 2020). Moreover, both sides agreed to take their cooperation on issues such as cybercrime, military-to-military relations, counter-terrorism and the ongoing skirmishes in Afghanistan to the next level. This honeymoon period soon ended, and relations between China and the US deteriorated. The US even labelled China as a revisionist great power (White House, 2017) and ascribed to it the role of a rival power in its new security plan.

Similar harm was done to EU–US relations, though arguably with less devastating consequences for long-term transatlantic relations. As for the EU, the US has been the main provider of global security. It had created a ‘rules-based global order’, which is heralded by the EU in its Global Strategy, and some observers even denote that European countries have allegedly been free-riding on US security measures (van Harm, 2018, p 8). These included limiting WMD proliferation, establishing and maintaining stability in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and resolving intrastate conflicts worldwide. For the EU, the disorderly retreat of the US from multilateral security arrangements such as the PA, the JCPoA and the INF came at a time when the EU faced increasing security challenges from abroad as well as deepening fragmentation and dissent internally, culminating in the Brexit, which also implied the exit of one of the mightier security actors among the EU member states. Moreover, in terms of security and defence, the approach of Trump was ‘reversing joint approaches formulated under

previous administrations’ (European Parliament, 2018b, p 1), leading to tensions on issues such as the Iran nuclear deal, burden-sharing within the NATO and perceptions of the multilateral order.

In reaction to the changing security role of the US, the international roles of the EU and China changed significantly. China now faced the challenge of adding security components to its economic engagement worldwide. So far, China had been very reluctant to become involved in regional disputes, seeking recourse in its principle of non-interference. This apolitical logic made it possible for China to remain relatively neutral in regional power disparities, for example in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, despite the strategic nature of its infrastructural and economic links to these regions (Gurol and Scita, 2020). As the ‘balance of power’ that the US had established in many world regions cracked as a result of Trump’s policies, international attention shifted to China to fill the security vacuum left by the US. In a similar vein, the EU was forced to reassess its security role (Ekengren and Hollis, 2020) as the US–EU security relationship kept deteriorating. Over the course of the Trump presidency, it became obvious that for Trump, the US’ importance for European security was a main point of leverage. This brought to the fore questions of European autonomy and actorness in the security realm. The 2020 Security Union Strategy can be read as an answer to that.

As regards traditional security, the US still appears to be the key global player, but in other areas – such as non-traditional security and development – the growing absence of the US from international cooperation had the (unintended) consequence of bringing the EU and China closer together. The retreat from global governance under Trump increased the interdependence between the remaining powers on the international stage and brought to light the ‘very complex three-dimensional relationship between the US, China and the EU’ (Interview 28).

It is exactly this complexity that informs a contrary reading of the US’ role for EU–China security relations, as there is evidence that the changing US foreign policy represents a hindrance for both the EU and China in exploiting new possibilities and jointly filling the vacuum. The growing absence of the US from international cooperation frameworks in the security realm made the relationship between the EU and China more difficult as both felt the urge to steer between effective multilateralism and maintaining good relations with the US. Especially for the EU, this was a complex and delicate issue as the transatlantic axis has long been the priority of the EU’s international alliances. For both, the US remained the most important player and partner on the international stage. A Chinese interviewee stated that ‘on [the] official level, the US is still most important for China’ (Interview 6) and a European counterpart stressed that ‘the US is our ally’ with whom the EU shares ‘many similar assessments’ (Interview 27). Likewise, the 2019



report on implementing the European Union’s global strategy emphasized the importance of EU–NATO ties (EEAS, 2019c). Similarly, China’s white paper on its position on the China–US economic and trade consultations of 2019 (State Council, 2019c) revealed the will to improve relations with the US.

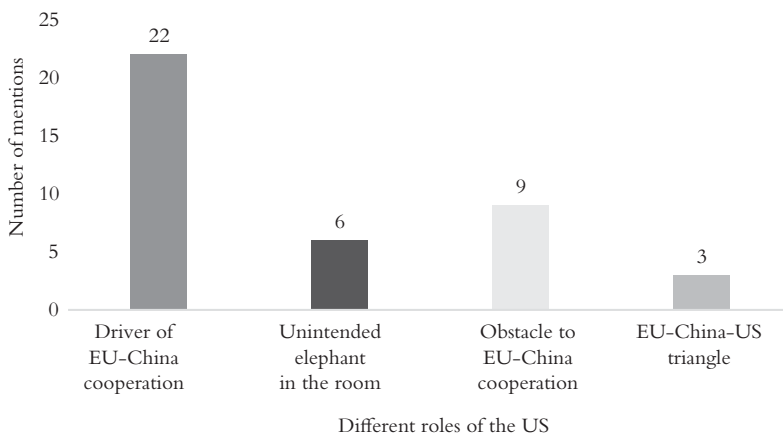
To sum up, the former ‘strategic’ triangle between the EU, China and the US turned into a ‘crooked’ triangle, with different cracks and wounds appearing in the US–China and US–EU legs of that triangle. In what follows, we shall examine how the EU and China each interpret the changing role of the US against the backdrop of their bilateral security relations and how they frame the role of the US.

### The US as a withdrawing hegemon: implications for the EU and China

In general, the Chinese take on the retreat of the US from global governance and its implications for EU–China security relations is much more optimistic and expects a deeper alignment between the security roles of the EU and China. Especially the interviews conducted with Chinese policy advisers and academics reveal that the unilateral foreign policy behaviour of the Trump administration is interpreted as a possibility to increase cooperation with the EU.

Figure 9.1 shows how often the interviewees mentioned the role of the US as being a ‘driver of EU–China security cooperation’, an ‘unintended elephant in the room’, an ‘obstacle to EU–China security cooperation’ or part of an ‘EU–China–US triangle’.

**Figure 9.1:** Chinese perspective on the role of the US



Source: Based on interview data.

According to many Chinese policy scholars, the changing policies of the US in the security realm created a vacuum of power that has two consequences. First, it generated a window of opportunity for closer EU–China alignment. Second, it increased the interdependencies between the two to cooperate, which was also reflected in Chinese media coverage on EU–China relations that confirmed a positive impact of the changing behaviour of the US on EU–China relations (*China Daily*, 2018a, 2018b). Nonetheless, the analysis shows an inconsistency of opinions within Chinese policy circles as to the extent to which the EU can serve as a new partner of equal weight to the US. The first concern regards the actorness of the EU and its capability to become a security actor. Elevating the EU–China security partnership to an equal level as the former US–China and EU–US legs of the strategic triangle would require the EU to emancipate itself from the grip of its transatlantic ‘big brother’ (Interview 8) in the long run. This concern is reflected in the Chinese hesitation to align deeper with the EU, despite the repeated articulation of the will and need to do so. A European interviewee confirmed this doubt on behalf of the Chinese, saying that China remains careful based on the assumption that the US might probably reach out to the EU to seek solidarity against China (Interview 23).

Thus, although EU–China security ties were considerably strengthened in reaction to the changing behaviour of the US, from the Chinese perspective the strategic triangle is not yet equilateral (Interview 19). The US and the EU share many common interests, especially in the security realm, and their alliance remains strong. As one interviewee put it, it is one layer of Chinese foreign policy to use the EU as a complementary partner to create a certain balance against the United States (Interview 19). This implies that the EU is not being considered a replacement of the formerly closer US–Chinese ties with regard to non-traditional security cooperation, but rather as a complement to Chinese power itself. This statement could not be triangulated through official written documents or media sources. Yet European interviewees also mentioned this tendency (Interview 25), so it seems plausible.

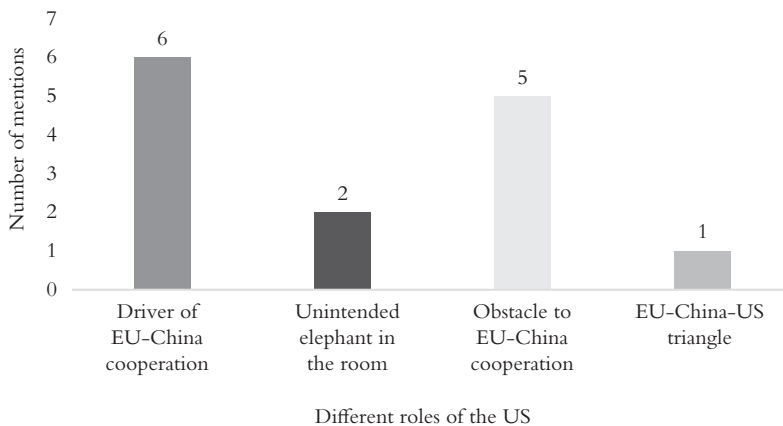
In any case, there is evidence that, against the backdrop of recent geopolitical developments, the EU’s role in security has increased from a Chinese perspective, along with the rising unilateralist foreign policy of the US, to the point that it plays an important role as a possible new strategic partner in China’s overall foreign policy strategy (Interview 4; Interview 19). This is reflected in China’s EU policy papers, which mention the EU as an important partner in global governance and as a necessary security counterpart (*European Commission*, 2001). In the realm of non-traditional security, there appear to be few concrete rivalries in their relationship and some potential for cooperation was mentioned, to be exploited in the future, under the condition that the US does not actively try to pressure

the EU to choose between new cooperative agreements with China and good transnational relations (Interview 21). Furthermore, there is evidence of China possibly pursuing a two-pronged approach. While attempting to improve its relations with ASEAN and other regional and multilateral bodies to make progress on China–US relations and China–EU relations, it also has been increasing its own capabilities to balance against the US (Interview 4). Such statements are also reflected in China’s policy papers and white papers on defence (see for example [MND, 2011a](#); [State Council, 2019a](#)).

However, the perceived inability of the EU to take decisions without US influence is a big obstacle to cooperation. Moreover, a certain level of mistrust remains, as Chinese officials are well aware of the fact that if the EU had to choose, the US would still be its main partner of cooperation ([Wacker, 2010](#)). The decision, under US pressure, not to lift the arms embargo after signing the CSP with China in 2003 is often referenced as a sign of this ([Spinat, 2004](#); [Politico EU, 2005](#)). Furthermore, there is an awareness that the EU’s security still depends on the US’ commitment and is mainly bound by NATO, especially as regards traditional security issues (Interview 3; Interview 28). However, when it comes to non-traditional security issues, China very much appreciates the EU’s measures, especially in the fields of climate and energy security, anti-piracy and maritime security, and nuclear non-proliferation ([Song, 2013](#)).

Concerning the EU’s perception of the impact of changing US behaviour on the development of EU–China security relations, two different perspectives can be distinguished based on interviews with EU officials: the changing role of the US as a driver of cooperation and as an obstacle (see [Figure 9.2](#)). Yet, in comparison to China, the EU’s sense of the US retreat

**Figure 9.2:** European perspective on the role of the US



Source: Based on interview data.

from global multilateralism and its deepening domestic crisis as a challenge for EU–China security relations is considerably stronger. Against the backdrop of the US’ shrinking hegemony under the Trump administration, the EU’s leadership in the security realm was put to the fore and the EU found itself torn between the divergent geopolitical interests of Beijing and Washington.

On the one hand, the EU is eager to maintain good transatlantic relations, as becomes evident through strong interview statements such as ‘the US is our ally’ with whom the EU shares ‘similar assessments’ (Interview 27). The EU’s support for the US is linked to a variety of factors, such as traditionally strong transatlantic ties, similar value orientation and EU–NATO ties (EEAS, 2019c). There are many statements that the changing foreign policy of the US is a challenge to multilateralism, both in the interviews (Interview 18) and in political speeches (Cañete, 2018). This has essentially pushed the EU and China closer together. Together, they have opposed the US’ unilateral withdrawals from international agreements such as the PA, the INF and the JCPoA. As a reaction to the unilateral reimposition of sanctions on Iran, the EU and China further voiced an interest in contributing to structural changes in the global financial system to reduce the global financial dependence on the US (Rosenberg and Saravalle, 2018; Can and Soto, 2020). As of today, the EU has already built a more constructive relationship with China than the US has. Even before Trump took office, there were major differences in the EU and US strategies towards China. For instance, several major EU member states (among them Germany and France) decided to join the newly established AIIB while the US refrained from doing so.

On the other hand, the pressure from the Trump administration on individual EU member states to avoid developing overly deep relations with China presented an obstacle to closer EU–China collaboration on many security issues (Interview 27). For instance, the US pressed the EU to ban companies that worked with the Chinese 5G provider Huawei (Cerulus, 2019b). This created a difficult situation for the EU to navigate its China policy while simultaneously maintaining good transatlantic relations (Kärnfelt, 2020). At the same time, the EU found itself in a position of new and unwanted global leadership in the security realm and had to deal with China’s instrumental approach to multilateralism and selective adherence to binding international rules without the backing of the US. As the President-in-Office of the Council, Melania Gabriela Piot, said at the EP in April 2019, the EU ‘need[s] to see how best to navigate between US–China rivalries and steer the dynamics of the triangular EU–US–China relationship’ (European Parliament, 2019b). The most recent example of the difficulties the EU faces in navigating the geopolitical US–China rivalry is the CAI (European Commission, 2020c). At the end of the negotiation phase, increasing pressure from the US almost sabotaged the finalization of the agreement and put the brakes on EU–China talks amid worries that

closing a deal without previous input from the US could jeopardize EU plans to partner with the new Biden administration on a joint China policy (Mears and Leali, 2020). This further shows that the EU is caught between a rock and a hard place as regards its relations with China and the US.

## **Outlook on EU–China–US relations under the Biden administration**

The abovementioned developments mostly stem from the changing US foreign policy and disorderly retreat from global (security) governance during the four years of the Trump administration. While it is too early to provide an analytical assessment of the Biden administration's take on China and possible continuities as well as paradigm shifts, the following section offers a cautious outlook on some possible developments regarding the EU–China–US triangle. It seeks to assess whether the damage that has been done to the triangle over the past four years can be reversed, and whether and how reviving the transatlantic axis might affect EU–China relations in general and in the security realm in particular.

While the overall tone and direction of US foreign and security policy towards China is expected to be reversed under the new Biden administration (Ferchen, 2021), the damage has already been done in terms of the corrosion of global security governance, the undermining of international rules and norms, and the emerging role of Beijing as a new 'standard-bearer' for global multilateralism (Huotari and Drinhausen, 2020). This latter trend is most likely to continue even under the Biden administration and will pick up speed regardless of how the US behaves. Although the EU will certainly find more entry points for cooperation with the Biden administration, in particular on issues such as human rights, economic regulations and climate and energy security, the US will likely focus on decoupling from China. Accordingly, Biden's approach to China is expected to be characterized by competition or even overt confrontation. Reinvigorating US domestic competitiveness while departing from Trump's approach of 'strategic competition' with China might lead to more continuities regarding the US' China policy than initially expected. However, the Biden administration is likely to employ different tools and arenas for its competition with the PRC (Ferchen, 2021). In his first call with Xi Jinping, he underscored his

fundamental concerns about Beijing's coercive and unfair economic practices, crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuse in Xinjiang and increasingly assertive actions in the region, including toward Taiwan. (White House, 2021b)

Similarly, in a speech on America's position in the world, he said that China is considered the US' most powerful rival and a challenge to US prosperity, security and democratic values (White House, 2021c). At the same time, he pointed towards possible avenues for reviving cooperation with China on issues of overlapping interests, although he lacked clarity regarding which policy fields this might affect. Although this stated US approach to China differs from the EU's adherence to a multifaceted approach of competition, partnership and rivalry, it facilitates the EU siding with the US on strategic questions of foreign and security policy, and a reinvigoration of the transatlantic axis can be expected.

However, the EU cannot afford to lose China as a cooperation partner in many security fields. Although reviving the transatlantic axis will be at the core of the EU's foreign policy during Biden's presidency, it needs to continue its dialogue with China on issues such as conflict resolution in the Middle East, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and climate and energy security (Interview 5; Interview 28). Fuelled by the US retreat from global security governance under Trump, China has expanded its presence – in terms of economy as well as security – in many regions of the world. Despite its reluctance to signal the possibility of offering an alternative to the US or even flanking Washington's security role in many regions, China's extensive use of economic diplomacy in the service of comprehensive national security goals within the regionalized foreign policy approach of the BRI (Garlick and Havlová, 2020) renders it an important partner when it comes to security endeavours in other parts of the world.

## Conclusion

When it comes to navigating its transatlantic relations and its deepening relations with China, the EU is in a tough spot. While the US and China are caught in a stalemate regarding their trade war, the EU faces a strategic dilemma. The disorderly retreat of the US from global security governance has fuelled this development and the EU is faced with the tough choice between US scepticism towards China and the Chinese desire for closer cooperation. Regarding the impact of the US on EU–China security relations the analysis thus suggests two countervailing interpretations. While for China, the changing international role of the US towards and its shrinking hegemony opened up a window of opportunity to reach out to the EU more proactively, the EU is divided over its relations to Beijing and Washington. While the temptation is strong to side with the US, one of the EU's most traditional allies, the EU cannot afford to lose China as a cooperation partner on many issues of global significance. Above all, the unilateral behaviour of the US under the Trump administration has brought to light the need for

the EU to reconsider its own positions and strive for more autonomy in the security realm. The retreat of the US from global security arrangements such as the INF and the JCPoA has brought to the fore the question of EU leadership. At the same time, the analysis indicates that the EU has been struggling with taking on this new leadership role and freeing itself from the US. From the vantage point of the US, this constitutes a chance to exert pressure on the EU to not seek overly close relations with China. Accordingly, the changing role of the US under Trump can be interpreted both as a driver of increased cooperation with China as well as a hindrance to it. Thus, the shrinking US hegemony has ambivalent consequences.

For China, the changing role of the US represented a window of opportunity to step up its assertive international behaviour and to fortify the promotion of its own state-centred and mainly authoritarian goals. Despite its reluctance to match its increasing economic engagement overseas with adequate security policies and to replace or even flank Washington's global role as a security provider, the retreat of the US from global security governance has created a strategic vacuum that China can fill. Besides, the Chinese interviewees pointed to the intensifying interdependence between the EU and China based on the changing international role of the US. Thus, the withdrawing hegemony is considered to have had a positive impact on EU–China security relations. From a Chinese vantage point, the EU has increased in importance during the Trump administration and China has sought cooperation with its European counterpart more proactively in this period.

Thus we can conclude that all three legs of the former EU–China–US strategic triangle have undergone significant changes during the Trump era. As a result, the triangle has become crooked, slightly favouring EU–China relations. However, the EU remains caught between a rock and a hard place, struggling to balance its relations with Washington and Beijing. As of today, there is no particular evidence that this will change under the Biden administration. Instead, the EU will most likely continue to struggle to find its own global role and to take on greater leadership.

## **Conclusion and Outlook: The EU and China at a Crossroads**

China's rise a global power is arguably one of the most important international developments of our time. Going from the world's largest developing power to an emerging pillar of world politics, China is on its way to becoming a new superpower with the potential to challenge the current world order. In line with this development, a widespread debate has emerged concerning the implications of China's rise. With regard to the EU, these implications have been discussed primarily in terms of economic relations, neglecting the changing relationship of the EU and China in the security realm. Similarly, cooperation in EU–China relations has hitherto received scant academic attention, with most European research outputs focusing on the challenges, risks and threats emanating from China and its increased international engagement. The ambition of this book was to disentangle the complex Sino–European relationship in the security realm and to explore and explain the modes and mechanisms that lead to cooperation between the EU and China beyond the scope of trade and investment. It was driven by the presumption that EU–China security cooperation is not a normative agenda, but rather an empirical issue (Christiansen et al, 2019). To answer it, we had to probe deeper into various security dimensions. The purpose of this concluding chapter is to bring together and compare the individual analytical chapters and to combine temporal patterns with the findings from the cross-sectional analyses of three exemplary security issues. Based on the preceding analyses, the chapter seeks to put the book's main findings in a wider context and points towards the potential and challenges of future avenues for the development of EU–China security relations.

The chapter begins by briefly summing up the main findings of the analytical chapters. The analytical chapters of this book have shown how complex and multifaceted EU–China relations in general and security relations in particular are. While economy and trade remain firmly at the



heart of EU–China relations, the security dimension of their relationship is also considerable. Having developed a solid and institutionalized partnership, interest often seems to trump values when it comes to cooperation. However, enormous normative and ideological differences prevail, and tensions resulting from the EU’s preference for multilateralism and China’s focus on territorial integrity and state sovereignty have even increased over time (Chapter 3). Therefore, the EU will have to deal with an illiberal China that is growing stronger and stronger and has extended its international outreach during the global pandemic in 2020. At the same time, globalization has drawn the EU and China closer together and rendered cooperation in policy fields such as security a ‘necessary’ and unavoidable choice (Chapter 4). This increases the need for the EU to reassess its China policies and to find more solid ways to put the EU’s interests back at the forefront of its dense interest-over-values partnership with China.

Finally, the nature of security threats that challenge the EU and China has changed significantly (Chapter 5). Generally speaking, non-traditional security threats, including climate change, terrorism, energy scarcity, food insecurity and the effects of regional conflicts, have risen in importance not only in Europe, but also in Asia. Over time, the EU and China have developed a more convergent understanding of what constitutes ‘security’ and which security challenges are especially important. They have based their security policies on the sense of shared responsibility for many issues of global governance. This enhanced understanding of many security issues has led to a rising level of security cooperation, despite deepening political tensions. With the rising salience of this policy field in their overall relations, cooperation has also increased.

Besides these temporal dynamics, the insights into three exemplary cases (anti-terrorism, anti-piracy, and climate and energy security) have shown how dense EU–China security relations are (Chapters 6–8). Again, it becomes apparent how interests seem to trump values when it comes to establishing cooperation formats. Simultaneously, a common understanding of the issues under scrutiny has proven to be a decisive factor. Whenever the EU and China find a common language, they manage to overcome ideological and normative differences and concentrate on the common ground. Yet, with normative contradictions and diverging framings as elephants in the room, they fail to do so and instead become riddled in stalemates, or even competition or rivalry, as in the case of anti-terrorism. However, despite these challenges and contradictions, the EU and China found themselves, at least temporarily, on the same side on global governance – especially during the protectionist and isolationist stance of the US under the Trump administration (Christiansen et al, 2019).

Comparing the findings over time as well as across the three chosen cases, it becomes obvious that in EU–China security relations there is convergence at

**Table 10.1:** Summary of the findings across cases

	<b>Complex interdependence</b>	<b>Economic interests</b>	<b>Problem understanding</b>	<b>Mutual perceptions</b>	<b>Dimension of cooperation</b>
Anti-terrorism	Weak	Weak	Divergent	'Rival'	Rhetoric
Maritime security and anti-piracy	Medium	Strong	Convergent	none	Rhetoric, institutional, activity
Climate and energy security	Strong	Medium	Partly convergent	'Necessary counterparts'	Rhetoric, institutional, formal, activity

the interest level and undisputable divergence at the value level. This translates into the inherently complex nature of EU–China security relations that are equally interwoven with cooperation and competition. In what follows, the empirical findings will be linked back to the four main concepts, and the explanatory power of each will be discussed. Starting with the explanatory power of the four key concepts, Table 10.1 provides an initial overview of how strongly present each concept was in the three analysed cases.

The analytical assessment of complex interdependence between the EU and China has shown that, as two relatively new actors to global governance, they find themselves bound in complex interdependence in many policy fields or security issues. The deepening entanglements as a consequence of globalization and the ongoing transnationalization of security have brought to light the notion of 'having no other choice but to cooperate' on many security issues. One interviewee summed it up by saying that most cooperation between the EU and China takes place 'where the necessity is strongest and where there is interdependence' (Interview 13).

The analysis has indicated that the extent to which economic interests are at stake influences whether and how strongly the EU and China engage in cooperation. Economic factors have an impact in that the EU and China are more likely to cooperate if they can thereby further their economic interests or avoid damage to their economies. The more economic interests are involved or the higher the threat to the economies, the more cooperation is observed.

Comparing the ways in which China and the EU frame terrorism, piracy, and climate and energy security concerns allows for a comprehensive assessment of how the two seem to perceive and react to security threats. A brief look at Table 10.1 reveals that to cooperate beyond mere rhetoric and discursive endorsements, agreeing on a shared definition of security generally, and the security concern under scrutiny in particular, is essential. Their oftentimes clashing normative (EU) and pragmatic (China) prioritizations in how to conduct foreign and security policy often lead to controversies rather

than cooperation. Finally, the analytical chapters shed light on the mutual perceptions of the EU and China. While they generally seem to deteriorate over time, the sense of complex interdependence is often reflected in the perceptions the EU and China have of each other as ‘necessary counterparts’.

Above all, in all three cases, constructivist and rationalist drivers of cooperation have proven to reinforce each other. For instance, in the case of anti-terrorism, the lack of a common understanding of the problem influences the rationalist considerations of the EU and China as it changes the cost-benefit equation of cooperation. It might raise the costs of cooperation significantly if a considerable amount of time needs to be dedicated to finding a common definition of what constitutes terrorism and then developing adequate response mechanisms. Accordingly, siding with more like-minded partners or relying on UN structures more strongly seems to be the more rational choice. Such interlinkages between rationalist and constructivist drivers emphasize the validity and analytical value of combining explanatory factors from both ontological strands.

Taken together, the three cases show an interesting interplay of different mechanisms. Except in the case of anti-terrorism, it can be concluded that the understanding and the perception mechanisms condition each other, in the sense that diverging understanding does not hinder cooperation if mutual perceptions are friendly and trustworthy. Moreover, depending on the issue area, strategic considerations can trump both perceptions and understanding of the economic or ideational interests are so high that any form of non-cooperation would harm the actors. This matches the findings of the analysis of the increase in EU–China security cooperation over time, which has revealed that role conceptions and expectations play a minor role if they are embedded in a larger environment of complex interdependences.

What does that mean in terms of future EU–China security relations? The findings of this book provide significant insight into possible avenues that EU–China security relations might take in the near future. At present, they are clearly at a crossroads. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1975, the EU and China have gone through different stages in their relationship. Having realized the benefits of cooperation, they had a honeymoon period of very optimistic, and in hindsight unrealistic, expectations of how their relationship might develop. They have gone through phases of extreme mistrust and criticism, but have never stopped talking to each other, no matter how difficult their relationship and how intense the geopolitical skirmishes. In short: present-day EU–China relations face a shallow future that will be determined to a great extent by broader geoeconomic and geopolitical developments.

EU–China security relations take place within a fluid international setting in which alliances are constantly changing. Just during the time of researching and writing this book (2017–20), the current world order was turned upside

down. The US withdrew from the JCPoA, the INF and the PA, the Brexit negotiations came to an end and the UK left the EU. The US and China began a trade war that does not seem like it will subside soon. Democratic countries like Brazil, Hungary and Poland experienced an authoritarian turn, and populists gained strength in several European countries. And last but not least, the spread of COVID-19 made the problems with globalization glaringly visible (Chapuis, 2020), put the EU and China in a state of constant insecurity and bafflement, and heralded an unprecedented global crisis. In such a fluid environment, not only are alliances constantly changing, but different actors are also cooperating on different issues and levels, and most actors find themselves trapped in multiscalar relationships, in which their cooperation partners in one policy field are their opponents in another. The same applies to EU–China security relations, which vary in scope and intensity across different issue areas. Although the aim of this book was to dive into the cooperative patterns within EU–China security relations and to extract the main drivers behind these patterns, the overall deepening tensions between the two should not be neglected. While there are general patterns of cooperative behaviour, there is also a considerable variation across different security domains.

While generalizations are difficult and predictions highly speculative in environments that are constantly evolving, it can nonetheless be concluded that the upcoming years will be very decisive for EU–China relations in general, and on security in particular. While the book has revealed a significant amount of security cooperation, there are also numerous obstacles to it, even on issues on which the EU and China have the same interests or objectives. Given these obstacles and the highly divergent principles of foreign and security policymaking that have been described in detail throughout the analysis, the actual amount of convergence and cooperation between the EU and China in the security realm is remarkable. Taking a careful look at the future, we can conclude that as comprehensive strategic partners, the EU and China will continue to engage with each other. A crucial question of strategic and academic importance is that on certain issues the EU and China indeed manage to set aside growing ideological and normative tensions, and focus on areas in which interests converge, pursuing different trajectories that follow a single aim. In that respect, security seems to be a policy field that brings the EU and China together more than it drives them apart.

# Notes

## Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted in Beijing, Shanghai and Brussels with policymakers, officials and academic experts with substantial levels of experience and expertise on EU–China security relations, or Chinese or European foreign and security policy. The results from these interviews are used as narrative evidence in the book. Moreover, they provide insights into the rationales behind EU–China security cooperation and thereby go beyond official declarations or statements. Due to confidentiality concerns, no information about the institutional affiliation of the interviewees can be disclosed.
- <sup>2</sup> However, building on the huge body of literature on interregionalism, one could argue that the EU’s and China’s region-to-state relationships could also be characterized as quasi-interregional (see for example, [Gilson, 2005](#); [Hänggi, 2006](#); [Rüland, 2012](#); [Baert et al, 2014](#)).
- <sup>3</sup> The distinction between traditional and non-traditional security issues followed throughout this book is drawn from [Williams \(2013\)](#). He distinguishes between traditional or hard security issues – which include conventional threats to state security and are directed against essential values of a state, including territorial integrity and political sovereignty – and non-traditional or soft security issues, which are non-conventional threats of transnational scope.
- <sup>4</sup> The Tiananmen Square Protests took place in 1989 and became famous as the Tiananmen Square Massacre after the Chinese military fired at the demonstrating crowd, killing several hundred people.
- <sup>5</sup> This office is now called the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP).
- <sup>6</sup> This policy asserts that there is only one sovereign Chinese state, called the People’s Republic of China (PRC). It is opposed to the idea of two Chinas: the PRC and the Republic of China (ROC). In this context, the PRC insists that Taiwan is an inalienable part of one China and should be reunified one day.
- <sup>7</sup> At the time of completing this book, the ratification and implementation of the CAI was still pending and discussions arose concerning the potential and pitfalls of this agreement for the EU.

## Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> The specific behaviours indicated in [Table 2.1](#) were developed inductively, based on a detailed mapping of the EU’s and China’s policy papers and joint declarations that make explicit reference to these behaviours.
- <sup>2</sup> The choice of the category is justified by the explicit reference that both Chinese and EU official policy papers and key documents make to this particular term. For example, the ‘EU–China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation’ proposes to ‘hold regular dialogues on defence and security policy’ ([EEAS, 2013](#)). Furthermore, the overall EU–China cooperation architecture is composed of three pillars, which are officially labelled as

dialogues (e.g. Pillar I is Political Dialogue) and consist of different sub-dialogues (e.g. Security and Defence Dialogue).

- <sup>3</sup> Cooperation could then emanate from the will to increase economic gains, to ensure economic interests or to prevent economic losses.

### Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup> These values are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union.
- <sup>2</sup> The five principles are (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, (4) equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful coexistence.
- <sup>3</sup> In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the three pillars of the doctrine, which were originally laid out in a report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> Rumours are spreading that China is planning to construct additional military bases in Central Asia or the Middle East (Lin, 2017). In 2019, the *Washington Post* reported about a Chinese outpost in Tajikistan (Shih, 2019). For the time being, the government has not yet acknowledged this outpost officially.
- <sup>5</sup> However, there are no specific documents, rules or mechanisms between the EU and China concerning cooperation in the UNSC.
- <sup>6</sup> The most cited contributor to Chinese discussions on good governance is Yu Keping, whose book *Democracy Is a Good Thing* has kicked off intra-Chinese debates on this concept. For further information see Keping (2006).

### Chapter 4

- <sup>1</sup> The earliest statistics date back to 1999, but still show this temporal pattern very clearly.
- <sup>2</sup> In comparison, the EU imported goods worth around €232 billion from the US (Eurostat, 2020b).
- <sup>3</sup> In comparison, the US had a share of 18 per cent in EU exports (Eurostat, 2020b).

### Chapter 5

- <sup>1</sup> This is not only characteristic of China, but affects other so-called 'emerging powers' whose colonial histories matter for an analysis of their current behaviour and foreign policy choices.
- <sup>2</sup> This pivot culminated in the 'Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in Asia' (2012) and had been initiated by the former High Representative for the EU's Foreign and Security Policies, Javier Solana (1999–2009). For further information about the guidelines, see Council of the European Union (2012).

### Chapter 6

- <sup>1</sup> Da'esh is the Arabic acronym for the so-called Islamic State.

### Chapter 7

- <sup>1</sup> This is further fuelled by the rising tensions in neighbouring waterways in recent years, such as the oil tanker attacks in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz in 2019. In this context, it was often discussed whether the US would be open to countries like China participating in the Persian Gulf and contributing to the regional security architecture.

- <sup>2</sup> As has been argued elsewhere, China's naval far-seas security model has achieved a qualitative leap in the GoA over the past 10 years and the presence of the PRC has increased significantly. This shows that China's motives for the fight against piracy in the GoA does not only stem solely from economic reasons, but also has wider implications for regional security (Gurool and Shahmohammadi, 2019).

## Chapter 8

- <sup>1</sup> It has to be mentioned that CCS is a highly controversial topic in Europe. Experts are divided over the advantages and disadvantages. This discussion cannot be deepened in the course of this chapter. For further information, see (Bouvard et al, 2011; von Stechow et al, 2011; Corsten et al, 2013; Volkart et al, 2013; Bruhn et al, 2016).
- <sup>2</sup> This picks up the debate between climate security and energy security, and shows that in the Chinese case, both issues are inextricably connected, as discussed in the literature (Bo et al, 2016).

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