

The EU and China-Myth Versus Reality of a (not so) ‘Strategic Partnership’

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Abstract When the European Union (EU) started referring to China as ‘strategic partner’ in 2003, it announced that the ‘strategic partnership’ with Beijing would facilitate the adoption of joint regional and global foreign and security policies. More than a decade later, however, that has not taken place as Brussels and Beijing have indeed very little (if anything) in common as regards approaches towards international politics and security. In fact, critical scholars and analysts (like this author) have for years argued that there is no ‘strategic dimension’ of EU-China ties beyond the expansion of bilateral EU-China trade and commercial ties. The below-mentioned EU-Chinese dialogue on Asian security e.g. has not produced any tangible results and China’s current regional foreign and security policies in general and those related to Beijing’s territorial disputes in particular are evidence for at least two things: firstly, EU influence on Chinese security policy behaviour remains in spite of a bilateral security dialogue on East Asia de facto non-existent. Secondly, Beijing will continue to completely ignore EU advice and concerns about Chinese regional and global foreign policy behaviour and will continue to pursue regional security policies in general and those related to territorial claims and disputes in particular, which are—to put it bluntly—the very opposite of how the EU approaches and adopts foreign and security policies. Consequently, this chapter concludes that EU-China cooperation in international politics and security will continue to take place largely (if not exclusively) on paper and paper only.

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1 Introduction

Since 2003 the EU and China have referred to each other as ‘strategic partners.’ As an expression of that partnership, Brussels and Beijing have over the last decade established more than 50 bilateral so-called ‘sectoral dialogues’ covering 24 areas, including competition policy, civil aviation, market access, intellectual property rights, nuclear energy, food safety, environment, regulatory and industrial policy, trade policy etc. While the intense institutional exchanges suggest that Brussels and Beijing both assign great importance above all to bilateral trade investment ties, many of the problems and disagreements covered by many of the ‘sectoral dialogues’ have been dealt with for years without having produced any progress, not to mention tangible results. The dialogues dealing with issues related to trade and investment, such as the ones on market access, government procurement and intellectual property rights in particular, deal with issues European business investing in China has been complaining about for years. In fact, the list of complaints about the obstacles European investors and investments in China are confronted with has remained—at least as far as the Beijing-based EU Chamber of Commerce is concerned—(very) long and indeed identical over the years.

Numerous and persistently unresolved problems on the bilateral trade and investment agenda notwithstanding, in 2013 the EU and China again confirmed their ‘strategic partnership’ by adopting the ‘EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation’ (European Union External Action Service 2013). Sino-European cooperation in international politics and security (under the headline ‘Peace and Security’) will—at least according to that policy paper—feature prominently on the EU-China policy agenda in the years ahead (European External Action Service 2013). The areas and issues Brussels and Beijing envision to be jointly dealing with include areas such as nuclear security, the international non-proliferation regime and related export control arrangements, transnational organised crime, cyber-crime, anti-terrorism, maritime security as well Asian security in the framework of the below-cited ‘EU-China High Level Strategic Dialogue.’ The ‘EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation’ also announced that it would “raise the level of EU-China dialogue and cooperation on defence and security, advancing towards more practical cooperation.” While this sounds good on paper, the move towards more practical security cooperation (i.e. the adoption of joint security policies) will continue not to take place. The EU and China continue to have very different positions on most (if not all) current issues on the regional and international security agendas, be it the crisis in Ukraine, the Middle East (e.g. Iran or Syria), and the so-called ‘rogue regimes’ in North Korea or Sudan—hardly the basis for moving towards practical cooperation on security in Asia (or elsewhere). The recent years of EU-Chinese consultations and dialogues on regional and global security have shown that the EU’s influence on actual Chinese foreign and security policy behaviour and policies is de facto non-existent and have also shown that Beijing could indeed not care less about European concerns about Chinese foreign and security policy conduct in Asia or elsewhere. In other words, Beijing will

realistically not alter the quality of its regional foreign and security policies in response to European advice or requests to do so. China denying others the right to ‘interfere’ in any of what China refers to as its ‘internal affairs’ is (very) deeply embedded in Chinese foreign and security policy thinking and making and Beijing will continue to take on board only the kind of advice on its foreign and security policies that comes nowhere near to resembling ‘interference.’ In fact, when Xi Jinping took power in 2012, Chinese policymakers as well as Chinese scholars interacting with European counterparts have tended to become very defensive and indeed aggressive fairly quickly when perceiving anything that might be in any way interpretable as ‘interference’ in Chinese domestic affairs from the outside. It is accurate to conclude that China is in a phase of seeking to define its identity, role and reach as regional and global security policy actor and it will only cooperate with the EU on security if such cooperation does not—at least from a Chinese perspective—obstruct the process of developing the kind of foreign and security policy identity endorsed in Beijing (as opposed to in Brussels or Washington).

2 Not Accepting ‘Interference’

Even if often-repeated official rhetoric speaking of EU-Chinese ‘mutual understanding’ and ‘common interests’ might suggest otherwise, the history of European colonialism in Asia in general and China in particular is still very present in China’s historical memory and hence any European opinion on Chinese domestic and foreign policies that could be interpreted as unwanted ‘interference’ is in today’s China almost inevitably associated with European colonialism and China’s so-called ‘Century of Humiliation’, i.e. the roughly 100 years from the first ‘Opium War’ (1839) to the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Furthermore, in order to be able to understand current Chinese foreign policy behaviour, it is necessary to mention that China’s President Xi Jinping has over the last two years in his speeches on domestic and foreign policies numerous times called on the Chinese people to remember China’s past of European colonialism and imperialism when outlining his vision of the so-called ‘China Dream’ to the Chinese people. The ‘induction’ of national self-confidence (accompanied by patriotism and at times strong nationalism) through Xi’s ‘China Dream’ has without a doubt had an impact on how much outside advice and opinions Chinese foreign policymakers are willing to accept. Indeed, an economically rapidly growing China governed by a leadership determined to encourage the Chinese people to exercise Chinese economic and political patriotism probably feels less than ever inclined to endorse outside advice which in turn within China could be interpreted as a sign of weakness. The analysis of China’s ‘national psyche’ taking into account Chinese history of the 18th and 19th centuries have over recent years sought to explain current Chinese foreign policy rhetoric and more importantly foreign policy behaviour. Among others, scholars concluded that Chinese foreign policy approaches and policies are—at least up to a point—the result of a mix between an

‘inferiority complex’ (as a Chinese ‘hangover’ of the above-mentioned ‘Century of Humiliation’) and a growing ‘national self-confidence’ (as a result of China’s phenomenal economic growth and development over the last 30 years) (Zheng 2012). Such—at least from a European perspective—contradictory elements making up and defining China’s ‘national psyche’ produce policies that in the West are perceived as nationalistic and driven by the motivation and determination to conduct policies independent and free from Western pressure and lecturing. The scope and limits of China’s cooperation with the EU and Europe in international politics and security have also to be understood and analysed against that background.

States and governments typically only do what they are obliged to do and China is certainly no exception. Giving in to European requests to make its political and governance system more ‘European’ or more ‘Western’ is not—put bluntly—one of the things China’s policymakers feel that they are obliged to do. China is referring to itself as a ‘great power’ and Xi Jinping’s foreign policy rhetoric and his earlier cited determination to induce the concept of China’s so-called ‘National Revival’ into the Chinese psyche is making sure that China’s policymakers in case of doubt opt for ‘interference’. In fact, in the current atmosphere and the ongoing phase of Xi’s campaigns and policies of consolidating his power in China, opting for categorically referring to any outside opinion on Chinese domestic and foreign policy as unwanted ‘interference’ has become the ‘safe option’ as it makes Chinese policymakers less vulnerable to inter-Chinese accusations of being ‘too soft’ with the West so to speak. To be sure, the jury is still out on whether such an approach is sustainable in the long-term and whether China will—against the background of China’s rapidly growing economy and global investments—find out rather soon that the ‘principle of non-interference’ and the de facto refusal to accept outside advice on its foreign and foreign economic policies could become unsustainable (European Council on Foreign Relations 2013).

According to the American China scholar David Shambaugh, China’s determination to insist on the ‘principle of non-interference’ in defence of Beijing’s foreign policy independence from outside pressure has already led to Beijing being short of ‘friends’ and without any close allies—a ‘lonely power’ as Shambaugh calls China (Shambaugh 2014). No other countries, Shambaugh argued, are copying China’s political and economic model and hence the country is not a ‘role model’ country for anyone. Almost needless to say that Beijing and numerous Chinese scholars have responded to and strongly disagreed with Shambaugh’s argument. Chinese soft power in the form of economic relations and investments in Africa or South America it is e.g. argued in China, have successfully promoted what Beijing argues is an alternative (i.e. non-Western) model of relations and development—a model, it is argued in Beijing, that has been endorsed and welcomed in many countries of the developing world.

Foreign and security policies, however, are not the only areas, in which Beijing does not want the EU (or anybody else for that matter) to ‘interfere’ in its internal affairs. As regards China’s domestic policies and issues and areas such as freedom of speech and expression, the rule of law, governance and other issues, China is indeed determined not to follow European advice and input as regards the level of

free speech and expression and the rule of law (as opposed to the rule ‘by law’). In fact, Beijing has in January 2016 made it very clear that it is very determined to suppress any European attempts to ‘interfere’ in what China insists are its internal affairs for nobody to interfere with. In fact, Beijing’s determination to ‘protect’ itself against being ‘contaminated’¹ with Western values and influence reached a new level in January 2016 when Chinese authorities arrested and detained a Swedish citizen, the founder of a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in China. Peter Dahlin, founder of ‘China Urgent Action Working Group’ was arrested and only deported from China after having obliged to confess his ‘wrongdoings’, i.e. his work on the promotion of human rights, on Chinese television. Such practice recalled the bad old days of Mao Zedong’s notorious forced self-confession sessions in the 1950s and 1960s,² leading the EU to express its protest against Beijing’s decision to publicly humiliate a European citizen on Chinese state television. “Mr Dahlin’s arrest and detention are part of a worrying trend and call into question China’s respect for the rule of law and for its international human rights obligations”, the EEAS declared in January 2016 (European External Action Service 2016).

3 Not (Fully) Trusting Brussels

Chinese policymakers are undoubtedly aware that the EU and the big EU member states would side with the US on Asian security issues in the case of a US-Chinese controversy if the conflict in question also affects European interests. Beijing has probably very few illusions about European preparedness to side with China and not the US, should Washington’s security interests in the region be affected by China’s regional security policies. When China in the early 2000s—during Washington’s unilateral moment in international politics and the invasion of Iraq in 2003—asked Europe to endorse the concept of a ‘multipolar world’ to counter US unilateralism, the European reaction (perhaps with the exception of France and Germany, which refused to participate in the invasion and later occupation of Iraq) was not enthusiastic, to say the very least. There are few illusions in Beijing today about the fact that the EU’s political and security ties with Washington are much more substantive than the ones with Beijing, which have led Beijing’s policymakers

¹Xi Jinping and his administration have in 2015 launched an official campaign strongly advising the Chinese people (i.e. ‘ordering’ the Chinese people) to protect themselves against the dangers of being ‘contaminated’ by Western values such as democracy and human rights, as the attempt to promote and introduce such ‘dangerous’ of such values are—at least as far as Beijing is concerned—part of a Western conspiracy to weaken and create instability in China.

²When Chinese citizens were forced to confess their alleged wrongdoings in public under humiliating circumstances and under enormous pressure.

not to fully trust European counterparts to adopt policies which would run counter to or are fully independent from US policies. In fact, there are numerous scholars and also policymakers in China who argue that high-sounding EU-China statements on the quality and scope of bilateral EU-Chinese security cooperation do not change anything about the fact that Europe continues to be an ‘agent’ of US interests in the region.

4 Siding with US Containment, Beijing Fears

When the US administration announced its ‘pivot to Asia’ in 2011, accompanied by increased US involvement in Asian security through the strengthening of existing military alliances with Japan and South Korea and the establishment of new defence ties with countries such as Australia, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam, Beijing concluded that Washington’s Asia ‘pivot’ was aimed at containing China. Beijing policymakers argued then (and still do) that the US ‘pivot’ and the expansion of US defence ties in the region accompanying it are aimed at ‘encircling’ China and continuing to ensure US regional military hegemony, deterring China’s rapid economic and military rise. While to date Washington continues to argue that its Asia ‘pivot’ is in no way intended to ‘encircle’ China, China continues to insist that it is just that. Furthermore, from China’s perspective the ‘pivot’ is a US attempt to convince other Asian countries to join Washington to deter China’s economic and political rise and that Europe will—again from a Chinese perspective—sooner or later be pressured into actively supporting China’s containment. Some European scholars on the other hand argue that the expansion of the EU’s economic and political engagement in Asia in general and with China in particular over the last decade can be referred to as a EU ‘pivot’ to Asia (Casarini 2013; Parelo-Plesner 2012). To be sure, not a ‘pivot’ with the expansion of military ties and alliances at the centre but instead one with policies aimed at engaging China economically and politically as much as possible. As the last three years of Chinese foreign and security policies under Chinese President Xi Jinping have shown, however, the kind of engagement the EU has in mind is bound to remain very limited, if at all existent. Indeed, the quality of Chinese policies related to territorial claims in the South China Sea has unambiguously demonstrated that Beijing is not willing to accept what it refers to as ‘interference’ from the outside.

Indeed, over the last two-three years Beijing has created facts on the ground, which have made it very clear that China is indeed in the business of expanding its territories in the South China Sea (to be sure, Beijing argues that it is merely reclaiming land and islands that have always and since ancient history belonged to

China) (Panda 2015; Watkins 2016; The Economist 2015). Through the so-called 'Nine-Dash Line' Beijing has unilaterally decided that more than 90% of the South China Sea belongs to China, thereby de facto rendering other claimants countries' territorial claims as good as obsolete.³ While such kind of territorial policies must without much doubt be referred to as unilateral territorial expansionism in the South China Sea in 2014⁴ and 2015,⁵ Beijing in turn pretends not to understand that its territorial policies are in the region perceived as threatening regional peace and stability. Instead, Beijing (wrongly) argues that it is merely claiming and defending territories and islands that have already belonged to China since 'ancient times.'

When in July 2012 Catherine Ashton, then EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State adopted the 'US-EU Statement on the Asia-Pacific Region'⁶ (US State Department 2012)', EU policymakers found themselves under pressure to explain to Chinese counterparts why the joint US-EU statement on Asian security does not mean that the EU is planning to join alleged US-led China containment policies. Beijing on the other hand maintained back then that the Clinton-Ashton joint statement sounded like the EU is preparing itself to get involved in a US-driven containment policy strategy towards China even if such a conclusion does not at all reflect the realities of EU foreign and security policies towards Asia in general and China in particular.

³Beijing's 'Nine-Dash Line' stretches several hundreds of miles south and east from China's most southerly province of Hainan. On the basis of that line the Paracel and Spratly Islands are part of Chinese sovereign territory and although largely uninhabited, the Paracel and the Spratly Islands are believed to have reserves of natural resources around them. Beijing claims that its territorial rights in the South China Sea go back centuries to when the Paracel and Spratly island chains were regarded as integral parts of the Imperial China. Vietnam and the Philippines dispute China's historical account, arguing China had never claimed sovereignty over the islands before the 1940s. Vietnam for its part claims that it has ruled over both the Paracels and the Spratlys since the 17th century and also claims to have historical documents to prove its dominion over these groups of islands.

⁴In May 2014, the intrusion of a Chinese drilling rig into waters near the Paracel Islands led to numerous collisions between Vietnamese and Chinese ships. Tensions between Vietnam and China further increased in the same year after China moved a state-owned oil rig, flanked by civilian, coast guard, and military vessels, into waters claimed by Vietnam as part of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

⁵In 2015 Beijing has accelerated the construction of facilities on and around disputed islands. After declaring in June 2015 that the process of building seven new islands by moving sediment from the seafloor to reefs was close to completion, Beijing has in the second half of the year 2015 undertaken efforts to build ports, airstrips and radar facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea. In April 2015, satellite images showed China building an airstrip on reclaimed land in the Spratlys. When announcing naval exercises off the coast of Hainan Island near the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea in July 2015, Beijing issued a statement not allowing other vessels to enter the waters in which the exercises take place.

⁶On the side-lines of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

5 Nothing in Common

The debate on the scope and quality of EU-Chinese cooperation in international politics tends to neglect the fundamental question of whether and to what extent cooperation between democratic and non-democratic countries in international politics and security beyond informal consultations is at all feasible and able to produce actual results in the form of measurable joint policies. While it is from a policymaker's point of view understandable—understandable since a policymaker is expected to produce on paper commitments from counterparts to demonstrate on paper preparedness to cooperate, regardless of different political systems and forms of governance—to publicly ignore the question of the feasibility and prospects of actual results as regards cooperation, the absence of actual joint EU-Chinese policies provides evidence that entirely different forms and systems of governance do indeed matter a great deal and have an impact on whether joint policies are at all realistic. In fact, it is accurate to conclude that recent Chinese regional and global foreign and security policies have more than anything else demonstrated that Chinese approaches towards regional and global politics and security are fundamentally different from European approaches and policies. Furthermore, EU-Chinese bilateral consultations and dialogues on human rights, governance, democracy, freedom of speech and expression, terrorism and arguably many other issues have made it very clear that Beijing and Brussels often do not even agree on shared definitions of concepts such as human rights, democracy and terrorism. While policymakers in both Europe and China tend—at least on the official record—to play down the differences as regards differing definitions standing in the way of going beyond agreeing to disagree—it can be concluded that the absence of the aforesaid jointly shared definitions a priori limit the possibilities of actual meaningful cooperation.

6 'EU-China High-Level Strategic Dialogue'

Doubts about the potential impact of European concerns and advice on Chinese regional and global security policy notwithstanding, in 2010 the EU and China set up an annual dialogue on Asian security. The last annual 'EU-China High-level Strategic Dialogue' was held in June 2016 and Brussels among others hoped that the dialogue would encourage Beijing to become more transparent about its defence expenditures and military equipment procurement and sales policies. However, that is clearly a case of European wishful-thinking as China will not make any more information on its arms procurement policies available simply because the EU is requesting Beijing to do that in the context of a bilateral dialogue on Asian security. When analysts argue that the EU-China strategic dialogue on Asian security is more than anything else an annual window-dressing event as opposed to a dialogue that produces real results, let alone joint policies related to Asian security,

EU policymakers typically point out that the dialogue's objective is not the adoption of joint policies but rather a platform to informally consult with each other on Asian security issues. While dialogue and consultations are positive as such, the *raison d'être* of such a dialogue must however be put in doubt if European advice and input on Chinese regional security policy conduct such as Beijing's (very) assertive policies related to territorial claims in the East and South China Seas are quite simply ignored in Beijing. Indeed, as already mentioned above, the reality of Chinese regional security policy conduct and policies has shown that Beijing's preparedness to consult with the EU on security issues which fall under what Beijing refers to as its 'core interests'—the Taiwan and Tibet 'questions' and what Beijing refers to as 'territorial integrity' in Asia's disputed territorial waters—is *de facto* non-existent. If that is accurate and if European views and advice on Chinese security policies in Asia are only endorsed during official encounters as opposed to in the 'real' world, then it is fair to question whether the dialogue on Asian security with China is an efficient use of EU resources and political capital. China's very assertive and indeed aggressive policies related to territorial claims in the East China Sea and more importantly South China Sea have indeed very clearly and unambiguously demonstrated that the EU does not have any influence on Chinese foreign and security policy behaviour, be it through the above-mentioned 'High-Level Strategic Dialogue' or any other bilateral dialogues and exchanges. To be sure, expectations that a bilateral dialogue on East Asian security with Beijing would inevitably lead to EU influence on Chinese regional policies and Beijing were always very low even if official rhetoric on the purpose and impact of Brussels talking on Asian security with Beijing suggests otherwise. In reality, however, EU officials involved in the bilateral dialogue on Asian security are fully aware that China's preparedness to accept and act upon European advice on how to tackle Asian security issues and issues related to territorial disputes in Asian territorial waters is *de facto* non-existent.

Brussels' decision not—at least now—to get involved in Asian territorial conflicts that involve China beyond urging involved parties to solve conflicts peacefully, have undoubtedly led Beijing policymakers to conclude that Brussels does not pose a 'danger' in terms of 'interference' in China's regional security policies. While Beijing on the official record complains about Europe's inability to formulate and adopt joint foreign and security policies, such inability makes sure that the EU is probably just the kind of institution China wants the EU to be: an institution with a foreign policy apparatus that is not equipped with the instruments and the authority to formulate policies towards China that cannot be undermined by individual EU member states when and how they see fit. In other words: an European External Action Service (EEAS) that can be ignored if and when it adopts policies towards China which China in turn perceives as threatening its interests or as unwanted 'interference' in its internal affairs. China's above-mentioned (very assertive) policies related to territorial claims in the South China Sea—policies that can indeed be referred to as unilateral territorial expansionism—have arguably further eroded the *raison d'être* of the European-Chinese dialogue on East Asian security. Beijing's regional policies related to its territorial claims in the East and

South China Seas are the very opposite of what the EU argues China should do: instead of reclaiming disputed territories in the South China Sea unilaterally, the EU has in 2015 and also 2016 several times called on China and other involved parties to address territorial disputes in the South China Sea through multilateral consultations. As recently as March 2016 the EU voiced outspoken concerns about China's policies related to territorial claims in the South China Sea. "The EU is concerned about the deployment of missiles on islands in the South China Sea. The temporary or permanent deployment of military forces or equipment on disputed maritime features which affects regional security and may threaten freedom of navigation and overflight is a major concern", a statement by the European Council read (European Council 2016).⁷ To be sure, such statements are due to the reasons elaborated above not likely to lead China to adjust or change its policies related to territorial claims and will most probably not keep Beijing from continuing to build civil and military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea. In fact, the opposite is the case: The EU expressing its preoccupations about aggressive Chinese regional territorial policies typically lead Beijing to 'remind' Brussels to mind its own business and not 'interfere' in what it insists are China's 'internal affairs.'

7 Conclusions

It is telling that a significant part of the EU's 'Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia' adopted in June 2012 deal with China and the limits, problems of EU-China cooperation in regional politics and security (Council of the European Union 2013). Telling because the guidelines display an arguably very critical European assessment of the quality of Chinese domestic and foreign policies by listing a number of (from a EU perspective) very problematic issues on China's domestic and regional foreign and security policy agendas. Such issues obviously include human rights, the—from an EU perspective—insufficiently developed application of the rule of law in China and the complete lack of progress as regards fundamental freedoms in the country. The long list of problematic issues also concern Chinese approaches to the rule of law, governance, international politics and (many) other issues, which indeed suggests that the EU and China have in terms of governance and approaches towards international politics and security as good as nothing in common. To be sure, as elaborated above, China will continue to ignore EU criticism as it seems fit and will certainly not change or adjust any of its domestic and foreign just because Brussels is requesting Beijing to do so.

⁷Although China is not explicitly mentioned in that statement, there is no doubt that China is meant as it is the only country that has in 2016 deployed military installations and facilities on disputed territories in the South China Sea.

China, French scholar François Godement concludes, is a realist power that does not in any way feel obliged to take European foreign policy opinions and criticism into account when implementing its foreign and security policies and Asia and elsewhere. “As a realist power, China has neither the inclination to consider Europe’s geopolitical influence at a time when Europe is struggling with an ongoing economic and political crisis, nor the incentive to favour a more united and empowered Europe that would also be a more effective negotiator with China” (Godement 2013). As long as individual EU member states opt for adopting their own China policies when it suits their interests, Godement argues, China will reserve the right to consider the EU a ‘support actor’ and not a protagonist in international politics and security. “National shortcuts are very tempting, but they will weaken the EU’s hand as a whole, and if such an approach is pursued Europe will never receive the kind of recognition from China that a united continent of 500 million people can expect to command.” The ‘national shortcuts’ Godement cites are still and undoubtedly part of European policies towards China and the Union’s big member states with strong business interests in and trade ties with China will like in the past also in the future continue to hinder the EU and its EEAS from adopting a coherent set of policies towards China if and when it is against their (business and trade) interests.

A European role promoting European models and modes of security multilateralism, some European scholars and (many) EU policymakers argue on the official record, is endorsed in Asia, including in China (Peyrouse 2012). However, as was sought to show above, such an assessment does not at all reflect the realities of Chinese regional security policies in general and its policies related to territorial claims in the South China Sea in particular. Insisting on the aforesaid ‘principle of non-interference,’ there is a near-consensus among independent and well-informed China scholars and analysts that Beijing will continue to remain opposed to multilateralizing its regional security policies in any meaningful and sustainable fashion. Indeed, unless there is a fundamental shift in Chinese foreign policy thinking and making (which is very unlikely), Chinese policymakers will continue to pursue what can be referred to as ‘multilateralism à la carte’ and Beijing will continue to turn to individual EU member states if and when it does not get what it wants from EU institutions. The problem of course does not lie with China alone. The three biggest EU member states—Germany, France and the UK—will for their part continue to formulate and adopt their very own individual policies towards China when they see fit, which will inevitably continue to have a negative impact on the EU’s ability to have one set of European economic, political and security policies towards China. Numerous times in the past have the above-mentioned three EU countries adopted their own foreign policies towards China without having felt obliged to consult with the European External Action Service (EEAS). Unless there is a fundamental shift in how the EU’s big member states conduct their respective foreign and security policies and unless they are prepared to assign more authority and competencies to the EEAS at the expense of the ability to adopt individual policies towards China (which is as unlikely as it is that Beijing will be fundamentally changing its foreign policy conduct), Beijing will seek to continue to be

able to exploit the lack of European foreign and security policy unity for its own benefit. While China is not the only country and actor exploiting insufficient European foreign and security policy coherence, it is—viewed against the background of Europe’s trade and investment ties and interests with and in China—probably the country in a position to exploit the lack of inner-EU unity most successfully.

Finally, it is accurate to conclude that China’s policies related to territorial claims in the East and South China Seas have over the last three years under President Xi become increasingly assertive and aggressive and indeed and from a non-Chinese perspective expansionist.⁸ As mentioned above, what China does as regards its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas does not have anything to do with EU approaches towards international politics and security and for the sake of EU credibility in international politics and security, Brussels’ policy-makers are advised to point out just that to their counterparts in Beijing. The trouble is that they don’t and won’t.

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⁸Obviously a conclusion that is not shared in China.

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