

## Chapter 2

# China-EU Political Relations

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**Abstract** China and the EU established the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2003. In recent years, after having experienced successively a “honeymoon” and a period of adjustment, China-EU relations are now running smoothly. In this context, this paper first makes a general review of the three stages in the bilateral relationships, after which it discusses the roles of the China-EU political dialogues and the attitudes of the major EU institutions and actors towards China, and conducts a case study of the bilateral cooperation in the areas of security, defense and crisis management as well as in the human rights dialogue. In the conclusion, this paper believes that no great changes will take place in future China-EU relations while, at the same time, there will probably still be twists and turns.

**Keywords** Comprehensive strategic partnership • China-EU summit • EU institutions • Cooperation in security and defense • Human rights dialogue

### 2.1 The Three Stages of China-EU Political Relations During the Period 2003–2013

China-EU political relations have undergone a “honeymoon period”, a period of adjustment and a period of restoration and progressive development in the years 2003–2013.

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### 2.1.1 2003–2004: The “Honeymoon Period” for China-EU Relations

The year 2003 was of great significance for China-EU relations when both sides issued policy papers for China-EU relations and upgraded the China-EU “Comprehensive Partnership” to the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”.

In June 2013, the EU released the “European Security Strategy Program” which identified China as one of the major strategic partners for the EU. In September, the EU issued the fifth paper concerning policies towards China<sup>1</sup>: *A Maturing Partnership—Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations*<sup>2</sup> This paper stressed that the EU’s ultimate goal was to establish a “Strategic Partnership” with China, namely “a vibrant, lasting and mutually beneficial relationship between equal partners”.

In October 2013, China issued its first policy paper towards the EU,<sup>3</sup> which was also the first of this kind for a specific country or territory in its foreign relations. This paper admitted that “the EU is an important force in the world” and held that the EU would play an increasingly important role in regional and international affairs in the future. This paper stated that no fundamental interest conflicts existed between China and the EU and neither consisted of a threat to the other side, and despite the different views and disagreements on some issues, common grounds and cooperation between the two sides is the mainstream in the bilateral relations.

During the subsequent sixth China-EU Summit meeting, leaders of both sides expressed the willingness to build a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and believed that a multi-level structure had been formed for China-EU relations, “suggesting that the China-EU partnership had become increasingly mature and showed more strategic prominence”.<sup>4</sup> Since then, China-EU relations have been further improved and entered a “honeymoon period”.

Against such a background, high-level visits between China and the EU were unprecedentedly frequent in 2004. When visiting the EU headquarters in May, Premier Wen Jiabao delivered a speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade

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<sup>1</sup>Previous four papers concerning policies towards China are *A Long Term Policy for China-EU Relations* in 1995, *EU New Strategy towards China* in 1996, *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* in 1998, *EU Policy towards China—Implementation of 1998 Paper and Measures for Further Strengthening EU Policy* in 2001. See website of Mission of the People’s Republic of China in the European Union, <http://www.chinamission.be/chn/sbgx/zogx/t142798.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>For the Chinese text, see website of the Ministry of Commerce, <http://eu.mofcom.gov.cn/article/jmjg/ztdy/200409/20040900273716.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup>See website of Mission of the People’s Republic of China in the European Union, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebe/chn/sbgx/zogx/t69236.htm>.

<sup>4</sup>*Joint Press Communiqué of the Sixth China-EU Leaders’ Meeting*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/1179/t39657.htm>.

Seminar<sup>5</sup> and explained the connotation of the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”: “comprehensive” meant that cooperation between the two sides was all-round, wide-ranging and multi-tiered; “strategic” meant that cooperation between the two sides covered the whole situation and was long-term and stable; “partnership” signified equal, mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation between the two sides. During this period, both sides established a mechanism for political dialogue covering many fields and were committed to enhancing their cooperation in multilateral mechanisms. Thus the European media described this year as “China’s European Year”, and some people in academic circles even asserted that a “China-EU Axis” had emerged.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1.2 2005–2008: The “Adjustment Period” for China-EU Relations

Since 2005, it seemed that the EU was suspicious of the growing strength and position of China,<sup>7</sup> and started to change its policies towards China, which had generally taken a tough stance. The deepening of China-EU relations was accompanied by new contradictions and tensions, and frictions increased markedly compared with those at the previous stage. Therefore, China-EU relations entered a complicated adjustment period during which the most iconic event was that the European Commission released two policy papers towards China in October 2006, including *EU-China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities* and *EU-China Trade and Investment: Competition and Partnership* in the form of a “communication” and a “working paper” respectively.<sup>8</sup>

In both papers, the EU apparently changed the overall tone of its policies towards China by describing China and EU as “Competitors and Partners” in contrast with the “Comprehensive Partnership” in 1998, or the “Mature Partnership” and “Strategic Partnership” in 2003. Compared with the previous policy papers, although these two papers still put an emphasis on the importance of cooperation between the two sides and on the EU’s continued support for China’s reform, the EU laid more stresses on China’s “responsibilities” and on the competition between the two sides. In particular, it is the first time for the EU to dedicate one separate special policy paper to the trade and investment policy, and it pointed out that China’s trade and investment policy constituted the most severe challenge for the EU, that the disequilibrium in China-EU trade was attributable to

<sup>5</sup>Speech by Premier Wen Jiabao at the China-EU Investment and Trade Seminar in Brussels on May 6, 2004: *Actively Developing the China-EU Comprehensive Partnership*, People’s Daily Online, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1024/2481360.html>.

<sup>6</sup>Shambaugh (2004).

<sup>7</sup>Zhou (2009a, p. 35).

<sup>8</sup>For the Chinese version, see Snyder et al. (2013, pp. 457–480).

the obstacles and restrictions imposed by China with respect to market access, and that China's policies for environment, social security, intellectual property, technology transfer, etc. had caused unfair competition for European enterprises. Soon afterwards, the European Commission issued a series of study reports entitled *Future Challenges and Opportunities in EU-China Trade and Investment Relations*,<sup>9</sup> which provided a detailed analysis of each important sector.

Frictions between China and the EU had been intensified and retrogression even occurred in some fields as stated in the above policy papers. Therefore, it was widely believed in academic circles and in the media that the "honeymoon period" for China and the EU had ended. First, no substantial progress had been made in two main appeals from China, namely the granting of market economy status and the lifting of the ban on arms sales. Second, no resolution had been found as to the differences regarding some multilateral issues between the two sides, which had, on the other hand, been somewhat worsened. For example, frictions concerning the Iranian nuclear issue and African issues became more acute. Third, the issue of human rights once again became the focus for contradiction. Some people in the EU even claimed that no progress had been made in the China-EU dialogues on human rights, and some European countries even harmed China's core interests under the guise of "human rights". For example, the heads of state or government of three big powers, namely, the UK, France and Germany, met the Dalai Lama, forcing China to postpone the 11th China-EU Summit originally planned to be held in France. Meanwhile, the Beijing Olympic torch relay was beset with various obstacles in London and Paris, thus China-EU relations underwent unprecedented setbacks and turmoil in 2008.

### **2.1.3 2009–2013: China-EU Relations Returning to Normal Track**

Obviously, setbacks and unrest in China-EU relations were detrimental to the interests of both sides. With concerted efforts from both sides, China-EU relations have gradually returned to the normal track since 2009. On the Chinese side, Premier Wen Jiabao made "the Journey of Confidence" to European countries in early 2009, which played an irreplaceable role in rebuilding trust between the two sides. On Europe's side, the UK and Germany were the first to take measures to restore relations with China: in January, the UK issued its first policy paper in history towards China and placed the relations with China as a "top priority" of its diplomacy in the future years; China and Germany made a joint declaration on the concerted efforts in stabilizing the world's economic situation on January 29 during Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Germany. The Group of 20 (G20) Financial Summit held in London in April provided

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<sup>9</sup>[http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/cfm/doclib\\_section.cfm?sec=120&link\\_types-&dis=20&sta=101&en=1208&page=6&langId=en](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/cfm/doclib_section.cfm?sec=120&link_types-&dis=20&sta=101&en=1208&page=6&langId=en).

an important opportunity for further improving China-EU relations, while the China-France Joint Press Communiqué issued before this summit removed obstacles for the China-France relations to get back on the normal track.

Against such a background, the 11th China-EU Summit, which had been postponed for half a year, was held in Prague, Capital of the Czech Republic, in May 2009. Half a year later, the 12th China-EU Summit was held in Nanjing on November 30, 2009, to which both sides attached great importance. At the Summit both sides unanimously recognized the importance of the China-EU Strategic Partnership and made a joint declaration after the Summit, symbolizing that China-EU relations had got back on the right track after the setbacks. The “Joint Declaration”<sup>10</sup> made after this summit stressed that “in a complex and ever-changing international context, EU-China relations increasingly transcend the bilateral framework and take on an international dimension... EU-China relations enjoy a broad strategic foundation and the significance of cooperation between the two sides is becoming more evident.”

China-EU political relations continued to take a turn for the better after 2010. The China-EU high-level strategic dialogue was officially launched in August 2010. In the report submitted by the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton concerning the EU and its strategic partnership at the meeting of the European Council in December 2010,<sup>11</sup> China was ranked No. 2, only second to the USA, among nine strategic partners listed in this report. This report also proposed that the EU establish a trilateral dialogue mechanism with China and the USA. Meanwhile, this report identified a joint reaction to global challenges and the reinforcement of global governance as priorities for cooperation between the two sides, and emphasized that both China and the EU should strengthen cooperation at a global level and in multilateral organizations so as to give concrete meanings to China-EU strategic relations. However, this report still took “freer and more equal access to the Chinese market” as one of the primary goals of the EU’s policy towards China and insisted on the so-called appeals for promoting “democratic governance, rule of law and human rights”, and the other like-minded values. This, once again, showed the dual characters of the EU’s policy towards China, namely its needs for intensifying cooperation with China and its unwillingness to give up some inherent prejudice and suspicion.

With the deteriorating European debt crisis, this “dual character” has been exposed more clearly. Some Europeans took dual attitudes towards China by looking forward to assistance from China while worrying about the rise of China, and even casting doubt on China’s “motives”. They were fearful of China’s “expansion of power” in Europe, while allegations that China “bought Europe” (or “Scrambled for Europe”)<sup>12</sup> were also rampant at one time. Under such

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<sup>10</sup>*Joint Declaration of the 12th China-EU Leaders’ Meeting*, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/1179/t630133.htm>.

<sup>11</sup>The Chinese content of this report was quoted from Feng (2011).

<sup>12</sup>For example, Francos Godement, Jonas Parelo-Plesner & Alice Richard, “The Scramble for Europe,” [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37\\_Scramble\\_For\\_Europe\\_AW\\_v4.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR37_Scramble_For_Europe_AW_v4.pdf).

circumstances, China-EU relations at this stage were characterized by both further cooperation in a wider range of fields, and ups and downs which coexisted at the same time. Moreover, conflicts on such hackneyed issues as human rights and Tibet still existed between the two sides; for example, the British Prime Minister Cameron met the Dalai Lama in May 2012, and Catherine Ashton criticized China's Tibet policy in the capacity of the EU High Representative for many times.

Nevertheless, the above problems did not hinder the continued reinforcement of China-EU relations. The year 2013 marked the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, offering an opportunity for further developing China-EU political relations. Especially in May 2013, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited four European and Asian countries including Germany and Switzerland. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that the inclusion of Europe in the first state visit by Premier Li Keqiang indicated the important position of Europe in China's overall foreign strategy and the great attention given to the development of China-EU relations by the new Chinese Administration.<sup>13</sup> In the meanwhile, the EU also took some positive actions; for example, the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton visited China at the end of April and held the first high-level talks with the new Chinese Administration. She mentioned that "after the completion of the changeover in Chinese leadership, we should continue the good momentum in the development of China-EU relations, comprehensively review the world situation, and correctly evaluate how to promote development and commit ourselves to cooperation".<sup>14</sup> This demonstrated that both sides had a great willingness to cooperate. Such willingness and the solid foundation laid in the decade-long China-EU Strategic Partnership were important favorable conditions for further deepening and widening relations between the two sides. However, how to construct mutual political trust and mutual understanding and to remove trust obstacles between the two sides is still a major issue facing both sides.

## 2.2 China-EU Political Dialogues

### 2.2.1 Overview

Political dialogue is the most important pillar in China-EU relations. It serves as the indispensable foundation for the institutionalization of China-EU relations, which is indeed an important characteristic of China-EU relations.<sup>15</sup> However, as most of the topics involved in political dialogue are sensitive on the one hand and most of the

<sup>13</sup>*Pioneer and Frontrunner in China-EU Relations*, website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_chn/zyxw\\_602251/t1044367.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/zyxw_602251/t1044367.shtml).

<sup>14</sup>*Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Visited China on the 25th Day*, People's Daily Online, <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2013/0424/c1002-21267530.html>.

<sup>15</sup>Zhou (2009a).

fields covered by political dialogues fall within the competence of the EU member states on the other hand, China-EU political dialogue is based on a relatively flexible “soft-law mechanism” built on the “soft approach” rather than on the form of a bilateral agreement, that is, the “hard-law approach”. Without a legal basis, although such a “soft approach” or “soft mechanism” does not produce any legal effect and “does not even take the form recognized by laws”, it does possess a stable structure and functions acknowledged by both sides, which can thus bring about actual effects in most cases, and even legal effects.<sup>16</sup> Currently, in the context of China-EU relations, the soft mechanism and the soft approach have developed to an “unprecedented” degree<sup>17</sup> and have constituted an important foundation for China-EU political dialogue.

China and the EU signed an agreement for political dialogue in 1994, under which a structured framework for political dialogue was established. During the 2nd ASEM Summit in 1998 leaders from both sides decided to set up a mechanism for an annual meeting and the 1st China-EU Summit was held in the same year. Since then, the China-EU Summit has been institutionalized. In 2002, both sides established the formal legal basis for such political dialogues by an exchange of letters. With the continuous development of China-EU relations, political dialogues between the two sides have covered almost all fields concerning not only bilateral issues, but also global issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, Asia’s security, global warming, the crackdown on illegal immigration and human trafficking, etc.

China-EU political dialogue has laid the foundation for further cooperation in the economic field and people-to-people exchanges. China-EU political dialogue is conducted at the following five levels<sup>18</sup>: (1) Summit meetings; (2) high-level strategic dialogue; (3) ministerial meetings, including biannual meetings between the Chinese foreign minister and the ambassadors from the EU member states in China; annual meetings between the Chinese Foreign Minister and the EU’s counterparts during the General Assembly of the United Nations, as well as meetings held between the EU’s “troika” foreign affairs ministers and the Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister according to specific needs at any time; annual meetings between the EU’s “troika” officials in charge of global political affairs and regional affairs and Chinese officials in charge of the corresponding affairs; and biannual meetings between the foreign affairs minister of the rotating EU presidency and the Chinese ambassador to the rotating EU presidency; (4) dialogues on special topics including security, defense, crisis management, African affairs, development issues, human rights, etc.; (5) regular expert-level dialogues covering Asian affairs, nuclear non-proliferation, the export of conventional weapons, and cyber security, etc. The dialogues at expert level play an important role in preventing the unpleasant

<sup>16</sup>Snyder et al. (2013, p. 573).

<sup>17</sup>Snyder et al. (2013, p. 575).

<sup>18</sup>For an overview of the China-EU political dialogue, see the website of the EU’s delegation in China [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu\\_china/political\\_relations/pol\\_dialogue/index\\_zh.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu_china/political_relations/pol_dialogue/index_zh.htm), or the website of European External Action Service “EU-China Dialogue Architecture-Main Elements,” [http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu\\_china\\_dialogue\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu_china_dialogue_en.pdf).

atmospheres at times in China-EU relations from spreading to the practical fields of China-EU cooperation.<sup>19</sup>

### ***2.2.2 The Annual Summits Between the Leaders of China and the EU***

As mentioned above, as the highest form of political dialogue between China and the EU, the annual Summit between the leaders of China and the EU is held in China and Europe by turns. The head of the Chinese representatives is the Premier of the State Council. Representing the EU, the participants were the head of state or government of the European Council's rotating presidency and the President of the European Commission before 2009, who have been replaced by the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission without representatives from member states any longer since 2010. In addition, the EU High Representative may attend this meeting at some occasions. In some cases, the participants may also include officials from both sides in charge of some specific matters discussed at the meeting.

Ten summits (the 6th to 15th summits) were held between the two sides once every year from 2003 to 2012. The China-EU Summit identified, made planning and confirmed the basic orientation of China-EU relations and witnessed the course of the maturing of the China-EU relations; which has become the hallmark of the institutionalization of the bilateral relations.<sup>20</sup> It is also the indispensable precondition for making China-EU relations really "strategic" and oriented towards a "long-term" direction. Its roles are particularly embodied in the following aspects:

First, the China-EU Summit itself is of great symbolic significance. As of the end of 2012, the EU had established summit mechanisms with only 11 countries and 3 territories.<sup>21</sup>

Second, the China-EU Summit provides guidance not only for China-EU political relations but also for more comprehensive exchanges and cooperation in various fields between the two sides, and determines the direction for the future development of China-EU relations.

Third, the China-EU Summit serves as an effective platform for improving China-EU political relations, while the positioning of the China-EU relations as a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" was proposed precisely during the 2003 China-EU Summit. Afterwards, the bilateral relations have been continuously

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<sup>19</sup>Zhou (2009a).

<sup>20</sup>Lexian (2008).

<sup>21</sup>For an introduction to meetings between leaders of the EU and third countries and other territories, see the website of the European Council, <http://www.european-council.europa.eu/the-president/summits-with-third-countries?lang=en&fromDate=19000101&toDate=20130413&type=SummitsWithThirdCountries&topic={5}&keywords=>.



consolidated and enhanced by the following Summits and their connotation has become richer along with the expansion of the fields covered by the summits.

Fourth, the China-EU Summit is an important platform for both sides to create new dialogue mechanisms and reach new bilateral agreements. Matters discussed at the China-EU Summits are very extensive, most of which relate to international or regional affairs which need to be dealt with at the highest level and which may lead to the final conclusion of bilateral agreements, creating a number of dialogue mechanisms for many key fields such as the China-EU High Level Strategic Dialogue and those mechanisms for climate change, energy, space technology, and etc.

Fifth, the China-EU Summit can be taken as the “barometer” to observe the situation of the China-EU relations through the number of participants, topics discussed, degree of attention to such summit as the indicators. For instance, it was precisely because the setbacks that took place in China-EU relations that the 11th Summit was postponed, while the holding of the 12th Summit in November 2009 was the most obvious sign showing the complete restoration of China-EU relations.

### 2.2.3 *The China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue*

The China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue, whose predecessor was the deputy-ministerial-level “China-EU Strategic Dialogue” launched at the end of 2005, is co-chaired by the deputy minister of the rotating EU presidency and the Chinese deputy foreign affairs minister. It aims at discussing major international and regional issues, exchanging views on bilateral issues of common concern.<sup>22</sup> Four strategic dialogues were held from 2005 to 2009.

In 2010, both sides decided to upgrade this strategic dialogue to an annual “High-Level Strategic Dialogue” with a view to turning it into an important platform for in-depth communication of macro strategic issues. One of the main considerations is that with the entry into force of the *Treaty of Lisbon*, the EU has established the office for a high representative for foreign policy in charge of external affairs and set up the European External Action Service to assist the High Representative in his/her work. It was widely anticipated that such a reform could enhance the EU’s capability for unified external actions, and China also hoped to engage in better dialogues with the new “dialogist”. The upgrading of the strategic dialogue symbolizes exactly China’s affirmation of the achievements of the European integration.<sup>23</sup>

The China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue was officially launched in 2010, with participants including the EU High Representative and the Chinese State

<sup>22</sup> *Joint Declaration of the 8th China-EU Leaders’ Meeting*, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/ziliao/1179/t365226.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Huang (2012).

Councilor in charge of foreign affairs. In the years 2010–2012, this dialogue has been held for three rounds in Guiyang, Budapest and Beijing respectively.

Undeniably, the China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue adds an important channel for both sides to exchange views on strategic issues and foreign policy, to enhance political understanding and mutual trust as well as to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation between the two sides. It is also an important link between the top leaders and government departments carrying out the practical work. Moreover, at the beginning of its launch, the China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue played a really important role in dispelling the haze surrounding China-EU relations in 2008. However, in order to make it function as a bridge between the two sides, there is still much work to be done by both sides, and in particular, the following two issues should be addressed. Firstly, as there are on one hand the Summit meetings at a higher level and ministerial dialogues at a lower level on the other hand, and a parallel “China-EU High-level Economic and Trade Dialogue” is available to it, how can the China-EU High Level Strategic Dialogue be more accurately positioned? Secondly, compared with the China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue, the China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue (especially the third round) seemed too “quiet”.<sup>24</sup> Under such a circumstance, the question as to how to entrust the China-EU High-Level Strategic Dialogue a more effective role deserves further exploration.

### 2.3 Roles and Policy Stances of the Main Institutions of the EU in China-EU Relations

In comparison with the bilateral relations between China and national players, China-EU relations are highly complicated, for which one of the reasons is that the EU is not a single “dialogist”. Instead it involves the double-leveled actors including both the member states and EU institutions, while the EU institutional system itself is extremely complicated since it incorporates not only intergovernmental institutions led by member states but also supranational institutions which represent the EU’s interests. Therefore, although China-EU relations have been institutionalized to a large extent and fixed communication channels established, China-EU relations are “still subject to the regulations and the structural form of the the EU’s external relations to a great degree”.<sup>25</sup> More intensive institutional reforms introduced by the *Treaty of Lisbon* have exerted an impact to varying degrees on the roles of the main EU institutions in China-EU relations.

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<sup>24</sup>Huang (2012).

<sup>25</sup>Algieri (2010).

### ***2.3.1 Intergovernmental Institutions: The European Council and the Council of the European Union***

#### **2.3.1.1 The European Council**

The European Council<sup>26</sup> consists of heads of state or government of the EU's member states, the President of the European Council (the post was held in turn by the member states before 2010) and the President of the European Commission, while the High Representative for Foreign Policy participates in its work. The European Council meets at least once every three months to decide on the overall political direction and priorities of the EU, but it does not perform legislative functions nor directly participate in the EU's legislation and policy-making. With respect to external fields, the European Council may, by means of a "decision", determine strategic interests and objectives of the EU on issues concerning relations between the EU and a specific country or territory, and the President of the European Council "externally represents the EU at his/her rank and in his/her capacity with regard to matters relating to the common foreign and security policy of the EU".

Given the functions of the European Council as mentioned above and the development of China-EU relations in recent decades, the main roles and influences of the European Council in China-EU relations are summarized as follows.

First, the European Council has played an irreplaceable role in the institutionalization of China-EU relations, especially that as the principal representative on the EU side who has been participating in the Summit since between the leaders of China and the EU ever since its very start in 1998, the President of the European Council has played an important role in effective exchanges and communication between China and the EU. As mentioned above, the China-EU Summit is the most important and the highest level of the dialogue mechanism between the two sides. Based on this, both sides have established a multi-tiered, systematic and all-around institutional dialogue system.

Second, as the European Council has a guiding role in identifying the direction of the EU's foreign policy, its decisions and attitudes often determine the direction of China-EU relations. Overall, the European Council has maintained an active position on the sustainable development and further deepening of China-EU relations in recent decades. For example, at the European Council held in March 2003, it confirmed the judgment by the European Commission and agreed to adhere to the policy goal towards China which had been implemented since the 1990s. Furthermore, it is because the European Council held that China-EU relations

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<sup>26</sup>For provisions concerning the composition and the functions etc. of the European Council, see Article 15 and Article 22 of the Treaty on the European Union, quoted from Cheng (2010). All texts of the Treaty on the European Union cited in this paper are quoted from this book.

should be maintained and upgraded<sup>27</sup> that the bilateral relationship has been upgraded from a “Comprehensive Partnership” to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” after the 6th Summit.

However, as the European Council is an intergovernmental institution, sometimes the positions or policies of the individual member states may affect the overall China-EU relations. The then French President Sarkozy obstinately met the Dalai Lama in his capacity as the European Council’s rotating presidency in 2008, resulting in an extremely adverse impact on China-EU relations. In addition, the policies and stands of the European Council are still less clear regarding some sensitive issues in China-EU relations such as human rights, issues concerning Taiwan and Tibet, and etc.

### 2.3.1.2 The Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union (“the Council”) is also an intergovernmental institution of the EU and the key legislative and policy-making institution, whose members are ministerial-level representatives of member states and represent the stances and interests of their governments. In the diplomatic field, the responsibility of the Council (the Foreign Affairs Council) lies in determining the external action plans of the EU according to the strategies and policies defined by the European Council and ensuring the consistency of its actions.<sup>28</sup> As a decision-making institution of the EU, all foreign policy papers drafted by the European Commission are subject to approval by the Council. In addition, only after authorization and approval have been obtained from the Council, can the EU launch negotiations, sign and conclude agreements with third parties, thus the Council is playing a crucial role in the EU’s foreign policy-making.

Given the towards aforesaid functions of the Council, it can be held that though all of the six EU policy papers China were issued in the form of the European Commission’s “Communication”, they undeniably reflect the policies and stances of the Council towards China. Before 2005 it highly commended China’s domestic reform and China’s status in international politics, and attached especially great importance to the positive roles of China in issues concerning North Korea and Iran, and actively supported lifting the ban on arms sales to China. For example, the Council decided to incorporate the lifting of the ban on arms sales to China into the EU’s agenda at its meeting held in December 2004 and adopted a resolution concerning the EU’s relations with China in December 2006, reaffirming that the EU would continue to be committed to deepening the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and to making continued efforts at promoting the process of

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<sup>27</sup>EU Commission, “A Maturing Partnership: Shared Interests and Challenges in EU-China Relations,” Brussels, 10.9.2003. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0533:FIN:EN:PDF>.

<sup>28</sup>Para 6, Article 16 of the Treaty on European Union.

lifting the ban on arms sales to China, and officially praised China's philosophy of the "harmonious society" for the first time.<sup>29</sup> However, with the entry of China-EU relations into the period of adjustment, the Council abruptly stopped efforts at promoting this process. The Council's attitude on whether to recognize China's market economy status changed in the same manner. Despite its preliminary agreement with the Commission's proposal for no longer including China in the "non-market economy list", it refused to recognize China's full market economy status after 2004. Such posture suggests that changes in stances of the Council towards China almost completely synchronized with the developmental track of China-EU relations.

In general, as intergovernmental institutions, although the decisions towards China made by both the European Council and the Council of the European Union represent the policy stance of the EU as a whole it is inevitable that their final decisions embody the collective will of the member states and is a result of the game-play of the interests among the member states. Furthermore, due to the inconsistent interests and stances among the member states, breakthroughs still cannot be made on some issues at the level of the European Council or the Council of the European Union, especially in the case of lifting the ban on arms sales to China and granting market economy status to China.

### ***2.3.2 The European Commission***

The European Commission is the supranational EU institution and enjoys a very high degree of independence in terms of performing duties, since its members are not subject to instructions from the government of any member state. The European Commission has the competence to initiate a legislative proposal in addition to the execution power according to decisions made by the Council. Moreover, pursuant to provisions of the Treaties, the European Commission represents the EU in fields other than the common foreign affairs and security policy (and under other circumstances prescribed by basic treaties), and it enters into negotiations on behalf of the EU according to authorization by the Council. Especially in the field of common commercial policies (including foreign trade and direct foreign investment) for which the EU enjoys exclusive competence, the European Commission is the only institution competent to initiate legislative proposal and to implement the relevant policies.

Given these aspects, the European Commission plays a decisive role in making and implementing the EU's policy towards China, and the documents drafted by it serve, to a large extent, as the foundation for the EU's policy towards China. In fact, on the EU's side, China-EU relations are developed mainly through promotion and

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<sup>29</sup>The Changing Image of China in the European Union, Zhou (2009b, p. 4).

execution by the European Commission.<sup>30</sup> As a supranational institution, compared with the other institutions, the European Commission is more objective and pragmatic towards China.

First, as the policy drafter, all of the EU's policy papers towards China are released by the European Commission in the form of "communications", identifying the strategic direction for developing China-EU relations, and the 2003 policy paper in particular laid a foundation for the China-EU "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". For example, this paper insisted that a "mature partnership" meant that China-EU relations should be characterized by comprehensive engagement, multi-tiered exchanges, institutional connections, and etc. The development of China-EU relations after 2003 showed that the EU's efforts had indeed been directed at such a direction, while the entry of China-EU relations into the period of relatively complicated adjustment started from and was marked by the release of the policy paper towards China by the European Commission in 2006.

Second, compared with the European Parliament which puts a relatively more important emphasis on ideology and with the Council of the European Union and the European Council who are to a great degree affected by domestic politics, the European Commission is relatively neutral on its China policy and less concerned with the ideological values. Especially before 2006, the European Commission took a relatively friendly attitude on some sensitive political issues including human rights, labor standards, the issues concerning Taiwan and Tibet, and etc. Though the European Commission placed more emphasis on its values after 2006, it remained relatively moderate compared with the other institutions. Furthermore, as shown in the *China Strategy Paper, 2007–2013* released in 2006,<sup>31</sup> the European Commission still hoped to engage in an in-depth strategic dialogue with China on various international issues, clearly expressed its "support for China's sustainable and successful development into a stable, prosperous and open country", and believed that "this was of great economic and political significance to the EU".<sup>32</sup>

Third, the economic and trade relation is the most important foundation for China-EU relations, while the European Commission is the institution responsible for the EU's common commercial policy. Overall, the European Commission took an active and positive stance towards China-EU trade. In its opinion, China-EU economic and trade cooperation is of momentous significance, and the rapidly developing Chinese market provides huge opportunities for Europe and enjoys great potential for further expanding bilateral trade and investment as well as strengthening bilateral relations. However, the European Commission still held that some problems still existed in China with regard to market access, non-tariff

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<sup>30</sup>The Changing Image of China in the European Union, Zhou (2009b, p. 5).

<sup>31</sup>[http://eeas.europa.eu/china/csp/07\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/china/csp/07_13_en.pdf).

<sup>32</sup>EU Commission, "Strategy for Cooperation with China (2007–2013)," [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/external\\_relations/relations\\_with\\_third\\_countries/asia/rx0025\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/relations_with_third_countries/asia/rx0025_en.htm).

barriers, intellectual property protection, and etc., but “these should not hamper the vision for both sides towards developing long-term cooperation”.<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, like the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission is one of the participants in the China-EU Summit and has also played an important role in institutionalizing China-EU political relations.

### 2.3.3 *The European Parliament*

The European Parliament is one of the most important players in China-EU relations. In recent decades, the European Parliament has adopted a host of resolutions towards China to express its own concerns and offer advice and suggestions for the EU in developing the China-EU Strategic Partnership, acting as a consultant and exerting influence on public opinion. However, the impact of the European Parliament on the EU’s foreign policy was very limited before the *Treaty of Lisbon* came into force. But since the *Treaty of Lisbon* went into force, the power of the European Parliament is no longer limited to that of consultation, and its power in the EU’s foreign policy has been reinforced especially on the following two aspects: (1) a common commercial policy in which the “ordinary legislative procedure” is applied, which means that the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union jointly exercise decision-making power and both enjoy veto power<sup>34</sup>; (2) according to the treaty provisions, “agreements concerning matters involved in fields to which ordinary legislative procedure applies” are subject to approval by the European Parliament before adoption.<sup>35</sup> In other words, the European Parliament will be exerting greater influences on China-EU relations, especially in foreign trade and investment fields through more and more means and channels, thus it merits our special attention.

#### 2.3.3.1 *European Parliament’s Stance Towards China*

In general, the European Parliament is dedicated to enhancing bilateral cooperative relations between the two sides, especially in fields involving visas, the WTO, science and technology, marine transportation, economic and trade relations, etc. However, compared with the other EU institutions, the European Parliament places more emphasis on differences in ideologies in its stance towards China and has repeatedly linked issues concerning Taiwan, Tibet, the arms embargo, human rights, and etc. to the so-called values of “democracy” and “human rights”. Moreover, it has repeatedly criticized and blamed China with an excuse of these

<sup>33</sup><http://ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/countries/china/>.

<sup>34</sup>Cheng (2010, p. 19).

<sup>35</sup>Subpara (1), Para 6, Article 216 of *The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*.

“values”, which constituted a de-factor interference into China’s internal affairs, creating troubles in China-EU relations.

The human rights issue is one of the most important means adopted by the European Parliament to criticize China; for example, the European Parliament alleged in a resolution adopted in July 2008 that the human rights situation in China was still unsatisfactory. This resolution condemned China for imposing the death penalty, and required the Chinese Government to observe its commitments concerning human rights, the rights of minorities, democracy, rule of law, etc., and to show to the world records of improving its human rights situation.<sup>36</sup> The European Parliament also adopted a resolution requiring the release of Liu Xiaobo and Ai Weiwei et al.<sup>37</sup> In addition, it always attempts to participate in the China-EU human rights dialogues in the capacity of official representative and believes that neither the Council of the European Union nor the European Commission could enable the China-EU Summit to give more political weight to the human rights issue. In addition, it stresses continued enforcement of the ban on arms sales to China until “substantial progress” has been made in China’s human rights situation.<sup>38</sup>

The Tibet issue is as well one of the areas in which the European Parliament frequently causes troubles in China-EU relations. The European Parliament invited the Dalai Lama to visit and deliver speeches many times and it has adopted a series of resolutions concerning Tibet. For example, in March 2009, the European Parliament passed a resolution requiring the Chinese Government to conduct a political dialogue with the Dalai Lama in order to reach a comprehensive political agreement, and demanded the Chinese Government to immediately release the so-called “peaceful protesters” in prison and permit foreign media, UN human rights experts and internationally recognized nongovernmental organizations to enter Tibet.<sup>39</sup> In June 2012, the European Parliament passed a resolution concerning the human rights situation in Tibet, requiring the Chinese Government to grant “genuine autonomy” over the “historical territory” in Tibet, to respect Tibetans’ freedom of speech, faith and association, to protect Tibetans’ language, culture, religion and other fundamental freedoms and not to force Tibetans to abandon their traditional lifestyle, etc.<sup>40</sup>

The European Parliament has also frequently made a fuss over the Taiwan issue; for example, in September 2003, the European Parliament adopted the *Report on Strategy for Asia* which covered nine Taiwan-related matters including support for

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<sup>36</sup>European Parliament Resolution of 10 July 2008 on the Situation in China after the Earthquake and before the Olympic Games.

<sup>37</sup>European Parliament Resolution of 21 January 2010 on Human Rights Violations in China, notably the case of Liu Xiaobo; European Parliament Resolution of April 7, 2011 on the Case of Ai Weiwei.

<sup>38</sup>European Parliament Resolution of December 13, 2007 on the EU China Summit and the EU/China Human Rights Dialogue.

<sup>39</sup>European Parliament Resolution of March 12, 2009 on the 50th Anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising and Dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government.

<sup>40</sup>European Parliament Resolution of June 14, 2012 on the Human Rights Situation in Tibet.



Taiwan's accession to the World Health Organization and issuance of a visa to Chen Shui-bian et al. for visiting Europe. In July 2005, the European Parliament passed the *Resolution on Relations between the EU, China and Taiwan and Security in the Far East* in opposition to China's *Anti-Secession Law*. In April 2006, the European Parliament passed the *Resolution of the European Parliament on the European Commission's Strategy Paper for China* and "refused to accept China's reservation of its right to use force" on issues regarding Taiwan.

Besides the above areas, the European Parliament has expanded increasingly its focuses on China in recent years, with such issues as market access, trade deficit, the RMB exchange rate, intellectual property rights, etc. in China-EU economic and trade relations having caused its attention. A resolution adopted in February 2009 emphasized that China-EU trade relations had rapidly expanded, but that this was the most serious challenge for the EU's trade relations.<sup>41</sup> Another resolution adopted in May 2012 called for establishing balanced trade relations with China to safeguard the interests of European industries.

Apart from the above specific areas, the European Parliament has passed some resolutions concerning overall China-EU relations, such as those published in September 2006 and March 2013.<sup>42</sup> Though in these resolutions, the European Parliament recognized that the China-EU Strategic Partnership was of paramount importance for addressing not only China-EU relations but also the many global issues including security, economic crisis, energy, and etc., and that considerable progresses had been made in China-EU relations, it still lodged a number of criticisms inconsistent with objective facts with respect to China's human rights situation, religion, justice, etc., inevitably producing negative effects on China-EU relations.

### 2.3.3.2 Exchanges Among Legislative Institutions and Among Political Parties

Exchanges among legislative institutions and among political parties constitute an important platform and channel for exchanges between the European Parliament and China, and for enhancing understanding between the two sides, dispelling suspicion and mistrust and stimulating the steady development of China-EU relations.

#### 1. Exchanges among legislative institutions

The Delegation for Relations with China is one of the European Parliament's relatively large-scale delegations. It has held meetings with China's National

<sup>41</sup>European Parliament Resolution of February 5, 2009 on Trade and Economic Relations with China.

<sup>42</sup><http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+20130314+ITEMS+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN#sdocta10>.

People's Congress since the 1980s, with the subsequent establishment of regular exchange mechanisms. In recent years, the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with China normally conducts two exchange visits with China's National People's Congress each year. Exchanges between the two sides involve very extensive issues including China's economic development, democratic and legal reforms, cooperation in various fields between the two sides (such as security, military affairs, cybercrime), China-EU trade relations and climate change in addition to the human rights issue.

For example, at the 31st meeting convened in June 2011 under the mechanism for regular exchanges between China-EU legislative institutions, the two sides exchanged views on global governance, multilateralism, relations with neighboring countries, and etc. Issues discussed at the 33rd meeting held in July 2012 mainly included the development of China-EU relations, legal and human rights issues, personnel exchanges, economic and trade relations, bilateral investment, and etc.<sup>43</sup>

On September 18, 2012, a delegation from the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China took part in the talks between the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with China and China's National People's Congress. This delegation submitted a position paper<sup>44</sup> covering 600 suggestions in total, 40 of which are related directly to the market access issue, while the others are concerned with China's investment model, new development mode, and suggestions that the EU should speak with one voice and strengthen, as a single entity, its strategy towards China.

## 2. Exchanges among political parties

The Party group is the most important organizational structure in the European Parliament. All of its main party groups have connections with China. For example, the Group of the European People's Party often holds informal roundtable meetings with the participation of European parliamentarians from this Group as one part and relevant personnel from the Chinese Delegation to the European Union and from the Chinese embassies in European countries as the other part, in order to exchange views on some important issues. The Group of the European People's Party held a seminar with the Chinese Delegation at the end of May 2012, which was designed to discuss issues concerning China's market economy status.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, parliamentarians from the main party groups have regularly visited and kept close contact with China. For example, Joseph Daul, President of the Group of the European

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<sup>43</sup>[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-cn/dv/agenda/\\_agenda\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-cn/dv/agenda/_agenda_en.pdf). Accessed on November 2, 2012.

<sup>44</sup>[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-cn/pv/912/912774/912774en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-cn/pv/912/912774/912774en.pdf), Accessed on November 2, 2012.

<sup>45</sup>Interview conducted by the Author at the European Parliament (Brussels), March, 2012.

People's Party, led a delegation to China in October 2010, with the hope of strengthening cooperation with China.<sup>46</sup> At the end of August 2012, the Group of the Green Party sent a small delegation to China to exchange views on issues including labor rights with scholars from the Institute of Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.<sup>47</sup>

The China-Europe High-Level Political Parties Forum has become an important platform of exchanges between the political parties from China and the EU since 2010, which is co-hosted by the main party groups in the European Parliament and the Chinese side. Exchanges among political parties have become an integral part of China-EU relations. The themes of the four forums held in 2010–2013 include: “Global Challenges & China-EU Cooperation”, “China’s 12th Five-year Plan & Europe’s 2020 Strategy: New Opportunities, New Prospects for China-EU Cooperation”, “China-EU Cooperation for Meeting Challenges Together” and “Promoting Win-win Cooperation for Breakthroughs in China-Europe Relations”. This forum has become increasingly mature particularly in the following aspects. First, topics discussed have become more pragmatic. For example, topics at the 2nd forum involved economic development mode, technological innovation, green economy, trade, biotechnology, information technology, and both sides hoped to find new areas for and methods of cooperation. Second, this forum serves as a channel for in-depth dialogues among political parties with different ideologies and political views. Though political parties from China and the EU have different views on some issues, it does not prevent them from frankly discussing issues of common concern. China and the EU cherish great expectations about the future development of this forum and hope to turn it into an important high-level, multilateral, strategic platform among political parties from both sides and a bridge for enhancing strategic communication and deepening mutual political trust between the two sides.

### 2.3.4 *The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*

The establishment of the post of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is an important innovation made by the *Treaty of Lisbon* concerning the EU’s foreign relations.<sup>48</sup> Its main responsibilities lie in coordinating the EU’s foreign policy in different fields and ensuring consistency in the foreign affairs as far as possible. The High Representative is not only responsible for

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<sup>46</sup>See “EU-China: Joseph Daul MEP, Chairman of the EPP Group, Calls for Strengthened Cooperation,” website of the Group of the European People’s Party at the European Parliament, <http://www.eppgroup.eu/press/showpr.asp?prcontroldoctypeid=1&prcontrolid=9810&prcontentid=16703&prcontentlg=en>. Accessed on November 20, 2012.

<sup>47</sup>Interview conducted by the Author at the European Parliament (Brussels), March, 2012.

<sup>48</sup>Cheng (2010, p. 24).

chairing meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council of the Council of the European Union, but as one of the vice-presidents of the European Commission, he/she is able to attend meetings of the European Council. In addition, the High Representative also engages in political dialogues with third parties on behalf of the EU on matters concerning common foreign affairs and security policy. The European External Action Service (EEAS), which officially began operation in December 2010, is responsible for assisting the High Representative in his/her work. Currently, the EU's functions in foreign policy, except decision-making power for common commercial policy and development assistance, have shifted from the European Commission to the European External Action Service. Given this, the High Representative will play an increasingly important role in China-EU relations.

First, the launching of the High-Level Strategic Dialogue by China and the EU is directly attributable to the establishment of the High Representative, which clearly demonstrates that China pays great attention to this post. This dialogue can play a bridging role in exchanges between China and the EU; however, the way to maximize its effectiveness still needs to be further explored.

Second, although the High Representative and the European External Action Service do not possess competence to make final decisions, they are responsible for drafting foreign policy reports except those concerning common commercial policies, and can submit any motion concerning common foreign and security policies to the Council of the European Union, who will in such a way exert reasonable influences on the EU's policy towards China. As mentioned above, the High Representative Catherine Ashton submitted a report the EU and its Strategic Partnership to the European Council in December 2010, which may become a starting point for the EU's future foreign policy. Furthermore, Catherine Ashton has also actively kept contacts with senior Chinese officials and visited China many times since taking office. However, she has mistakenly criticized China on its policies regarding human rights, Tibet, and etc. on many occasions.

Third, by exercising leadership over delegations from EU countries to third countries and international organizations, the High Representative and the European External Action Service can indirectly influence China-EU relations.

As it is for only a short time after the High Representative took office, it will still take time to make a final judgment on the influence of the High Representative on China-EU relations. However, it can be sure that the changes in the EU's diplomatic mechanism will have both positive and negative effects on China-EU relations: on the one hand, it may bring more long-term and increasingly strategic viewpoints to China-EU relations; however, on the other hand, the EU may be more capable of exerting pressures on China in the fields in which conflicts occur between China and the EU.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Key Research Group for China-EU Relations from the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: *Retrospect and Prospect of China-EU Relations in 2010*, Chinese Journal of European Studies, 2011(1), p. 5.

## 2.4 Case Studies for China-EU Political Cooperation

The China-EU political cooperation encompasses a very wide range of areas, including security, defense, crisis management, human rights, immigration, development and cooperation in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean Region, and etc. This paper will only focus on the following two fields as a case study.

### 2.4.1 *Security, Arms Control and Crisis Management*

In the recent decade, China and the EU have carried out many political dialogues concerning security and arms control, but pragmatic cooperation between the two sides has taken place in only a few fields. On the contrary, the *Arms Trade Treaty* negotiations under the UN and China-EU cooperation on anti-piracy navigation escort outside the bilateral dialogues have become the bright spots in the cooperation between the two sides. In addition, cyber security and crisis management have gradually become key fields for dialogue and cooperation between the two sides in recent years.

#### 2.4.1.1 **Issues of Security and Arms Control Discussed at the China-EU Summits**

The proposal for a China-EU security and arms control dialogue was first put forward at the 5th China-EU Summit in 2002. In a joint communiqué issued after this summit, both sides emphasized the importance of strengthening the dialogue on such issues as nonproliferation, arms control and disarmament. in multilateral fields. Meanwhile, anti-terrorism was included as an issue for consultation for the first time.<sup>50</sup> In 2003, security was incorporated into the agenda as an important issue at the China-EU Summit at which the necessity for strengthening nonproliferation and arms control was emphasized.<sup>51</sup> At the 7th Summit in 2004, both sides signed the Joint Declaration on Non-proliferation and Arms Control and mutually recognized the other party as the important strategic partner in this field. In the same year, the EU clearly expressed the political willingness to lift the ban on arms sales to China for the first time.<sup>52</sup> However, due to strong opposition from the USA, the EU changed its position by stating at the 8th Summit in 2005 that the process on lifting the ban on arms sales to China should be continued on the basis of the European

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<sup>50</sup>Snyder et al. (2013, p. 591).

<sup>51</sup>*Joint Press Communiqué of the 6th China-EU Leaders' Meeting*, People's Daily Online, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1024/2161621.html>.

<sup>52</sup>*Joint Press Communiqué of the 7th China-EU Leaders' Meeting*, reproduced from China Daily by Sina.com, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2004-12-09/08184472853s.shtml>.

Council's conclusion concerning this issue.<sup>53</sup> This move set the tone for the EU's subsequent attitude towards this issue.

With the EU's adjustment of its policy towards China in 2006, dialogues in the traditional area of security had almost "disappeared" in the subsequent China-EU Summits, while non-traditional areas of security became the focus of attention. For example, both sides vowed to take cooperative anti-piracy navigation escort actions in the Gulf of Aden during the 13th Summit, agreed to set up the China-EU Cyber Working Group for addressing the issue of cyber security at the 14th Summit, and confirmed and emphasized continued cooperation in crisis management, anti-piracy navigation escort, maritime safety, and etc. during the 15th Summit. It is noteworthy that at this summit, both sides reaffirmed their continued cooperation in such fields as export control and prevention of illicit trade of weapons, and support for an early conclusion of the *Arms Trade Treaty* under the UN framework.<sup>54</sup>

#### **2.4.1.2 Arrangements Relating to Security and Arms Control Within the Mechanism of the China-EU Political Dialogues**

##### **1. Nonproliferation and arms control**

In 2005, the two sides established the "Conventional Weapons Export Experts Meeting", the "Nonproliferation Experts Group Meeting" (afterwards expanded into the China-EU experts meetings on such issues as international security, arms control, nonproliferation, and etc.) and later the "Light Weapons Control Experts Meeting".

Despite the above mechanism, the nonproliferation and arms control dialogues between China and the EU have been conducted mainly under a multilateral framework. The main fields involved in view exchanges between the two sides include mainly nonproliferation export control policy, export license system, enterprise self-discipline, export control law enforcement. In recent years, the China-EU nonproliferation dialogues focus mainly on the Iranian nuclear issue, but certain differences regarding this aspect exist between the two sides. Although China approved the United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 1929 in 2010, meaning China agreed to sanction Iran by means of prohibiting it from participating in investment activities in the nuclear field carried out in foreign countries, and from conducting any activity relating to ballistic missile tests in order to prevent its nuclear process,<sup>55</sup> China

<sup>53</sup>Joint Press Communiqué of the 8th China-EU Leaders' Meeting, Xinhuanet.com, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-09/05/content\\_3448040.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2005-09/05/content_3448040.htm).

<sup>54</sup>For Joint Press Communiqués of the 9th–15th China-EU Leaders' Summits, see the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Daily Online etc.

<sup>55</sup>United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929 on Sanctions against Iran: Less Emphasizing Destruction, More Stressing Solidarity, People's Daily Online, <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/172467/11851888.html>.

opposed the UK and France's proposal for further intensifying sanctions against Iran in 2011.<sup>56</sup>

With respect to arms exports, control of small arms and light weapons exports has become an issue of common concern between the two sides in recent years. The EU intended to convert the non-legally binding *Code of Conduct on Arms Exports* into legal rules and believed that this would help the EU restrain arms export trade between its member states and third countries according to laws.<sup>57</sup> China issued a paper entitled *China's Efforts in Arms Control, Disarmament and Nonproliferation* in 2005 with a view to strengthening the management of arms exports, and stressed that a severe crackdown on illegal activities in the areas of small arms and light weapons was of great significance.<sup>58</sup> In light of a common interest on the part of both sides, the Council of the European Union proposed to incorporate small arms and light weapon exports into the China-EU strategic dialogue in 2006.<sup>59</sup>

At the multilateral level, some of the EU member states led by the UK have actively pursued a conclusion of the Arms Trade Treaty for regulating arms exports under the UN framework since 2006. Though China generally supported the conclusion of the arms control trade treaty within the international community, it has had reservations about this Treaty for a relatively long time. China held that opposition against illicit arms transfers was conducive to reducing conflicts and violence; however, from a long-term perspective, only by reducing poverty and developing economy of the countries concerned, can the roots for illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons be eradicated.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, China emphasized the importance of economic development rather than the establishment of an international system for illicit arms trade control.<sup>61</sup> With the progress of the negotiations involving the *Arms Trade Treaty* and changes that took place in the international situation, China changed its stance, especially as more and more illicit arms transfers and trafficking disturbed and violated China's overseas interests. China felt deeply that it was urgent to introduce the arms control treaty within the international

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<sup>56</sup>Valÿsse et al. (2012).

<sup>57</sup>The European Parliament suggested in the 2004 *Rueda Report* that at the time of lifting the arms embargo, a series of legally binding rules should be developed to replace the current *Code of Conduct on Arms Exports*; its objective was to permit arms sales to China but supervise it. Snyder et al. (2013, p. 665).

<sup>58</sup>Information Office of the State Council, quoted from Xinhuanet.com, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2005-09/01/content\\_3429141.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2005-09/01/content_3429141.htm).

<sup>59</sup>Council of the European Union, "EU Strategy to Combat Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of SALW and Their Ammunition," <http://consilium.europa.eu/en/06/st05/st5319.en06.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup>Speech by Li Baodong, Ambassador of Chinese Permanent Mission to the United Nations, at Open Debate of the Security Council on the Impact of Illicit Arms Trafficking on Peace and Security in Central Africa, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_chn/wjdt\\_611265/zwbd\\_611281/t674182.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/wjdt_611265/zwbd_611281/t674182.shtml).

<sup>61</sup>Special Speech on Conventional Weapon Issue by Counselor Zhang Jun'an from the Chinese Mission in the 65th United Nations General Assembly First Committee, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_chn/wjb\\_602314/zzjg\\_602420/jks\\_603668/fywj\\_603672/t772776.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_chn/wjb_602314/zzjg_602420/jks_603668/fywj_603672/t772776.shtml).

community as soon as possible.<sup>62</sup> China voted for the *Arms Trade Treaty* in November 2012. This move facilitated further arms sales dialogues between China and the EU and intensified cooperation on global affairs between the two sides.

## 2. Cyber security

In the last two years, cyber security has become the issue rapidly attracting attention in the China-EU high-level political dialogues. At the 15th China-EU Summit, both sides agreed to set up the Cyber Working Group to exchange views on cyber issues of common concern, enhancing mutual trust and understanding.<sup>63</sup> After the Summit, this group was established and held the first working meeting.

As a matter of fact, the establishment of the Cyber Working Group accorded with the growing concerns of China and the EU about cyber security. According to the *2011 China Internet Cyber Security Report* released by the National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team/Coordination Center of China in 2012, the development of new technologies exposed China to increasingly severe threat from overseas network attacks. In 2011, 47,000 overseas IP addresses were involved in controlling nearly 8.9 million mainframes within China, an increase of 3.9 million controlled domestic mainframes as compared with that in 2010.<sup>64</sup> A Chinese official pointed out that “internet has become the 5th largest space next to air, sea, land and space, and China is willing to cooperate with all countries in this field on an equal footing”.<sup>65</sup>

In February 2013, the European Commission issued a white paper entitled the *EU Cyber Security Strategy* designed to reinforce the cyber security of governments, enterprises and individuals and to effectively protect the basic rights and economic security of its citizens.<sup>66</sup> According to this white paper, cyber crimes driven by economic benefits and funded by some states are posing threats to the cyber security of governments and enterprises in the EU countries.<sup>67</sup> The EU High Representative Catherine Ashton added that “the EU cyber diplomacy will become

<sup>62</sup>He Yun, *Changes in China's Stance in the Arms Trade Negotiations*, <http://www.safeworld.org.uk/news-and-views/comment/65>.

<sup>63</sup>*Joint Press Communiqué of the 15th China-EU Leaders' Meeting*, Xinhuanet.com, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012\\_09/21/c\\_123741988.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2012_09/21/c_123741988.htm).

<sup>64</sup>*China Has Become the Hardest-hit Victim of Network Attack and Will Deepen International Cooperation in Cyber Security*, People's Daily Online, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2012/0704/c70731-18443353.html>.

<sup>65</sup>*China Has Become the Hardest-hit Victim of Network Attack and Will Deepen International Cooperation in Cyber Security*, People's Daily Online, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2012/0704/c70731-18443353.html>.

<sup>66</sup>*The European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee for the Regions, 'Cyber security of European Union: an Open, Safe and Secure Cyberspace', "* Brussels, 7 February 2013, JOIN(2013) 1 final.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid*, p. 34.



the main task in the EU's foreign policy"<sup>68</sup> Thus a common concern on both sides about cyber security constitutes the foundation for them to engage in further cooperation in this area in the future.

### 3. Crisis management

The two sides reached a consensus on strengthening cooperation in crisis management and agreed to jointly carry out the China-EU crisis management project during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Europe in 2009. In 2011, the two sides set up the "Crisis Consulting Experts Meeting" mechanism to coordinate the capabilities of both sides for dealing with crises. In June 2012, the China-EU Institute of Emergency Management was founded in Beijing. This cooperation project shores up an institutionalized platform for the two sides to communicate and cooperate in emergency management. With cooperation between the two sides in food safety, coal mine collapse, chemical leakage, natural disasters, etc., China can draw upon the EU's experience to improve its capability for emergency management and intensify the training of emergency management professionals.

#### 2.4.1.3 Anti-Piracy Navigation Escort Cooperation Outside the Bilateral Dialogue Mechanism

In international security affairs, anti-piracy navigation escort action in the Gulf of Aden has become the new area for pragmatic cooperation between the two sides.<sup>69</sup> However, such cooperation is conducted outside the existing political dialogue mechanism.

Guaranteeing the security of seaways in the Gulf of Aden is of great strategic significance for both sides. Statistics data illustrate that trade transport by sea accounts for 95 % of the total international trade, while goods shipped through the Gulf of Aden exceed 12 % of the total goods traded worldwide. The Gulf of Aden witnesses the transport of 30 % of the crude oil for the EU, while 80 % of the goods transported by this route by China have some connections with the EU.<sup>70</sup> In addition, developing other seaways besides the Strait of Malacca to ensure the safety of overseas investments and energy trade and to safeguard national interests is of momentous strategic significance for China.<sup>71</sup> For that reason, with the

<sup>68</sup>Europa press, "Remarks by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton at the Press Conference of the Launch of the EU's Cyber Security Strategy," Brussels, 7 February 2013, A 69/13.

<sup>69</sup>Liang Guanglie: *Navigation Escort Has Become New Field for Pragmatic Cooperation in the Military Field between China and the EU*, People's Daily Online, <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/172467/16000334.html>.

<sup>70</sup>U.S. Department of Transportation, *Economic Impact of Piracy in the Gulf of Aden on Global Trade*, [http://www.marad.dot.gov/documents/HOA\\_Economic%20Impact20of%20Paricy.pdf](http://www.marad.dot.gov/documents/HOA_Economic%20Impact20of%20Paricy.pdf).

<sup>71</sup>Liu Yanxun et al.: *Behind Naval Escort Off Somalia: the Chinese Navy Heads for the "Deep Blue"*, China News Service Online, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2009/01-05/1513983.shtml>.

authorization of the UN Security Council,<sup>72</sup> China dispatched her navy to escort navigation in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned by some scholars, as China began to participate in the anti-piracy navigation escort, the EU, the first military player entering this region, played an actively coordinating role in this process.<sup>74</sup> Before this, China had failed to join the coordination mechanism for combating piracy off Somalia due to the leadership of the USA. After the EU was invited to serve as the co-chairman in April 2009, China decided to dispatch a navy fleet for escort for the sake of common interests and with the coordination on the part of the EU.<sup>75</sup> Since 2009, China has dispatched 12 navy fleets for escort to work together with EU countries in the fight against piracy off Somalia. Both the Chinese military and the EU have stressed that mutual military trust between the two sides was enhanced through cooperation and information sharing. Pragmatic cooperation in the military field between the two sides will further enrich the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.<sup>76</sup>

#### ***2.4.2 The EU's Human Rights Policy Towards China and the China-EU Human Rights Dialogue***

The human rights issue plays an important role in China-EU political relations and has become prevalent on many aspects including economics and trade relations and cultural and social contacts, which can affect the healthy development of China-EU relations.

Disputes over the human rights issue between China and the EU started in 1989, before which human rights had not entered the formal agenda in China-EU relations. In June 1989, the European Community made a statement condemning China and launched sanctions including a ban on arms sales and suspension of reciprocal visits. Furthermore, it criticized China for its “human rights issue” on multilateral occasions such as the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The European Community developed a “common position” on the human rights issue towards China and formed a subsequent human rights policy towards China at the EU level.

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<sup>72</sup>In 2008, the resolution regarding authorization, by the UN Security Council, of various national and regional organizations to take all necessary measures...to eradicate piracy and maritime robbery was adopted, see UN Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008) and Resolution 1846 (2008).

<sup>73</sup>Liu Yanxun et al.: *Behind Naval Escort off Somalia: the Chinese Navy Heads for the “Deep Blue”*, China News Service Online, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2009/01-05/1513983.shtml>.

<sup>74</sup>Weiler and Larik (2011, p. 136).

<sup>75</sup>Weiler and Larik (2011, p. 136, 138).

<sup>76</sup>The Ministry of National Defense: Be Willing to Contribute to Enriching the Connotation of the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, People's Daily Online, <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/16030880.html>.

In the decade after China and the EU announced the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the EU's human rights policy towards China and the China-EU human rights dialogue underwent the following stages.

#### **2.4.2.1 2003-2005: The EU's "Constructive Engagement" with China and the China-EU Human Rights Dialogue**

Tensions in China-EU relations related to the human rights issue tended to be relaxed in general since the 21st century compared with the situations in the 1990s. In 2003, China and the EU announced the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, following which the EU's policy towards China in the area of human rights has become relatively steady and moderate accordingly. The China-EU human rights dialogue has played a rather significant role in bilateral communications.

This dialogue started in 1995 and is conducted bi-annually in Beijing and the EU. Both China and the EU enjoy equal rights with respect to the right to deliver opinions about relevant issues, the number of participants invited to this dialogue and the release of the results of the dialogue. This dialogue is made up of two parts. For the first part, government officials from China and the EU discuss general human rights issues and specific cases, with the participants on the EU side composing mainly of the EU's "troika" (experts designated by the rotating EU presidency, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) organized by the Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) at the Council of the European Union,<sup>77</sup> and those on the Chinese side including officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a variety of government ministries and department, and a special representative for human rights. For the second part, the two sides hold an academic seminar on specific issues relating to human rights, which is also called the China-EU Judicial Seminar. The organizers on the EU and the Chinese sides are respectively the Irish Centre for Human Rights and the Institute of Law of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Participants in this seminar include government officials, scholars and representatives of nongovernmental organizations from both sides.<sup>78</sup> The official talks mainly focus on discussions about some specific cases, while generally not too many contents will be released. The China-EU Judicial Seminar involves academic discussions about some issues concerning human rights. As a supplement to the dialogue, generally the representatives from two sides may also make field investigations to various places in China and the EU with respect to specific issues involved in the dialogue.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup>The High Representative for Human Rights newly appointed by the EU has also attended this dialogue since 2005.

<sup>78</sup>The European Parliament has also sent representative to attend the China-EU Judicial Seminar since 2005, see China-related part of EU 2005 Human Rights Report.

<sup>79</sup>For example, the EU's "troika" visited Tibet and Xinjiang in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

Similar to many external action modes towards third countries, the China-EU human rights dialogue and implementation of relevant projects at this stage are characterized by the following aspects. First, the EU adopted a “softness-linked” strategy; in other words, though the EU suspended criticism of China for human rights on international occasions, it often emphasized on other occasions that the dialogue was conditional. For example, the EU stated in the 2004 Annual Human Rights Report that maintenance of the dialogue did not mean that the EU refrained from reviewing and condemning China’s human rights situation on any other international occasions.<sup>80</sup> Second, the human rights dialogue mechanism features a semi-open and multi-session model, under which closed-door official talks enable the two sides to keep possible political disagreements under control, while the informal academic seminar is relatively open and in-depth discussions can be conducted. Third, the EU attaches great importance to utilizing the advantages of its experience and knowledge, whether in the process of the dialogue or in the various activities relating to the dialogue. For example, it seems that the titles of a series of European assistance and cooperation projects have nothing to do with human rights, however, almost all of them may be closely related to human rights concepts advocated by the EU. Fourth, the EU pays much attention to building channels and networks for exporting its human rights concepts. The prominent example in this case is the China-EU Human Rights Network Program supported by the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and implemented as from 2002.<sup>81</sup> One of the most important functions of this Program lies in enhancing academic exchanges between China-EU human rights experts and building an academic network for these experts.

Compared with hard confrontation in the 1990s, the subsequent soft engagement policy fit in better with the reality of the EU’s policy towards China. Certain achievements had also been made in projects relating to human rights launched by the EU in China.<sup>82</sup> With the deepening of communication and cooperation in the human rights dialogue and human rights projects between the two sides, relations between them have also been somewhat improved.

#### **2.4.2.2 2006-2008: The Human Rights Issue During the Period of Deteriorating China-EU Relations**

Changes had occurred in China-EU relations in the area of human rights after 2006, reflect directly by the Communication on EU’s China policy released by the European Commission on August 17, 2006. Compared with previous papers

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<sup>80</sup>See the China-related part of the EU 2004 Annual Human Rights Report.

<sup>81</sup>The European Commission, “Priorities and Guidelines for the Implementation of the 2001 European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR),” p. 9.

<sup>82</sup>Take the China-EU Human Rights Network Program as an example, this Program churned out academic achievements, and periods of subsequent projects were extended. For information about relevant projects, see Huang and Schabas (2004).

relating to relations with China which showed the usual posture of active cooperation and control of disagreements, this paper was very hard-lined and expressed dissatisfactions about China in many areas in China-EU relations, highlighting the importance of human rights and the European view of values in bilateral relations. Afterwards, conflicts in the area of human rights between the two sides had been revealed at multiple levels.

First, some of the disagreements on human rights originally under control had been unilaterally magnified by the EU side. Especially with the rise of China's international status and the increase in China's overseas economic and trade activities, the EU increasingly linked China's normal economic and trade activities in the Asian and African countries such as Sudan, Zimbabwe and Myanmar to the so-called "human rights issue", and repeatedly criticized China for its policies towards these regions. Second, a part of the political forces at both the EU and the member state levels exerted more pressures on China on various occasions, and in particular the European Parliament passed multiple resolutions concerning the so-called "China's human rights issue" to incessantly criticize China for its policy on human rights. In addition, at the level of member states, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy met the Dalai Lama in 2007 and 2008 respectively, resulting in a devastating impact on China-EU relations which has rarely been seen in recent years.

These incidents cast a shadow over the development of China-EU relations in the area of human rights and led to escalated disputes in this area between the two sides. There were some deep-seated causes behind this situation. First, with China's development and the deepening of China-EU bilateral relations, changes had taken place as to the balance of power between the two sides and some new interest frictions began to emerge. Particularly at the international level, the African issue became a new point of disagreement between the two sides, and some political forces in Europe associated the differences in regional development models between the two sides with the human rights issue, while a tendency of politicization added uncertainties to China-EU interaction in the area of human rights. Second, changes in the leadership of some of the major EU countries also affected China-EU relations. Pro-China German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques René Chirac successively left office, while their successors obviously had different considerations about the human rights issue. Nicolas Sarkozy actively kept close economic and trade cooperation with China on the one hand but deliberately made a sensation by inappropriately talking about the Tibet issue to attract widespread attention and support from the general public. Angela Merkel acted under the pretext of "value-oriented diplomacy" in order to benefit from the domestic political competitions.<sup>83</sup> Though both countries adjusted their policies towards China to some extent after the European debt crisis, their stances on human rights had not changed fundamentally. They only toned down their criticism of China, reflecting their political pragmatism. Third, in spite of the fact

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<sup>83</sup>See *Sino-German Relations: Balmy Weather after Frost*, South Reviews, 2008(3), p. 78.

that China and Europe started diplomatic contacts as early as the 1970s, it has only been a short history for the comprehensive engagement in a real sense between the two sides, and contacts between the two sides are unbalanced at different levels and in different institutions. In particular, channels for communication between the European Parliament and the Chinese authorities fell relatively short, and part of the European parliamentarians held prejudice against China for a long time and were not so willing to maintain deep engagement with the Chinese Government.<sup>84</sup>

#### **2.4.2.3 2009–2013: The EU’s Human Rights Policy Towards China and the Human Rights Dialogue in the Process of Adjustment**

China-EU relations have improved since 2009. However, the signs showing a favorable turn in bilateral relations were not so obvious in the area of human rights, but some signs of policy adjustments still merit attention.

First, as shown by the arrangements of the EU’s cooperation projects towards China and by a comparison of the EU’s 2007–2010 interim assessment of its strategy towards China and the 2007–2012 country strategy paper towards China on the one hand and the 2002–2006 country strategy paper towards China on the other, promoting China’s democracy and human rights was one of strategic priorities of the EU’s actions towards China before 2006,<sup>85</sup> while such topics were no longer identified as a separate strategic priority in the 2007–2012 paper.<sup>86</sup> Instead, the EU emphasized its support for China’s reform through sector dialogue, projects under which were not related directly to the human rights issue. However, the EU also expressed support for the modernization of China’s public management system and hoped that civil society would play potential roles in the future political, economic, social and management environments in China. Overall, changes have taken place as to the modes of links between the EU’s human rights appeals with its assistance projects towards China.

Second, in the recent human rights report, the EU expressed its intention to conduct a human rights dialogue within the framework of the China-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in the future and believed that this was a “major opportunity to encourage China to assume greater responsibilities in the human rights area”.<sup>87</sup> As the EU often takes use of conditionality to link human rights terms to the agreements in the other fields when signing a bilateral agreement with a third country, this position means that the human rights issue may be a potential policy lever having a greater impact on China-EU relations in the other fields. Of

<sup>84</sup>These views came from the interview with an official from the Conference Office of the Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the European Union by the Author in October, 2008.

<sup>85</sup>“European Commission Working Document, 2002–2006 Country Strategy Paper, China,” p. 25.

<sup>86</sup>Three strategic priorities of the EU’s cooperation towards China in 2007–2012 are sector dialogue, climate change and human resources development, see “European Commission Working Document, 2002–2006 Country Strategy Paper, China”, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup>See European Commission (2010, p. 157).

course, the future development of this issue will also depend upon both sides' negotiations in the partnership agreements.

Third, the EU has officially specified, in human rights reports in recent years, the possibility that it would like to improve the effect of the China-EU human rights dialogue.<sup>88</sup> One of the original objectives of the human rights dialogue is to prevent the two sides from confronting with each other on international occasions with respect to the human rights issue and to put disagreements between the two sides under control. However, some people in the EU always hold the view that the human rights dialogue could become meaningful only after the human rights situation in China had been improved and that the effect of the current dialogue in promoting China's human rights development is limited. From China's perspective, the Chinese Government has always resolutely encouraged improvement in the area of human rights, but the EU has always dealt with the issue in a commanding manner rather than in an attitude of equal communication. In addition, the EU has often put particular stress on some individual cases rather than viewing human rights situation in China from an overall perspective and expressed concerns about those individual cases by means of official statements. After the *Treaty of Lisbon* came into force, the EU's foreign policy instruments on human rights have somewhat been integrated. However, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton continued to adopt the previous approaches regarding China's human rights issue and made public statements about some individual cases including the Tibet issue many times. Such practice was obviously meant to publicly exert pressures on China, which was unfavorable for both sides in resolving their disagreements. The number of human rights dialogues between the two sides decreased after 2010, indicating possibly deepened disagreements about such issues between them. In general, in the past decade the path of the China-EU relations in the area of human rights is not completely synchronized with the development of bilateral relationships in the other areas.

## 2.5 Concluding Remarks: Outlook for Future China-EU Political Relations

China-EU political relations have fully recovered and developed steadily in a general sense since the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two sides in 2003, especially after a period of adjustment. The overall trend for future China-EU political relations will keep steady, it is because, just as the speech delivered by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the University of Cambridge in 2009 that "the foundation for China-EU cooperation is solid and the prospect is bright, there are neither problems left over from history nor fundamental

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<sup>88</sup>See European Commission (2010, p. 156).

interest conflicts between the two sides”.<sup>89</sup> The Multi-tiered and comprehensive political dialogue and cooperation between the two sides is indeed where the “solid foundation” can be found. Meanwhile, as important political forces in the world, both sides have increasingly broadened and deepened their political cooperation at the international level.

However, future China-EU relations will still be beset by some uncertainties, conflicts, twists and turns, which can be mainly attributed to the following reasons.

First, as mentioned above, the EU is a decision-maker and dialogist with a “dual character”, and especially in the area of foreign policy (except the common commercial policy), the EU is far from “a speaker with one voice”. Although the EU’s policy towards China is a result from the compromises of the interests and positions among its member states, it cannot be fully equal to nor completely replace the policies and strategic positions of its member states, while the interests, ideas and other forces inherent in the EU member states will continue to affect the development of China-EU relations. As the EU still adopts the unanimous vote method in its decision-making in many areas concerning the foreign policy, China-EU relations will meet more uncertainties in the future.<sup>90</sup>

Second, China-EU relations are not determined merely by pure bilateral factors, in which the USA always plays an important role and even a crucial one at some occasions, such as in the case of the arms sales ban to China. As shown in the introduction words to the EU-US Summit by the European Council,<sup>91</sup> from the Europeans’ perspective, the USA is the single most important strategic partner for Europe and the transatlantic relations are “irreplaceable”, while joint action between the EU and the USA will give rise to “fearful” powers. The EU has never used such high-profile rhetoric to assess the EU-Russia relations or China-EU relations. This reveals that the USA enjoys a unique position in the EU’s foreign strategy. The contributions of factors besides the bilateral ones have further complicated China-EU relations.

Finally, some value divergences will continue to exist in China-EU relations. The history of China-EU relations demonstrates that values always constitute a major source from which conflicts and disagreements arise between the two sides. The EU and its member states will not stop taking excuse of these issues, especially the human rights issue and the Tibet one to create troubles in the future. Furthermore, along with the increasingly rich contents involved in China-EU political cooperation and deepening cooperation, these issues may become more prominent. Some of the conflicts and misunderstandings may be lessened along with deepening mutual understanding and trust, but they will never disappear.

<sup>89</sup>Speech by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at University of Cambridge (full text), Xinhuanet, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-02/03/content\\_10755604.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-02/03/content_10755604.htm).

<sup>90</sup>See Zhou (2009a, p. 35).

<sup>91</sup>EU-US Summit, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/126281.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/126281.pdf).



Therefore, under such circumstances, mutual respect for core interests of the other party, equality and mutual benefit, mutual inclusion and understanding are still the fundamental ways for removing disagreements between the two sides and the basic principles for ensuring a smooth development of China-EU relations in the future.

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