Regional Solutions for Regional Conflicts? The EU, China and their respective neighbourhoods

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Regional threat perceptions and security issues

The post-Cold War security landscape is increasingly characterized by regional security interactions (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Sub-system violent conflicts, often labeled ‘new wars’ (Kaldor 1999) have become a core concern. While their novelty remains contested (for example, Melander et al. 2009), such wars have become an integral part of security strategies. Thus, the 2003 European Security Strategy identified ‘regional conflicts’ a key threat (Council of the EU 2003: 4). Asia, too, faces new security threats, including the effects of regional conflicts (Caballero-Anthony and Cook 2013). Both the EU and China show increasing concerns, for instance, about the instability and terrorist threats emanating from the Central Asian region (Council of the EU 2015: #11; Lain 2014).

To the EU, such regional conflicts are particularly relevant if they persist in the EU’s own neighbourhood. The wars in the context of the break-up of former Yugoslavia signified the failure and

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sparked the development of EU security policy (Kirchner 2006; Juncos 2005). In this context, the build-up of military capacities in the form of battlegroups and the construction of the European External Action Service as a diplomatic force on the EU level have received a lot of attention. Yet the EU is at the same time committed to the transformation of regional conflicts through civilian and political means, and in particular through the promotion of regional integration. Meanwhile, the Asian context illustrates that regionalism is not equal to EU-style ‘institutional’ integration. It may also take the form of ‘intergovernmental’ regionalism, focused on states, and ‘networked’ regionalism, in which states and regional actors are connected in relatively decentralized yet interlocking webs and variable geometries (Yeo 2010).

Such comparisons of the EU’s and China’s regionalization policies are complicated by the fact that one is a regional organization and the other a great power. As a mature security community, the EU is committed to the transformation of its external security environment, using both power and values-based means to achieve normative ends. As an ‘authoritarian capitalist’ great power (Gat 2007), China seeks to influence and shape its external security environment in ways that best benefit its nationalist ends. To China, regional conflicts are relevant if they have the potential to destabilize the regional security environment and adversely affect the region’s (and hence China’s) economic dynamism. In economic terms, China has actively pursued engagement with the outside world and advocated regional integration with its near abroad. Yet in strategic terms, it has patiently endured (and benefited from) American leadership in Asia, although it has recently shown an increasing tendency to question such leadership. In security terms, China has consistently advanced its principles of peaceful coexistence and promoted a ‘new security concept’ – first introduced in 1997 and subsequently reintroduced each time with slight modifications – that emphasizes equality, mutual trust, respect and cooperation, consensus through consultation and the peace settlement of disputes.

That said, Chinese provocations in the East and South China Seas have fed regional circumspection over China’s strategic intentions given the perceived gap between its words and deeds. While such
provocations have mostly been explained within realist frameworks (for example, Friedberg 2012), some authors have proposed that this presumed inconsistency in Chinese policy is better explained by recourse to identity-based considerations, where China’s national security is closely tied to its nationalist insecurities (Callahan 2012). Nonetheless, there is an inherent tension between China’s role as putative conflict transformer and (in the eyes of its regional neighbours) its propensity to be an instigator of conflict in Asia.

Against this background of two different regional threat perceptions, this paper outlines and assesses the EU and Chinese strategies of promoting regional integration as a response to and as a means to prevent regional conflicts in the EU neighbourhood and in the Asian region. The aim is to draw out the main characteristics of their policies, their successes and failures, and thus provide the basis for comparative regionalisms. Because the EU is also promoting regional integration elsewhere, and as such has supported the development of ASEAN, we are also interested in this promotion of regionalism in order to discuss the extent to which such a policy may interfere with or coalesce with China’s policy in its neighbourhood. Furthermore, Central Asia has become a region in which both the EU and China are active.

In the next section (2), we will shortly outline a conceptual framework, with which we can then chart the development of the EU’s regionalization approach (3) and that of China’s (4). We will then discuss the successes and limits of their respective policies in the EU’s and China’s neighbourhoods (5), before discussing their respective promotions of regional integration on a global scale (6) and the possible prospects of this policy for Central and East Asia (7).

**Influencing the neighbourhood: a conceptual framework**

The EU’s and China’s promotion of regional integration in their respective neighbourhoods is part of their ‘normative power’. As such, the transformation of regional conflicts largely builds on a change
of behavioural patterns or what Manners (2002: 253) describes as ‘redefining what can be ‘normal’ in world politics’. Integration is supposed to change interaction patterns, constrain actors in their conflict strategies, and alter identities through socialization processes. Such a policy of shaping conceptions of the normal is not unique to the EU, and it is not devoid of any interests. Normative power is a form of hegemonic power, in which there is a conflation of norms and interests, and the attempts to promote regional integration and thus change the structure of international relations, in which both the EU and China engage, are hegemonic struggles (Diez 2013).

In the following, we are particularly concerned with the means and instruments that the EU and China use as possible normative powers. We see the promotion of regional integration as a conflict transformation policy as following a set of characteristic pathways. Simplifying the literature on this issue (for example, Diez et al. 2006; Tocci 2007), we suggest distinguishing two dimensions:

a) whether any foreseen transformative influence is the effect of active policies or of the mere existence of the EU as a regional integration project (or another great power like China as something else; ‘passive’ policy);

b) whether the policy relies on interest calculations or socialization processes.

Integrating these two dimensions, one arrives at four principal policy dimensions or options:

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<th>EU/Great Power Involvement</th>
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<td>Logic of Influence</td>
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<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Carrots and Sticks</td>
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<td>Socialization</td>
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*Carrots and Sticks* policies try to have an impact on conflicts through offering incentives or threatening the imposition of sanctions. In the EU case, the classic incentive in its neighbourhood is the offer of
EU membership. Association agreements, including free trade agreements, are weaker forms of this incentive. Beyond integration and association, the EU has classic incentives at its disposal, including financial support. Sanctions, in contrast, largely consist of the withholding of these benefits. In the Chinese case, the incentives for China’s near abroad are opportunities for increased trade and enhanced political ties with China and, further down the road, the collective formation of regional communities. That many if not most Asian countries have sought to take advantage of economic cooperation with China is evidenced by the fact that China has supplanted Japan or the United States as their most important trading partner. Yet China has also demonstrated its readiness to employ sanctions against those whom it deems are opposing it, as it did with the Philippines in 2012 over Scarborough Shoal (Higgins 2012).

**Engagement** policy is aimed at changing the basic worldviews, identities and patterns of behaviour through various forms of involvement. These include participation in common institutions (of which membership is the strongest version), twinning arrangements between bureaucrats and policy-makers and societal exchanges. Engagement policy works through a mix of socialization processes and social learning. In comparison to the EU, China has traditionally been less eager to pursue a comprehensive engagement with the outside world. However, this has changed under Jiang Xemin and subsequently Hu Jintao.

The two passive policies may be ‘passive’, but they are nonetheless policies to the extent that policy-makers are well aware of their existence. In the European case, both rely on the EU as a model for other states and regions to follow, even if this will hardly ever be a one-to-one imitation. We can see such model-setting in the adoption of specific policies in non-EU states without EU pressure, including the adoption of the Euro as the main currency as in the case of Montenegro, and in the construction of regional institutions following or in explicit differentiation from the EU model, evident both in the African Union and in ASEAN.
This model-setting follows either of the two logics of influence: In the case of the *Competitive Model*, the EU is seen as an example to guarantee peace and economic welfare, and it is thus in the interest of other actors to follow this model in order to improve their international position. The same applies to China and its radiation as an economic model for East Asia. In the case of the *Normative Model*, the organization of societies in territorially distinct states is seen as outdated. Regional integration is the way to go, and the EU therefore becomes a model to follow.

As we will now show, both the EU and China have relied on all of these forms of involvement in their neighbourhood, although to different degrees.

**Policy response: The EU’s regionalization approach**

The geographical areas that constitute the EU’s near abroad are the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea. In all of these, regionalization has played a central role in EU policy as a response to regional conflicts, although in different forms and to different degrees.

Because of the Cold War context, the EU was first engaged in the Mediterranean, initially through bilateral association agreements with the primary aim to facilitate trade. These agreements were signed from 1962 onwards and generally contained an association council with representatives from both the EU and the partner states, and in some cases a joint parliamentarian committee. Thus, EU policy towards the Mediterranean from the beginning involved incentives and engagement measures. However, the benefits of an association agreement were not yet tied to political conditions, and thus were not explicitly used as carrots, and the policy was largely bilateral. This changed with the development of a General Mediterranean Policy (GMP) in 1972, which introduced the idea of political conditionality. Furthermore, the GMP’s idea was to streamline agreements and link them up with each other, leading to ‘extended bilateralism’ (Schimmang 2014), although not yet full-blown regionalism.
After the end of the Cold War, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) continued to be based on bilateral association agreements, but it included a distinctly regional approach through common meetings organized around three ‘baskets’: Political and Security Dialogue, Economic and Financial Partnership, and Social, Cultural and Human Partnership. Political conditionality was maintained, but the focus was now clearly on multilateral dialogue (Bicchi 2006: 138), which persisted even after the bilateral association agreements came under the umbrella of the strictly bilateral European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) following the 2004 enlargement (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005: 21). In the ENP, the experience of the previous membership negotiations led to a copying of conditionality through the application of action plans and regular reports (Kelley 2006) and therefore a more open carrot and sticks policy. Partly as a response to criticism that the multilateral character of the EMP had been side-lined in the process, the EU under French leadership launched the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, with common institutions such as a secretariat, common ministerial meetings and a co-Presidency. While this strengthened the engagement path, carrots and sticks became less important. Thus, projects under the UfM tend to be less openly political and concentrate mostly on technical issues such as infrastructure and education.

At the same time, the EU has used the prospect of membership as a policy tool for stabilization (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005). This is by no means a policy of the new millennium; rather it dates back to the Southern enlargement of the 1980s, when Greece, Portugal and Spain joined the EU as new democracies. However, the stabilization rationale of enlargement was most visible in the 2004/7 Eastern Enlargement as well as the 2004 entry of Cyprus. The threat of a deterioration of ethnic conflict in the East and the prospect of solving a long-standing dispute to the Southeast through integration became a core legitimization of enlargement (Higashino 2004). Other countries were offered association agreements either under the ENP or in the form of Stabilisation Association Agreements where future membership was seen as a realistic prospect, primarily in the Western Balkans. One of these countries, Croatia, became an EU member in 2013.
While EU policy in the Mediterranean has therefore been focused on constructing region-ness, the approach in Central and Eastern Europe has focused on bringing states either into or associating with the existing regional framework of the EU. In both cases, the EU relied on a mixture of carrots and sticks on the one hand and engagement on the other, and benefited from the fact that the EU was seen as an economic model. While the EU has promoted its regionalism normatively in both cases, it was less successful in the Mediterranean, where there are principled political and cultural differences (Azhar and Louis 2014). Furthermore, in the case of Central and Eastern Europe, it benefited a lot from the attempt of many states to dissociate themselves from Russia and the former Warsaw Pact and therefore to regard the EU as the ‘true’ Europe (Pavlovaite 2003).

Meanwhile, the EU has followed a regionalization approach in the Baltics in the form of the ‘Northern Dimension’. It has supported the Council of the Baltic Sea States and launched a Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership in 2002 (Browning and Joenniemi 2003: 465-70). Because Russia belongs to this region, the EU in this case has focused more on engagement than on carrots and sticks. The Baltic Sea is an important example of regionalization as a peace and conflict transformation strategy, not least because this emphasis on engagement, in contrast to the Ukraine debacle, has led some observers to qualify the Northern Dimension as ‘a policy of peace’ (Browning and Joenniemi 2003: 468).

**Divergence and commonalities: China’s regionalization approach**

The importance that the Chinese attach to their near abroad is clear in their multilateral commitments: strong, active and even creative in its near abroad, but decreasing steadily with distance away from China (Wu 2008: 267). Its near abroad includes Mongolia and Russia to its north, former parts of the old Soviet empire to its west, Himalayan neighbours and India to its south, and the countries of Northeast and Southeast Asia to its east.
Regarding Central and South Asia, the Xi Jinping administration has revived the notion of a ‘new Silk Road’ (Rana and Chia 2013). First mooted in the early 1990s, the concept marked an attempt by Beijing to strengthen cooperation with the newly formed states of the post-Soviet era. However, China’s outreach to its west and south had initially not really taken root. Partly, the Shanghai Five – formed in 1996 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – were slow to implement the economic vision. Furthermore, Deng’s emphasis on China’s eastern coastal regions as the preferred zones for the country’s economic modernization, and his penchant for China to maintain a low profile also contributed to the initial setbacks. Yet the pressing need to find new export markets and, more crucially, close the gaps between the well-developed eastern part of China and its economically depressed and security-challenged western part have led to a revival of the New Silk Road proposal, based on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (Pantucci and Li 2013).

Comparatively speaking, China’s outreach towards East Asia and across the Pacific is the most mature among its regionalization efforts. China began its involvement in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with a fair bit of suspicion about the true intent behind such ‘new regionalisms’ and concerned over their possible use by the United States and others to conscribe China’s rise. But the architects of the APEC and the ARF envisioned their creations as regional platforms to engage China and help its evolution towards becoming a ‘normal’ and ‘responsible’ power (Ba 2006; Johnston 2008). Following the 1997 financial crisis, China benefited from the perceived highhandedness of the US and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). China’s readiness to advance a form of regionalism that excludes the US paved the way to the formation of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) and a currency swap arrangement, the Chiang Mai Initiative (Beeson 2003). China is also a founding member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a sixteen-party free trade agreement (FTA) which includes ASEAN countries. Finally, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has been a committed participant in regional joint exercises in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) conducted under the aegis of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus process (Tan 2012b). At the first HADR exercise in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei
in June 2013, the PLA dispatched over a hundred troops (including engineer and medical detachments) as well as the Peace Ark, a PLAN hospital ship.

China has also placed a great deal of emphasis on its engagement with Southeast Asia. Infrastructural links between China and the ASEAN region effectively began in the 1990s with China’s southern provinces, especially Yunnan and Guangxi, playing key parts (Li and Lye 2011). In 2003, China was the first extra-regional power to accede to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. And while incidents such as China’s use of force in its territorial dispute with the Philippines over Mischief Reef in 1995 cast a pall over Beijing’s relations with South China Sea territorial claimants, they did not significantly blunt China’s ‘charm offensive’ towards the region for most of the first decade of the twenty-first century (Kurlantzick 2008). While Chinese strategy hardened in response to US President Barack Obama’s pivot to Asia, the absence of Obama at the APEC and East Asia Summit (EAS) meetings held in Bali in October 2013 as a consequence of the US federal shutdown coincided with a Chinese ‘charm offensive 2.0’.

Finally, China is attractive to the rest of Asia as an economic model. Its spectacular growth has in the view of some rendered it the ‘leading dragon’ whose model of industrialization has become one developing economies and lower income countries are seeking to emulate (Lin 2011). Building on this, China’s latest effort at multilateral engagement with the region is the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Founded by Kazakhstan, China has used this low-key forum to introduce a new security ‘paradigm’, focused on mutual respect and understanding and the search for common ground while shelving differences as the basis for Asian security to ‘be handled in the Asian way’ (Kor 2014).

China’s approaches to regionalization thus encompass all of the four paths outlined in section 2. In the case of the South China Sea disputes, Beijing’s alternating use of reassurance and restraint, on one hand, and coercive diplomacy on the other fits a carrots and sticks approach. In terms of engagement, Beijing has been an active contributor to multilateralism in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Moreover,
China has sought to be norm socializer (such as in promoting its new security concept) and not just a recipient of norms (Ba 2006). Its proactive defence of non-interference and sovereignty principles in the ARF and other multilateral arrangements has ironically made China in some ways a more committed proponent of the ‘ASEAN way’ than some ASEAN countries (Emmers and Tan 2012). As a competitive model, China’s economic regionalism has been embraced by regional countries seeking to not merely plug themselves into regional supply and value chains that are increasingly centered on China, but to model themselves after the Chinese economy (Lin 2011). Finally, China’s vision of an exclusive brand of regionalism and its emphasis on an ‘Asian way’ are hints of a normative model, although at this stage, few states in Asia will accept China’s normative leadership on this issue.

We can thus conclude that Chinese policy to influence the neighbourhood diverges from the EU in its much more open emphasis on sovereignty and the promotion of interests. Yet this should not be misconstrued to say that the EU pursues norms whereas China pursues interest. We have suggested in our framework that normative power is imbued with interests, and we have demonstrated in this section that there is a much more normative side to Chinese policies than is often assumed. While this creates a commonality, and while both sides share the interest in a peaceful neighbourhood, we find the main divergences in the norms themselves, in the fact that China is much more directly and openly embroiled in regional conflicts than the EU, and that China is itself a powerful state in contrast to the EU as a regional actor. These differences are reflected in the assessment of the successes and limits of both EU and Chinese regional policies.

**Successes and limits**

The EU’s regionalization policy has had a rather mixed success. Historically, integration has consolidated the transformation of the German state. The platform that the EU has provided for UK and Irish politicians to meet after membership together with efforts by the European Parliament have made a major long-term contribution to a peace settlement in Northern Ireland. However, Ireland is
also a case that shows that EU policies of carrots and sticks as well as engagement, here in the form of the PEACE programmes, lead to mixed results and are often dependent on facilitating conditions (Hayward 2007). In the case of Southern enlargement (Greece, Portugal and Spain), most analysts agree that integration has contributed to a lasting transformation.

One of the conflicts where the EU impact has widely been debated is Cyprus. This is partly because EU membership was initially promoted by Greek Cypriot politicians as a ‘catalyst’ to a solution, an argument later taken up by the EU side. However, in the Cyprus case the carrot-and-sticks approach was hardly used. The decision to assess progress in the membership negotiations independent of the conflict development, together with the historical narrative of the conflict in both UN Security Council resolutions and European Court of Human Rights rulings (see Özersay and Gürel 2009), meant that the EU undermined any possibility of making conflict resolution a conditionality for membership.

Engagement in turn has continuously been hampered by the fact that technical cooperation has routinely been undermined by questions of sovereignty and recognition (Constantinou and Papadakis 2002), although the EU did serve as a crucial reference point in the Turkish Cypriot regime change following a banking crisis in 2000/2001 (Diez and Pace 2011: 217).

Even less successful has been the attempt to have an effect on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For one thing, the lack of a realistic integration perspective has meant that the carrots-and-sticks approach was limited to start with (Yacobi and Newman 2008: 201). The influence on the Palestinian side, while in principle stronger because of the material and ideological support of Palestinian state-building, has suffered from the exclusion of Hamas and the one-sided endorsement of Fatah (Asseburg 2009). While the EU has subsequently pushed for and later welcomed the 2014 unity deal between Hamas and Fatah, the Gaza war in summer 2014 has not made EU policy easier. The historical legacy and current practice of anti-Semitism has limited the range of policy choices towards Israel (Tocci 2007: 125). Furthermore, the idea that one could transform the conflict through engaging both sides in a Mediterranean regional context failed because of a lack of clear conflict transformation instruments,
and because in the absence of a recognized state, Palestinians could not be drawn into such a project, while Israel had no particular interest to become involved (Asseburg 2009).

The assessment of the Northern Dimension, for instance concerning the Kaliningrad and Karelian conflicts, has been rather positive (for example, Joenniemi 2008). The integration strategy in Central and Eastern Europe has certainly helped to mitigate and even transform some conflicts, but it has not prevented continuing discrimination of Roma, laying bare the limited availability of sticks once the carrot of membership has been eaten. In the two conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean discussed above, the EU has had little impact. Even though it has instigated the idea of the Mediterranean as a region (Bicchi 2006: 138-44), the practices of regionality have so far been limited, and there has been little transformation of the conflicts because of integration as such. Hegemonic effects may be seen in the influence of the EU on Palestinian state-building, but Israel has continued to align itself much more closely with the United States (Del Sarto 2006: 303). In Cyprus, both sides have used the EU too often to bolster their position in what one may call ‘reverse Europeanisation’ (Diez and Tocci 2010: 181).

Since then, the EU’s interaction with its near abroad has run into increasing difficulties, above all in the Ukraine. Instead of bringing stability to the region, the EU involvement has been one factor stirring up Russian sensitivities (Mearsheimer, 2014; Speck, 2014) culminating in the Russian annexation of Crimea. Without downplaying the responsibility of Russia for the course of events, the case illustrates a number of problems with the EU’s regional approach. The interests of some member states coalesce with those of some conflict parties, turning the EU into a conflict party and applying carrots and sticks unevenly. While socialization is a long-term strategy, the “Europeanists” in the Ukraine have used the norms and model of the EU in the short term to legitimize their claims and put the EU into a difficult position to reject their advances, in essence creating a situation of “rhetorical entrapment” (Schimmelfennig 2001). And more broadly speaking, the EU has ignored the consequences of its association strategy for the development of new borders (Diez 2015). This is not to say that the EU’s
Eastern Partnership approach *per se* has been misguided. However, the Ukrainian crisis has made it clear that the implementation of a regionalism approach towards a conflict-prone region needs to include an elaborate communication strategy taking into consideration all relevant actors and interests within the region – a lesson of particular relevance for EU-China relations in Central Asia and in terms of the cooperation between the EU and China in East Asia.

China’s regionalization policy has had a mixed record, too, but for different reasons. China’s economic engagements have enjoyed relative success. However, China’s focus on the SCO as the vehicle for Central Asian economic integration has hitherto proved limited, not least because of worries that security problems facing China’s western neighbours such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also the states of Central Asia, could derail the project (Pantucci and Li 2013). East Asia tells a different story. The post-Cold War era has all been about ‘Factory Asia’ with China leading the way in riding global supply and value chains (Baldwin 2012). In recent years, intraregional trade and investment patterns have grown substantially, with China at their centre (Wong 2012: 5).

However, whether Chinese-led economic integration has decreased the propensity for war in Asia remains unclear. While the benefits China accrues from strong economic ties with Japan are likely to trump its desire to raise the stakes on their islands dispute, the wildcard is China’s concern over America’s possible entry into the fray on Japan’s behalf. Furthermore, at the Asia-Pacific level, China’s resistance to any attempt to ‘internationalize’ territorial disputes or to adopt multilateral approaches to their resolution, has long been seen as a key impediment to the ARF’s ability to progress to preventive diplomacy (Emmers and Tan 2011). Fellow APT members have also viewed China’s dominance of the APT with concern, even as they have benefited from their ties with the Chinese (Roy 2013: Ch. 3).
Competition and cooperation: overlapping neighbourhoods and Chinese encounters

We have so far discussed EU and Chinese regional integration policies to transform regional conflicts separately. Yet as the EU pursues its norms and interests beyond its immediate neighbourhood, and as Chinese foreign policy is becoming increasingly active, but also because the EU and Chinese neighbourhoods overlap in Central Asia, we will now turn to instances where China and the EU encounter each other in their policies, and to what extent this has led to competition or even fissures, or to cooperation. Given our discussion so far, it is no surprise that the picture is largely one of competition, laced however with attempts of cooperation. Indeed, given the emphasis on the possibilities for linkages and synergies between Chinese-led regional approaches such as the Silk Road initiative in the EU’s 2015 strategic review and its reconsideration of its 2007 strategy for Central Asia, a marked contrast exists between the EU emphasis on cooperation with China and the assessment of Russia as an increasing threat (Council of the European Union 2015: #11, 16; European External Action Service 2015: 13)

Based on its experience in the neighbourhood, the EU promotes regional integration as a strategy in order to overcome regional conflicts in other world regions, however with one central difference: the absence of the carrot of EU membership. This narrows the policy choices available to the EU. Nonetheless, the cooperation with different world regions and their regional institutions is an important instrument of EU external relations (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005: 535). China, too, is increasingly engaged beyond its immediate neighbourhood, although with a less regionalist agenda. Consequently, the EU and China sometimes confront each other in their strategies to influence the far abroad.

The EU has actively worked through carrots and sticks, for instance, in its support of the African Union’s Peace and Security Architecture (Africa-EU Partnership 2013), although some authors qualify the EU’s promotion of norms in the African context and its use of conditionality as indicative of its economic self-interest (Farrell 2005: 271). A looser form of carrots and sticks is visible in Latin America,
where good governance norms are part of a number of cooperation agreements such as with the Andean Community (CAN), Mercosur and Central American countries. In both regions, *engagement* has played a role, as the EU has (successfully) promoted a common security vision among ECOWAS members (Piccolino and Minou 2014) and has worked through experience-sharing in, for example, cross-border issues, in order to change perceptions favouring a regional approach to Latin American challenges (Commission of the European Union 2013: 43). In terms of passive *model setting*, African interest in the EU seems to have declined due to the EU’s financial crisis and due to competitive model-setters for the region (among them China). In Latin America, regional actors have also distanced themselves from regional integration in the European way has occurred.

Meanwhile, China’s commercial and political engagements with Africa, Latin America and the Pacific Islands do not properly constitute the promotion of conflict transformation as such. China’s engagement with the African region, framed by the triennially held Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), has primarily been concerned with natural resource extraction, infrastructure development and manufacturing. Its strategic partnerships with a number of Latin American countries have attracted perceptions, fair or otherwise, of Chinese involvement as an alternative to US hegemony; of China as an economic competitor displacing indigenous industries; and of China as a neo-imperial power consuming Latin American resources and commodities with presumably little regard for environmental and labour protections (Edwards and Roberts 2014). China’s engagement has in fact led Latin American countries on the Pacific side, who see themselves as commercial gateways between Asia and their own continent, to form the Alliance of the Pacific in 2012 (Ellis 2013: 5).

Chinese policymakers in the foreign ministry see aid and investment as political tools to strengthen China’s foreign relations and status vis-a-vis other powers. Yet trade advocates in China’s Ministry of Commerce see aid and investment as contributing to the economic growth and dynamism of those
regions, which equally serves China’s overall national priority – a benign but not altruistic intent (Sun, 2014).

In Central Asia, regionalization efforts of both China and the EU overlap. After the EU’s eastern enlargement, the region has become crucial for the EU. The 2008 EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in post-War Georgia, although not located in Central Asia proper, illustrates the EU’s commitment to stability in the region. Its limited response to uprisings (for example, Kyrgyzstan) has however also demonstrated the limits of this commitment (Aubert 2012: 7). One of the EU’s major concerns is organized crime. Central Asia is considered a ‘significant corridor’ for drug trafficking. The EU therefore actively supports the establishment of new forms of interaction among Central Asian states on this issue through technical assistance and ‘trans-regional’ cooperation in the Central Asia Drug Action Program (CADAP, see Council of the European Union, 2010: 22). Furthermore, the EU has promoted its model of ‘integrated border management’ through the Border Management in Central Asia (BOACA) programme.

Select EU member states are leading such EU regional programmes for Central Asia, including those on ‘the rule of law’ (France and Germany) or on ‘water and environment’ (Italy and Romania). However, the EU engagement with regard to the different countries composing the region varies decisively – EU political cooperation and impact on Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, for instance, is still very small while the EU and Kazakhstan have intensified their relations through an enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (Gross, 2015). In general, the lack of a membership perspective provides few incentives for Central Asian countries to comply with EU principles (Aubert, 2012). Prospects for an increased EU presence may lie in the hands of the Slovakian Special Representative to the Region, Peter Burian, an experienced diplomat, appointed in 2015 (Gross, 2015).

The shortcomings of the EU’s approach can be contrasted with the growing Chinese influence in the region. China adopts an ever-growing role, not least via the SCO. The Chinese approach seems to work in a rather long-term perspective, which is not only economic in character but includes political and
security issues (Aubert, 2012: 10). While the EU mostly works through engagement in soft issues, China tries to push its vision of an ‘Asian way’ in Central Asia.

Yet the EU and China also encounter each other in their own near abroads. Security issues in the Asia-Pacific are discussed in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), of which the EU is a member. The EU accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2013 and the Bandar Seri Beghawan Plan for strengthening the enhanced EU-ASEAN partnership 2013-2017 point to the EU aim of strengthening its ties within ARF. Furthermore, the EU tries to counter its exclusion from other relevant regional security forums, such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting plus (ADMM+) and the East Asian Summit (EAS) by strengthening the security aspect within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (Interview 2013, October 23). In terms of regional security, the EU is encouraging a common position of ASEAN members to the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, while recognizing that it is unlikely that China will abandon territorial claims in the name of integration. Furthermore, it tries to socialize Asian partners through engagement maritime border seminars.

Yet, China has also started to become active on the EU’s home ground through the 16 +1 initiative. Its ‘Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road’ – often shortened to ‘One Road, One Belt’ – strategy includes the China-Central and Eastern Europe (CCEE) meeting, a component that aims to enhance its fast-growing trade ties with Central and Eastern European countries (the ‘16’). Resisting comparisons with the United States’ Marshall Plan for postwar Europe’s rejuvenation, the Chinese prefer to promote their plan as the integration of Eurasia through economic growth rather than political influence (Stokes 2015). Crucially, the Chinese leadership does not see this framework as a challenge to the EU – of the sixteen European members, five (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) are not EU members – but as a supplement to it. As Premier Li Keqiang and his CCEE counterparts stressed in November 2013, all economic deals between their countries would follow applicable EU regulations (Tiezzi 2013). Following its model of providing investment backing for large-scale infrastructure projects – the China-backed Asian Infrastructure
Investment Bank is a clear illustration of Beijing’s ‘grand strategy’, so to speak – China is looking to Europe to enhance its economic, energy and food security. While not a direct challenge to the EU, the readiness of Central and Eastern European countries to turn to China indicates that China, at the very least, has additional resources to offer that the EU alone cannot provide.

The EU and China: regionalization and prospects for cooperation

The EU and China differ in terms of their visions and approaches towards regional security. Both engage in hegemonic practices to further their respective visions of international society, not only in their near abroad but also in the other’s backyard. While the EU tries to promote regional integration by pushing its partners into different forms of regional cooperation, China’s approach is primarily motivated by maintaining its status quo as the main (economic) power in the region. Yet it also wishes to spread an Asian approach towards regional security, relying on the principle of non-interference.

In terms of threat perceptions, the EU sees the Central Asian region as an area bearing potentially violent conflicts that directly affect EU security. China has traditionally seen Central Asia as an economically profitable region, yet also one with increasing security threats. The Chinese dominance of the SCO and even more so its engagement via CICA have opened the opportunity to deal with security issues in the ‘Asian way’.

This difference between regional integration efforts of the EU and independent Asian solutions for an Asian conflict have contributed to a soft clash of both approaches, for instance in the South China Sea. As Chinese authorities have become aware that an assertive position in the disputes has not played out and as the EU keeps softly, but constantly insisting on sharing its experience with maritime border disputes, this may become in the long term a case where both visions someday converge. Indeed, the EU has adopted a rather ‘neutral’ stance not taking sides with the US, nor with ASEAN, nor openly denouncing China for not respecting the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
The annual strategic EU–China Dialogue on Security and Defence has contributed since 2010 to a regular EU-China exchange on regional security issues. However, the dialogue structure still lacks any military-to-military exchange. This can be seen as a serious obstacle for fruitful communication with the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on regional conflict issues. (Duchâtel, Hujiskens 2015)

To different degrees, then, both China and the EU seek regional solutions to regional conflicts. They do so from different standpoints and advocating different instruments. While we have shown that there is at times significant overlap between the two projects, the two actors will have to engage in continuous dialogue and seek out overlapping issue areas to transform clashes between their hegemonic practices into areas of mutual engagement. Central Asia is a particularly important region in this respect. The fact that, while strategically important, it is not the top priority of either China or the EU may provide the ground for innovative forms of cooperation. In fact, even in the Ukrainian case, there is potential for EU-China cooperation, even if Chinese support to the EU’s strategic interests will hardly be outspoken (Brugier, Pupescu 2014: 2). China has always seen the strategic (economic) links between the EU and Ukraine as providing positive effects for its business, not least in the framework of its Silk Road project (Brugier, Pupescu 2014:2). The Russian assertiveness in the region is in contrast seen as a threat from Chinese strategic point of view. Thus, although China is of course against the ‘overthrow of an autocratic regime by popular protesters’ as happened in Ukraine, both China and the EU have eager interest in stable Central Asian region where both partners converge in their strategic and economic interests (Brugier, Pupescu, 2014). EU statements emphasizing the promotion of ‘dialogue with the relevant regional and international organisations … with a view to seeking synergies … including possibilities arising from “silk road” initiatives’ (Council of the EU 2015: 16) are a clear indication that the EU is indeed interested in such a long-term cooperation on both the bilateral and the multilateral level.
Furthermore, EU engagement in South-East Asia and China links with EU member states do not have to be seen as Trojan horses, but rather as bridges between regions. In a world of increasing regionalism, such engagement and dialogue could then in itself provide a normative model for global governance. This implies that the existing dialogue structures should be used and extended by both actors, in order to further discuss common regional security threats and possible common responses to such.

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